

**Mothers and Daughters at Imperial Crossroads: Expressions of Status, Economy and  
Nurture in 16<sup>th</sup> Century Mexico**

**by**

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## **Dedication**

To Chela, Kari, Sandra, Janet and Sarah

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## Abstract

My dissertation, *Mothers and Daughters at Imperial Crossroads: Expressions of Status, Economy, and Nurture in 16<sup>th</sup> Century Mexico* considers an often overlooked but foundational aspect of colonization in the New World: the transfer of status and wealth through indigenous women in a confluence of political economy and ritual ceremony. Chapter 1 sets up this analysis through the Nahua historian Chimalpahin Quautlehuanitzin's exposé on the crisis of government in Chalco, a formerly powerful Nahua state at the southern edge of the valley of Mexico. Chimalpahin's insistence that colonial authorities recognize women's nobility prompts an investigation, in Chapter 2, of the gendered dimensions of nobility between Spanish and Nahua societies. To this end, these first two chapters advance a triangular reading of Chimalpahin's representation of nobility alongside the *Florentine Codex*, a 16<sup>th</sup> century encyclopedia of life in pre-Conquest Mesoamerica, and the legal codes propagated by Alfonso X in the *Siete Partidas*. While Chapters 1 and 2 focus on the stakes of nobility within the colonial regime, Chapter 3 explores the chameleon-like status of the tribute women given to the conquistador Hernán Cortés during his march to Tenochtitlan in 1519. The transformation of young common women into noble brides through body paints, feathers and fine clothing enacts a deliberate dissolution of hierarchies that prefigures the crisis of government in Chalco. Alongside Spanish and Nahuatl accounts of the Conquest, the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*'s visual representation of indigenous tribute gifts to Cortés anchors this exploration of Mexico's tribute women. In Chapter 4, the maguey plant in its deified form, as the goddess Mayahuel, becomes an avatar for a transfer of wealth that flows from women's bodies to the imperial capital. The insistence of women, however, to

harvest maguey and sell its products on their own terms challenges the limitations to their mobility and appropriation of their income—an intrusion into the masculinist historiographies and imperial spaces of 16<sup>th</sup> century Mexico.

## Introduction

This project occupies itself with two problems: 1) how to tell the history of women in the Conquest of Mexico and in the early colonial period and 2) how to do so in a way that captures the resonances of pre-Conquest lifeways through the Conquest and beyond. In my work, the “Conquest” with a capital “C” refers specifically to the period between 1519 and 1521, from the arrival of Spanish conquistadors commandeered by Hernán Cortés on the Gulf Coast of Mexico in 1519 to the overthrow of the Mexica government in 1521. A number of scholars have written about women in the Americas in the in the early colonial period (from the 1520s to the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century),<sup>1</sup> but little has been written on women in the Conquest of Mexico (or of the Caribbean or Central and South America for that matter) beyond the figure of Malinche, interpreter and mistress of Hernán Cortés. If, as Camilla Townsend suggests, “there were many potential Malinches,” it bears asking what happened to those other “Malinches,” to the other women of the Conquest.<sup>2</sup> Malinche, after all, had ample company—19 other young women, perhaps girls, accompanied her as a gift that Mayan leaders on the Mexican Gulf felt compelled to give to Cortés’ army in 1519. These 20 young women, and others collected by Cortés in his year-long expedition to Tenochtitlan, held any number of often overlapping positions: brides, slaves, sacrificial victims, and concubines. Camilla Townsend considers Malinche a case of noble-turned-slave: when she was still a child (between 8 and 12 years old), and amid hostilities

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<sup>1</sup> Key studies include those in Susan Schroeder, Stephanie Wood, and Robert Haskett, *Indian Women of Early Mexico*, eds. (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997) and Irene Silverblatt’s *Moon, Sun, and Witches: Gender Ideologies and Class in Inca and Colonial Peru* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> Camilla Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices: An Indian Woman in the Conquest of Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 6.



between hers and a neighboring community, before the arrival of the Spaniards, her parents thought it expedient to sell their daughter to Mayan merchants.<sup>3</sup> With the arrival of the Spaniards, armed conflict once again motivated the use of Malinche as collateral, as something between tribute and gift. The gifting of indigenous women draws on ceremonial protocols and patterns of political economy already at play in Mesoamerica during the Mexica era. To address the second problem mentioned above, that act of gifting plays into what economic anthropologists have called “ritual economy,” the confluence of political economy and ceremonial life.<sup>4</sup>

The ritualized transfer of indigenous women from their home communities to the Spanish conquistadors furnishes us with one of the most dramatic examples of history’s unspoken secret: that where powerful men engage in conquest, colonization and the founding of states, women form the grist of their relations. David Graeber notes that “the histories we tell are full of blank spaces, and the women in them seem to appear out of nowhere, without explanation.”<sup>5</sup> Remarking on the “bondsmen” (women slaves) written into barbarian legal codes, Graeber asks “Who were they? How were they enslaved? Were they captured in war, sold by their parents, or reduced to slavery through debt? Were they a major trade item? The answer to all these questions would seem to be yes, but it’s hard to say because the history remains largely unwritten.”<sup>6</sup> With slight modifications, we could ask the same questions about the tribute women in the Conquest of Mexico, whose history also remains unwritten.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 22-24.

<sup>4</sup> Patricia A. McAnany and E. Christian Wells, “Toward a Theory of Ritual Economy,” *Research in Economic Anthropology 27: Dimensions of Ritual Economy* (Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (New York: First Melville House Printing, May 2011), 128.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Answering the questions around Mexico's tribute women entails an analysis of how gender gives shape to social hierarchies and the ritual economies that animate them, give them life and legitimacy. Gayle Rubin addressed the interaction of social hierarchies, gender and political economy in her essay on the "traffic in women":

Traditional concerns of anthropology and social science—such as the evolution of social stratification and the origin of the state—must be reworked to include the implications of matrilineal cross-cousin marriage, surplus extracted in the form of daughters, the conversion of female labor into male wealth, the conversion of female lives into marriage alliances, the contribution of marriage to political power, and the transformations which all of these varied aspects of society have undergone in the course of time.<sup>7</sup>

While political economy and kinship appear paramount in the above quote, certain terms ("marriage," "conversion," "transformation") imply the weight of ritual in processes of state-making, of which social stratification is one element. Irene Silverblatt's study on gender in colonial Peru, in turn, takes these same analytical concerns and places them in the context of the Andes, in the meeting of Incan and Spanish ritual economies.<sup>8</sup> Yet, even Silverblatt's work moves quickly over the moment of Spanish-indigenous first contact, and the exchanges that occurred therein that became foundational to colonial society. My work does this in the context of Mexico, itself the most immediate precursor to the confrontation between Spanish and Incan empires.

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<sup>7</sup> Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, Monthly Review Press, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (1975), 210.

<sup>8</sup> Irene Silverblatt, *Moon, Sun, and Witches: Gender Ideologies and Class in Inca and Colonial Peru* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

The Conquest of Mexico presents us with a simultaneous process of state-making and un-making, enacted through the gifting of indigenous tribute women. The transfer of indigenous women could only make sense via the ritual protocols appropriate to both indigenous and Spanish cultures. This gifting could imply marriage in one instance and sacrifice in another. For Spaniards it prompted the activation of baptism as a precondition for entrance into Christian community.<sup>9</sup> Marriage to indigenous noblewomen, after baptism, gave Spaniards a claim onto indigenous tribute, and it gained nobles protections within the Spanish empire. From this perspective, Xicotencatl the elder's gift of his own daughter, doña Luisa, to the Spaniards (she married Cortés' second-in-command, Pedro Alvarado, nicknamed *Tonatiuh*, or "the Sun," by the Nahuas), cemented a military alliance that, with the defeat of the Mexica, provided Tlaxcala with ample motivation to press for the privileges and protection under Spanish rule.<sup>10</sup> In the province of Chalco, meanwhile, the memory of pre-Conquest noblewomen would inflect indigenous disputes over governorship. According to the Nahuatl historian Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, writing in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, those disputes grew so intense that the colonial administration sent an indigenous judge to Chalco to appoint governors, an intervention that put Chalco's local government in direct confrontation with the maturing colonial state. At stake in that confrontation was the continued viability of indigenous hierarchies as indigenous ethnic identities and class differences collapsed under the weight of Spain's tribute demands.

These pressures point to a specific kind of "enclosure" (appropriation of lands, institution of debt peonage) in Mexico. If Gayle Rubin presents the problem of the traffic in women, Silvia Federici brings it to bear on the early colonial period in the Americas, specifically in the Andes.

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<sup>9</sup> Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, trans. Janet Burke and Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Pub. Co., 2012), 50, 97, 152.

<sup>10</sup> Andrea Martínez Baracs, *Un gobierno de indios: Tlaxcala, 1519-1750* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2008), 46-48.

Federici concentrates her analysis on the pressure exerted on women via the dual mechanisms of the witch-hunt and wealth extraction at the dawn of a transatlantic commercial economy, a confluence of ritual (the witch-hunt, administrated through Inquisition) and the creation of surplus value (overseen by Church priests and *encomenderos* alike) through forced labor.<sup>11</sup> The destruction of human life in the New World, in turn, sparked extensive debate on the treatment of indigenous people, on their very status as humans with souls, and the proper method of evangelizing them. Alberto Moreiras paints that debate as an exercise in imperial reason, which takes terror as a precondition for imposing a new “law in the land.”<sup>12</sup> The Conquest, then, represents the terror that gives way to “enclosure,” to law and a colonial state apparatus that crystallizes precisely at the moment (in the 16<sup>th</sup> century) that Europe finds itself grappling with the “problem of government.” As Foucault explains, that problem coalesces around the legitimate use of force—we can say terror—on the part of the state.<sup>13</sup>

The force of the colonial government finds expression via the bodies of indigenous women through whom the Conquest flows and opens out to a colonial regime of government. In short, the Conquest does not happen without women to provide the labor (work and birth) needed to reproduce empire in the Americas. In this sense, the laboring woman has her analogue in the laboring earth that bears fruit and nourishment, a relationship that reaches apotheosis in the figure of Mayahuel, the goddess of the maguey plant.<sup>14</sup> As deified woman and source of sustenance and wealth, the barely moveable maguey plant sits at the crossroads of Mesoamerican and Spanish ritual economies. At the same time, the maguey plant illustrates the passage from

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<sup>11</sup> Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Alberto Moreiras, “Ten Notes on Primitive Imperial Accumulation: Ginés de Sepúlveda, Las Casas, Fernández de Oviedo,” *Interventions* 2.3 (2000), 333.

<sup>13</sup> Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*, trans. Graham Burchell, ed. Michel Senellart (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 295.

<sup>14</sup> Eloise Quiñones Keber, “Mayahuel and Maguey: Sustenance and Sacrifice in an Aztec Myth,” *Latin American Indian Literatures Journal* 5.2 (Fall 1989), 72-83.

terror, in the Conquest, to systematized force under colonial rule. That is not to say that terror and force did not exist prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. During the Mexica era, a period spanning from the 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, rulers, called *tlahtoque* in Nahuatl (the *lingua franca* of the Mexica empire), were characterized as commanding a combination of respect and fear based on the right of a ruler to kill one's subjects, the *macehualtin* (commoners). Even the imagery of Mayahuel plays into these imperial expectations in a number of painted manuscripts produced shortly before the arrival of Europeans in the New World. At the same time, Mayahuel represents the integrity of household wealth, from the *macehual* community to the imperial domain as the house of rulers. The maintenance of the household constitutes a central concern of indigenous leaders hoping to maintain their status in the Conquest and beyond. It is in this vein that women as mothers appear in Conquest historiography, in the retelling of early colonial conflict, and in the effort to root out pagan practices under the Inquisition.

This dissertation, then, deals with expressions of status, economy and nurture in the Conquest and early colonial period, an exercise that entails, at the same time, an investigation into pre-Conquest lifeways to understand how they impact indigenous-Spanish relations. My focus is predominately on Mesoamerican culture—its pre-Hispanic context in the Mexica era and reconstitution in the colonial period. Another study—another kind of project—would investigate in more detail the confluence of ritual and political economy in medieval and early modern Spain as a precursor to the terror of the Conquest and colonization of the Americas. For the purposes of the project presented here, I draw particularly on Spanish and colonial legal codes outlining the basis of nobility and circumscribing the authority of indigenous leaders under Spanish rule.

This study consists of four chapters centered on a close analysis of indigenous prose and visual texts, produced in colonial and pre-Hispanic contexts. The first two chapters draw on the

work of Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin to excavate the substance of rulership and the significance of women rulers in the governorship disputes that take place in 1540s Chalco and elicit intervention by the viceroyalty. The first chapter, then, deals with Nahuatl conceptions of government while the second analyzes Nahuatl representations of women rulers and noblewomen. Given Chimalpahin's motivation to act as bicultural mediator between Spanish and Nahuatl forms of government, I put his work in dialogue with Spanish and Nahuatl-language texts that express the meanings of law and government within their respective societies. As a historian holding on to the vestiges of his ancestors' nobility, Chimalpahin fixates on the ability of women in particular to inherit and pass on nobility, ultimately to the benefit or detriment of Chalco's male rulers. This is where Chalco's past women rulers and nobles appear in the historiographical record, albeit as phantom mothers and daughters who, for Chimalpahin, loom over Chalco's governmental disarray in the face of colonial pressures. In this vein, Chimalpahin casts his lot with that of the *macehual* population.

The third chapter moves my analysis of noblewomen to 1519, to the instances when indigenous leaders in Tlaxcala and Amaquemecan gave their own daughters, and *macehual* daughters, to the Spaniards as brides and gifts. Tlaxcala's gifts of women, which included captive slave women, served as a precedent for Amaquemecan, which then presented a gift of young *macehual* women dressed up as noble brides. The cosmetic transformation of the common women into counterfeit nobles would draw on the beautification strategies employed by indigenous women in pre-Hispanic agricultural festivals as well as by the *ahuiani* ("pleasure woman" in Nahuatl). Taking Chimalpahin's Nahuatl histories as a starting point, the first part of this chapter draws on visual and prose histories that portray the gifting and taking of women in the Conquest of Mexico. The second part of the chapter reconstructs the experience, if not

voices, of the young women groomed for presentation to the Spaniards. Bernardino de Sahagún's ethnographic encyclopedias of pre-Conquest life in Mexica society serves as the principal source for investigating the ways in which indigenous women would apply paints and feathers to their bodies in wedding ceremonies and agricultural festivals.

The fourth chapter, in turn, explores this gendered dimension of agriculture via the maguey plant and its deification, in Nahua culture, as the goddess Mayahuel. In this chapter, I propose that the domestication of the land and plant life, and the extraction of value from both, is bound up with the circumscription of women's mobility outside of the home. And, yet, even the commoner's home becomes a site of value extraction via the collection of tribute, under the Mexica and within Spanish colonial rule. The sublimation of maguey's varied uses through Mayahuel, and the insistence of indigenous communities on cultivating the plant in their own way, clashes with the Spanish effort to root out native religion in the planting field and in the consumption of maguey's fermented sap, *pulque*. The maguey plant, then, figures as an emblem for gendered mediation of ritual and economic exchange in the meeting of Spain and Mesoamerica.

The analysis of status, economy and motherhood in early colonial narratives intervenes in the field of colonial literature by excavating the experiences, if not voices, of women across the Conquest divide, from the pre-Hispanic context to the early colonial period. This is not to sidestep the question of voice, but to put it in relation with a constellation of affects and material properties that constitute human experience. The excavation of experience, along with and beyond voice, acknowledges the limitations of the textual (prose) archive in documenting the voices of women. Early colonial accounts of the Conquest and colonization of Mexico, and pre-Hispanic life, have been written predominately by men, and authorship is attributed virtually

exclusively to men, indigenous or European. These authors take for granted the centrality of men as historical protagonists, and women largely form part of the background of their narratives. The problem of analyzing indigenous women in early colonial Mexican histories, then, revolves around questions of representation—who is doing the representing, in what way, and to what end. Gayatri Spivak has suggested that “the subaltern as female cannot be heard or read,” that the subaltern cannot speak to us through the archive in the direct manner that historians would like.<sup>15</sup> Spivak’s analysis of the Hindu goddess Sati—as rebellious daughter whose destruction becomes symbolic of the self-sacrificing “good wife”—challenges us to consider the masculinist bias, in colonial-era accounts—that assigns “goodness” to figures like Malinche and other tribute women of the Conquest, as well as mythological figures like Mayahuel. In many instances, the ascription of “goodness” to women draws on a truth and a drive: the truth being the necessity of reproduction and nurture and the drive being to bring those necessities under the control of men as heads of the household and empire. The present study takes up this drive as a constitutive element of the colonization of bodies—human, plant, earth—and the re-inscription of values on these bodies via ritual economy.

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<sup>15</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Macmillan Education: Basingstoke, 1998), 104.



## Chapter 1. Nobility and the Crisis of Government in Chimalpahin's Chalco

The present chapter centers on governance and sovereignty in the historical writings of Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin.<sup>16</sup> I focus in particular on the “Octava relación,” which Chimalpahin completed in 1620.<sup>17</sup> The “Octava relación” forms part of a set of histories now known as the *Ocho relaciones*.<sup>18</sup> Writing in Nahuatl using alphabetic Spanish script, Chimalpahin tells the history of the communities that came to inhabit the valley of Mexico before and after the Spanish conquest of Mexico. In his native vocabulary, Chimalpahin bridges pre- and post-Conquest histories as he comments on the Spanish colonial intrusion into indigenous government. That intrusion, however, follows prior conflicts in the valley of Mexico, particularly the Mexica conquest of Chimalpahin's home province of Chalco in 1465. Chimalpahin remarks that the Mexica conquest of Chalco left the province without *tlahtoque* (rulers), replaced by *cuahtlahtoque* (sub-rulers, or deputy rulers), resulting in the disruption Chalco's ruling lineages.<sup>19</sup> At this point, Chimalpahin tells us, the people of Chalco became the

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<sup>16</sup> His full name as given in the “Octava relación” don Domingo de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin. For an analysis of his name, see Susan Schroeder, *Chimalpahin and the Kingdoms of Chalco* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1991), 10-12.

<sup>17</sup> I use Rafael Tena's edition of the *Ocho relaciones*, which contains a transcription of Chimalpahin's original Nahuatl manuscript and Tena's Spanish translation. The manuscript of the *Ocho relaciones*, along with the *Memorial de Culhuacan*, is housed at the National Library in Paris as Mexican manuscript 74 (242 folios). Tena's edition is published as Domingo Francisco de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, *Las ocho relaciones y el memorial de Colhuacan*. Trans. Rafael Tena. 2 vols. (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional Para la Cultura y las Artes, 1998). In this chapter, English translations of the passages from the *Ocho relaciones* are mine. In translating Chimalpahin's work into English, I have also benefitted from Tena's Spanish translation. I primarily quote from the “*Séptima relación*” and the “*Octava relación*,” both of which are in Volume 2 of Rafael Tena's translation.

<sup>18</sup> The “relaciones” titles were attached to Chimalpahin's manuscripts posthumously, possibly by Antonio de León y Gama in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Rafael Tena, “Presentación,” *Las Ocho Relaciones y el Memorial de Colhuacan*, trans. Rafael Tena (Mexico City: CONACULTA, 2003), 1.

<sup>19</sup> Chimalpahin, “*Séptima relación*,” 120-121 and “*Octava relación*,” 318-319.

*macehualmeh* (tribute-paying commoners, or vassals) of the Mexica *tlahtoani* (ruler). With the arrival of Hernán Cortés and the overthrow of the Mexica, Chalco's government underwent further reorganization, not just of its leadership but also its territorial space. That reorganization would place a strain on the hierarchy maintaining Chalco's ruling elite, resulting in a crisis of governance. In the "Octava relación," this crisis comes to a head in the 1540s, when a series of governorship disputes motivated the Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza to send an indigenous judge to Chalco in order to mediate the disputes and appoint governors. This anecdote revolves specifically around Chimalpahin's native *altepetl* (city) within the Chalco province. For Chimalpahin, the judge's intervention would undercut the value of indigenous nobility. Ultimately, the "Octava relación" offers a defense of indigenous nobility as a comment and critique of colonial governance.

Occupying a space between European and Mesoamerican intellectual milieus, Chimalpahin provides a Mexican perspective on what Foucault calls the "problem of government" that emerges in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The "Octava relación" participates in that "flourishing development of a significant series of treatises that do not exactly present themselves as advice to the prince, nor yet as political science, but which, between advice to the prince and treatises of political science, are presented as arts of government."<sup>20</sup> For Foucault, this intellectual discourse marks a shift in political thought from sovereignty to government:

Whereas the end of sovereignty is internal to itself and gets its instruments from itself in the form of law, the end of government is internal to the things it directs (*diriger*); it is to be sought in the perfection, maximization, or intensification of the processes it directs, and the instruments of government will become diverse tactics

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<sup>20</sup> Foucault, 88.

rather than laws. Consequently, law recedes; or rather, law is certainly not the major instrument in the perspective of what government should be.<sup>21</sup>

According to Foucault, the art of government had been blocked from full realization by sovereignty, understood as the massive juridical framework built around a sovereign monarch. That obstruction is removed once the management of populations, rather than the maintenance of sovereign power, becomes the motivating factor for government.<sup>22</sup> The management, or economy, of entire populations thus overtakes law as the focal point of the state. And this development is due to “the demographic expansion of the eighteenth century, which was itself linked in turn to the expansion of agricultural production.”<sup>23</sup> Foucault calls the full realization of the art of government, that is, its transformation into a science, “governmentality.”

In the Americas, indigenous intellectuals such as Chimalpahin in Mexico and Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala in the Andes are uniquely positioned as witnesses to this move to “governmentality.” At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, both Chimalpahin and Guaman Poma wrote treatises on the administration of colonial government and its impact on indigenous communities. In 1615, Guaman Poma finished his the *Primer nueva cronica y buen gobierno*. As Guaman Poma finished this treatise, Chimalpahin was in the process of writing a number of histories in Nahuatl, and rewriting a Spanish chronicle of the Conquest, with an emphasis on the governing structures in indigenous and colonial societies. Central to Guaman Poma and Chimalpahin’s works are the injustices and violence meted out on indigenous communities by agents of colonial authority.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 103.

Reflecting on events taking place from the 16<sup>th</sup> to early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, Guaman Poma and Chimalpahin effectively call for good government against the injustices burdening indigenous communities. Here, the element of force in the implementation of a colonial order comes to the fore. According to Foucault, “force” as a “new element of political reason” emerges in the late sixteenth and early 17<sup>th</sup> century with “the discovery of America, the constitution of colonial empires, the disappearance of the Empire, and the withdrawal, the erosion of the universal functions of the Church.”<sup>24</sup> Following this argument, with the end of the Holy Roman Empire and the rise of nation-states, the Americas would serve as the testing ground for implementing Spanish good government, or *policía*.<sup>25</sup> The governance of New Spain would revolve around the proper deployment of force in the colonization of indigenous subjects. The relocation of entire indigenous communities into *congregaciones* and the oppressive labor draft are but two examples of the centrality of force in the implementation of *policía*.<sup>26</sup> In Mexico, these strategies of Spanish governance altered the organization of the pre-Hispanic *altepetl*, the domain of the *tlahtoani* (“ruler” or “governor” in Nahuatl). Chimalpahin’s engagement with Spanish law responds precisely to this incursion on indigenous governance.

Foucault, however, makes only passing reference to the fact of colonization even as it underlies his argument. Yet, colonialism in Latin America is concomitant with the transition

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 295.

<sup>25</sup> “Civilizar [...] implicaba ciudadanizar a la población, urbanizarla, en síntesis, conminarla a vivir *en policía*.” Federico Fernández Christlieb and Marcelo Ramírez Ruiz, “La policía de los indios y la urbanización del altepetl,” *Territorialidad y paisaje en el altepetl del siglo xvi*, eds. Federico Fernández Christlieb and Ángel Julián García Zambrano (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006), 114.

<sup>26</sup> Fernández Christlieb and Ramírez Ruiz assert that “La doctrina de la ‘policía humana’, que se materializó en la urbanización del altepetl para facilitar las labores de civilización de los indios, fue una iniciativa que se acompañó de la mortandad de la mayor parte de la población indígena y la congregación de sus sobrevivientes dentro de pueblos de geometría regular. También se acompañó de contradicciones internas. La más palpable radicó en el hecho de que, para transformar al indio en un ser ‘sociable, político o civil’, frecuentemente fue necesario hacerlo por la fuerza. Una orden de 1608 afirmaba que a los ‘indios de las reducciones no debe dárseles licencia para vivir fuera de ellas’.” Fernández Christlieb and Ramírez Ruiz, 160.

from a monarchical model of political organization to one of governmentality. The demise of the General Indian Court, with the implementation of the Bourbon Reforms, is especially emblematic of this transition.<sup>27</sup> For Borah and Owensby, the Court was the key institution shielding indigenous American populations from the full onslaught of exploitation.<sup>28</sup> The role of the court, however, was ultimately to mitigate the abuses against the indigenous population just enough to ensure the continuation of the colony. When indigenous litigants filed petitions in the Court, which they did frequently, they appealed to the mercy of the Spanish king. This appeal was not a gesture of simple submission but a tactic of indigenous individuals and communities seeking legal reprieve. Owensby argues that indigenous litigants quickly adapted to the Spanish legal system upon its implementation, this adaptation facilitated by similar conceptions of power between Nahua and Spanish cultures. In particular, Owensby points to the “powerful hand” invoked in Nahua petitions as a symbol of power at various levels, including that of the king.<sup>29</sup> The “powerful hand” gives expression to the king’s sovereignty, imagined as the ability to

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<sup>27</sup> Woodrow Borah takes the Mexican bureaucrat Hipólito Villarroel’s ideas as emblematic of the logic of the Bourbon reforms: a staunch opponent of the General Indian Court and the special protections it afforded to indigenous litigants, Villarroel believed that “The Indians should be taught to live in Christian, useful society, in proper obedience to the king and his officers, through the application of more punishment and less misdirected piety. [...] A further desirable measure was to legalize a moderate, carefully applied repartimiento de mercancías, with previously fixed limits, so that the provincial governors would bring their Indians to industry and life within a commercial market. The General Indian Court should be abolished, and presumably with it the entire system of salaried agents of the half real.” Borah, *Justice by Insurance: The General Indian Court of Colonia Mexico and the Legal Aides of the Half-Real* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 388.

<sup>28</sup> See Borah’s *Justice by Insurance* and Brian B. Owensby, *Empire of Law and Indian Justice in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008). In regards to the relationship between law and indigenous populations in the colonial Americas, Owensby cuts a middle path between “the quieter and more ordered process of law that interested Borah” and “the hegemonic processes identified by [Steven] Stern.” Owensby, *Empire of Law and Indian Justice*, 4. Between these perspectives, Owensby sees law as a site of political struggle, “a means to ‘reclaiming the political’ for the colonial period.” Owensby, *Empire of Law and Indian Justice*, 11. Both Borah and Owensby, however, begin their studies of law in colonial Mexico after the 16<sup>th</sup> century, that is, after the establishment of the General Indian Court. My work in this chapter, in contrast, focuses on legal and extra-legal processes at work in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, premised on contending notions of governance as the colonial administration set up its regime.

<sup>29</sup> For Owensby, the “powerful hand” could symbolize the overreaching power of abusive officials and individuals or protection from such abuses: “There was perhaps no more evocative metaphor of the political problem of colonial life from the perspective of Indian petitioners seeking the king’s protection than this polysemic image of the hand.” Owensby, 63.

intervene in the law and abrogate it even as the law supports the king's authority. In between the law and sovereignty, government occupies itself with the tactics of managing mundane social relations, including the deployment of force.

The dual issues of sovereignty and governance find acute expression in the work of Chimalpahin. This is all the more evident when we analyze the "Octava relación" in conjunction with the *Florentine Codex*. A triangular analysis of Spanish law, the "Octava relación," and the *Florentine Codex* illuminates the way Chimalpahin treats European and Mesoamerican cultures. As an indigenous scribe trained in European letters, Chimalpahin mediates between Mesoamerican and European epistemes. This position in between worlds, in turn, highlights his ambiguous status within Nahua society. Remarking on Chimalpahin's class status, Susan Schroeder argues that he was "probably at the far edge of the nobility, or even originally beyond the edge. Yet it was perhaps precisely for that reason that he identified with it so closely in his mind."<sup>30</sup> Schroeder proposes that Chimalpahin took his Nahuatl names, "Chimalpahin" and "Quauhtlehuanitzin," from royal ancestors whose rule ended with conquest of Chalco by the Mexica.<sup>31</sup> Thus Chimalpahin inhabits a position not just between Europe and Mesoamerica, but within Nahua hierarchies that continued to operate within Spanish colonial rule.<sup>32</sup> These hierarchies reveal themselves as the remnants of a specifically indigenous mode of governance. It is from the spaces of cultural in-between-ness and indigenous class hierarchy that Chimalpahin offers examples, or case studies, of the governorship disputes in Chalco in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century as a watershed moment for Mexico's indigenous governments.

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<sup>30</sup> Schroeder, *Chimalpahin and the Kingdoms of Chalco*, 12.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Gibson sees these hierarchies flattening out over the course of the colonial period, while Lockhart argues that they remained significantly in effect despite the imposition of Spanish governance. See Gibson, Chapter 7: "The Political Town," *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule*; and Lockhart, "Chapter 4: "Social Differentiation," *The Nahuas After the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth Through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992) 94-140.

## Indigenous government meets the colonial state

A series of governorship disputes that occurred in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century motivates Chimalpahin's discussion of governance in the "Octava relación" is motivated by. This dispute occurred more than a half century before Chimalpahin put pen to paper in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Chimalpahin's aims his critique at the judge Andrés de Santiago Xochitototzin, whom the viceroy Antonio de Mendoza sent to Chalco to appoint governors in 1547. According to Chimalpahin, the judge was to consult the community histories of the five *tlayacatl* (sub-divisions) of Amaquemecan, part of the larger Chalco polity.<sup>33</sup> The judge's decisions, however, would contradict the genealogies presented to him by the community elders, thus sparking resistance to his appointments among the leaders of Amaquemecan.

An anecdote from the *tlayacatl* Tzacualtitlan Tenanco illustrates the dissonance between the judge's appointments and local patterns of governance. According to Chimalpahin, the judge offered governorship of this *tlayacatl* variously to don Diego Hernández Moxochintzetzellohuatzin, don Francisco Cuetzpaltzin, Tlilcahuatzin, and don Balthasar Atleoneuhtzin Atlauhtecatlteuhctli. These potential appointees, however, rejected the judge's offer, proposing instead their younger cousin as *tlahtoani*. Chimalpahin provides the following quote as explanation of their rationale for refusing the governorship: "Tleyn oc ye ticnequi ynic titlahotcatizque?; amo ye iuhqui ynic titequipanollo in ticaltillo yn tellimiquillilo yn ticuahcuahuililo, yequene timatequillo ticamapaco, timahuiztillilo? Amo; ma yehuatl tlahtocati, ma techonpacho ma techonpie yn toteyccaauh don Joseph de Castilla hecaxoxouhqui" ["Why would we want to govern?; will we no longer receive tribute service, or have houses built for us, or cemeteries, or have wood provided for us, and likewise have our hands washed and mouths

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<sup>33</sup> Chimalpahin, "Octava relación," 354.

washed? Will we no longer be respected? No, let him become *tlahtoani*, let our younger cousin don Joseph de Castilla Hecaxoxouhqui govern us.”<sup>34</sup> This quote suggests that the privileges of the nobles, expressed as a series of rhetorical questions (having houses built for them, etc.), depended on the presence of a legitimate ruler, a *tlahtoani*. Likewise, the quote signals the potential backlash among the commoners if a legitimate ruler were not chosen. Implicitly, it is the commoners would provide the tribute services listed by the nobles in their response to the judge. The stability of *altepetl* governance would therefore depend on the respect of the commoners for the *tlahtoani* and, by extension, the noble class. Chimalpahin’s phrase for respect, “amo ye iuhqui ynic timahuiztillilo” (“we are thus [...] no longer respected”), rests on the concept of *mahuiztli*, which also encompasses fear. In his 16<sup>th</sup> century Nahuatl-Spanish dictionary, Alonso de Molina translates *mahuiztli* as “miedo, o persona digna de honra” (“fear, or person worthy of honor”).<sup>35</sup> Molina’s definition of *mahuiztli* thus also includes its personification, the person “worthy of honor” and, implicitly, fear. In this way, Chimalpahin makes reference to the potential loss of this respect and fear by the commoners towards the noble class should an unpopular governor take power.

This anecdote finds expression within a larger history of Chalco. The “Octava relación” tells us the history of the formation of Chalco as well as its Conquest by the Mexica in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and then the Spanish conquistadors in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. These narratives revolve around the succession of rulers in the various *tlayacatl* of Amaquemecan. Each *tlayacatl* sub-division had its own *tlahtocayotl* (rulership). Chimalpahin focuses not only on the succession of rulers, but on the disruption of the *tlahtocayotl* after successive conquests of Chalco by the Mexica and

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 356.

<sup>35</sup> “mauiztli,” Molina, *Vocabulario de la lengua mexicana*, Nahuatl-Spanish section (Mexico City: Biblioteca Porrúa, 2008), 54v.



then the Spaniards. As *altepetl* governance is tied to the *tlahtoani*, the disruption of the *tlahtocayotl* at the same time breaks the *tlahtocamecayotl* (rulerly lineage). The idea of lineage is expressed through the idea of the *mecatl* (cord), which is incorporated into the concept of the *tlahtocamecayotl*.<sup>36</sup>

In focusing on the disruption of the *tlahtocayotl* and *tlahtocamecayotl*, Chimalpahin frames his history as a crisis of governance in Chalco precipitated first by the Mexica and then the Spanish conquistadors. In this vein, the “Octava relación” displays a very local manifestation of the “problem of government.” For the people of Amaquemecan, the Spanish Conquest would represent further disruption of a community already in turmoil, a second conquest in less than a century. Indeed, Chimalpahin reminds us that the Mexica had previously conquered Chalco in 1465. He states that this prior conquest led to the irretrievable loss of the royal lineages of two *teuctlahtoque*<sup>37</sup> in the *tlayacatl* Tzacualtitlan Tenanco.<sup>38</sup> At the time of his writing, in 1620, Chimalpahin laments that this same *tlayacatl* was at the point of disappearing as new *capultlaxilacalli* (wards) formed outside of traditional *altepetl* configurations.<sup>39</sup> These statements

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<sup>36</sup> For a study of the *mecatl* metaphor in Nahuá pictorial genealogies, see Olko, “Native Pictorial Genealogies,” a publication associated with The Mapas Project, Wired Humanities, University of Oregon (December 2008). Along with Olko, I see the *mecatl* as a specifically indigenous way of understanding lineage and kinship. See also Daniel Nemser’s discussion of the *mecatl* as Nahuá genealogical metaphor in *Toward a Genealogy of Mestizaje: Rethinking Race in Colonial Mexico* (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2011), 114.

<sup>37</sup> The Spanish text of the *Florentine Codex* substitutes *teuctlahtoque*, (a combination of the two lordly titles *teuctli* and *tlahtoani*, and written as “tecutlatoque” in Sahagún’s text) with “juezes” and “senadores.” Bernardino de Sahagún, Book 8: Chapter 17, folios 36v-37r. Retrieved from <https://www.wdl.org/en/search/?collection=florentine-codex>. Following the *Florentine Codex*, we can understand these *jueces* as governing officials subordinate to the *tlahtoani* (ruler). Molina, in contrast, situates the work of the *teuctlahtoani* (singular of *teuctlahtoque*) within the Spanish governing system. He defines *teuctlahto* (writing it as “tecuhtlatoa”), the active verb form of *teuctlahtoani*, as “tener audiencia, o entender en su officio el presidente, oydor, alcalde.” “tecuhtlatoa,” Molina, Nahuatl-Spanish section, 93v. In the case of Amaquemecan, Chimalpahin understands the *teuctlahtoque* to be male indigenous leaders within the *altepetl*. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the *Florentine Codex* is primarily concerned with Mexco-Tenochtitlan and only peripherally with outlying communities such as Amaquemecan. Nonetheless, and especially with the consolidation of Mexica power in central Mexico, the governing structures in both Mexco-Tenochtitlan and Amaquemecan converged significantly. The use of the same terms for governors in both Chimalpahin’s text and the *Florentine Codex* attests to this convergence.

<sup>38</sup> Chimalpahin, “Octava relación,” 281.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 288.

indicate both the disruption and durability of Nahua communities in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In the face of successive conquests, these communities experienced a continual reorganization of their social and spatial organization dating to 1465.

This reorganization goes hand in hand with the installation of more properly European forms of governance. Thus, when writing about the colonial period, Chimalpahin makes more liberal use of Spanish loanwords to refer to governors and governance. For example, in regards to Tenanco, renamed San Juan Bautista, Chimalpahin states that “Ynin ce altepetl yc catqui ce gobernador oncan tlapia, yhuan oncan moyetztcate teoyotica oncan motepachilhuia in tlaçoteopixque S[anc]to Domingo.” [In this *altepetl*, there is a governor who holds office, and residing there as spiritual administrators are the revered Dominican priests] (288). Here, Chimalpahin refers to the specific authorities in charge of governing Tenanco/San Juan Bautista in both secular and religious matters. In this way, he alludes to the collusion of Church and State in the reconfiguration of indigenous communities. The re-naming of Tenanco, to San Juan Bautista, is especially emblematic of this collusion.

This re-naming, however, would not erase Nahua geographies. Indeed, Chimalpahin’s use of *altepetl* and a specific place-name, Tenanco, signals the continued relevance of indigenous geographies in the colonial period. Fernández Christlieb and Ramírez Ruiz provide a hypothetical model of how the four parts, or *capoltin* (wards), of a typical *altepetl* would have been built into a Spanish-style town through the process of *congregación*.<sup>40</sup> Central to the pre-Hispanic *altepetl* was the sacred hill, around which the four parts of the *altepetl* were organized. On top of the hill stood a temple, the ceremonial and political center of the *altepetl*. Colonial resettlement forced indigenous communities into a flat urban space away from the hills; the pre-

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<sup>40</sup> Fernández Christlieb and Ramírez Ruiz, “La policía de los indios,” 144-160.

Hispanic temples were destroyed and their stones used to build Catholic churches in the middle of the new town. The four *capoltin* would be reconstituted as town *barrios* organized around a central plaza. The new town incorporated pre-existing indigenous hierarchies, with indigenous leaders occupying central places close to the plaza.<sup>41</sup> Following the insights of Fernández Christlieb and Ramírez Ruiz, we can say that colonial governance in Tenanco/San Juan Bautista, and Chalco more broadly, runs through both Spanish and indigenous geographies. This is so even as Spanish governance takes up a position of superiority over and against indigenous governance, including reorganizing indigenous communities as new *congregaciones*. According to Chimalpahin, *tlahtoani* rulership in Tzacualtitlan Tenanco came to an end in 1576 with the death of José del Castillo Ecaxoxouhqui. In the same year, the people of Tzacualtitlan Tenanco, and those of Panohuayan, were relocated to present-day Amecameca, where they built the temples of Santiago and San Felipe, respectively.<sup>42</sup> In Tzacualtitlan Tenanco, then, it appears that the colonial administration was content with waiting out the demise of Ecaxoxouhqui before uprooting his community and centering it around the temple of Santiago.

Spanish colonialism would undercut indigenous sovereignty as it attempted to override indigenous government, resulting in a crisis of governance in Chalco. This crisis prompts his recuperation of pre-Conquest history. But just as urgent for Chimalpahin is the task of translating indigenous and European forms of government. As an intellectual shaped by European and Nahuatl perspectives, Chimalpahin takes up a mediating role between the two, and he would be particularly aware of changes in Nahuatl modes of governance. Indeed, while Nahuas in Chalco shared a similar cultural heritage with the conquering Mexica, Spanish Conquest represented a reorganization of governance not only in Amaquemecan but in Mesoamerica more broadly.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>42</sup> Chimalpahin, "Séptima relación," 244-247. See also Schroeder, *Chimalpahin and the Kingdoms of Chalco*, 84.

While force played a fundamental role in the relocation of whole indigenous communities in colonial Mexico, Spanish law provided the conceptual framework for imposing European ideals of governance, or *policía*, on the New World.

To this end, Spanish law interpellated indigenous rulers within the colonial administration as *caciques*.<sup>43</sup> The term *cacique* derives from Arawak, the language of the Taíno culture in the Caribbean. The Spanish conquerors applied the term to any indigenous ruler they encountered in the Americas. In this way, *cacique* became the default term for an indigenous governor. Felipe III reinforced the use of *cacique* in a legal provision of 1614. That provision mandates that succession to the office of *cacique*, or the *cacicazgo*, follow traditional, local custom. It states that “Desde el descubrimiento de las Indias se ha estado en possession, y costumbre, que en los Cacicazgos sucedan los hijos á sus padres. Mandamos, que en esto no se haga novedad, y los Virreyes, Audiencias, y Governadores no tengan arbitrio en quitarlos á unos, y darlos á otros, dexando la sucession al antiguo derecho, y costumbre” [“Since the discovery of the West Indies, it has been a given, held up by custom, that in the maintenance of the cacicazgo, sons succeed their fathers. We order that in this regard no changes are to be made, and the viceroys, audiences and governors are not to have the authority to take the cacicazgo from some

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<sup>43</sup> Here I make use of Althusser’s notion of interpellation as a function of ideological state apparatuses (ISA’s), where force is an integral aspect of the law, which is its own ISA while also buttressing other ISA’s like the education system. According to Althusser, “The ‘Law’ belongs both to the (Repressive) State Apparatus and to the system of ISA’s.” Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation,” *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 96, note 9. Thus we can say that law is the supreme site of state power both in the creation and conditioning of subjects and above all their subordination to the Subject with a capital “S.” I understand the Subject to be the sovereign Spanish king in the case of Mexico. But between the Spanish sovereign and indigenous populations there was room for negotiation, and this in the face of the violence of the colonial state. Key to this negotiation was the ability of indigenous populations to understand and appropriate Spanish legality and thus to manipulate the primary instrument of state ideology in their favor. My use of Althusser here is partially inspired by John Sullivan’s Althusserian analysis of the spatial and linguistic dynamics of 16<sup>th</sup> century Tlaxcala. See John Sullivan, “Espacio, lenguaje y sujeción ideológica en el cabildo tlaxcalteca a mediados del siglo XVI,” *Territorialidad y paisaje en el altepetl del siglo XVI*, eds. Federico Fernández Christlieb y Ángel Julián García Zambrano (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006), 531-577.

and give it to others. Instead, they are to leave succession to the ancient law and custom”].”<sup>44</sup>

Thus, the relative autonomy of indigenous governors, now called *caciques*, would be preserved as *costumbre*.

The *Siete Partidas*, the legal code upon which Spanish colonial law was based, defines *costumbre* as “[...] derecho o fuero no escrito, el cual han usado los hombres largo tiempo ayudándose de él en las cosas y en las razones, sobre que lo usaron” [unwritten law, which men have long used to assist them in the matters and arguments to which that law pertains].<sup>45</sup> Thus, from the perspective of Spanish law, customs could acquire the status of law through long established usage, even without being written. Through the idea of *custom*, the colonial administration acknowledged indigenous forms of governance that it could then appropriate. This circumscription of indigenous governance is especially evident in a royal provision of 1538, which mandates that no *cacique* appropriate the title of sovereign (“que los Indios Caciques, y Principales no se intitulen Señores”).<sup>46</sup>

Nonetheless, a reference to indigenous sovereignty appears in the first law regarding tribute. This law, drafted in 1523, mandates that “Porque es cosa justa, y razonable, que los Indios, que se pacificaren, y reduxeren a nuestra obediencia, y vassallaje, nos sirvan, y dén tributo en reconocimeinto del señorío, y servicio, que como nuestros subditos, y vassallos devé,

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<sup>44</sup> *Recopilación*, Libro 6, Título 7, Ley 3.

<sup>45</sup> *Siete Partidas*, Partida I, Título 2, Ley 4. I use Gregorio López de Tovar’s 1555 edition of the *Siete Partidas*, which was the version most commonly used in Latin America. Translation mine.

<sup>46</sup> *Recopilación*, Libro 6, Título 7, Ley 5. The text of the law reads: “Prohibimos À los Caciques, que se puedan llamar, ò intitular Señores de los Pueblos, porque assi conviene á nuestro servicio, y preeminencia Real. Y mandamus à los Virreyes, Audiencias, y Governadores, que no lo consentan, ni permitan, y solamente puedan llamarse Caciques, ó Principales, y si alguno contra el tenor y forma de esta ley se lo llamare, ò intitulare, executen en su persona las penas, que les parecieren convenientes” [We prohibit the *caciques* from calling themselves or naming themselves lords of the people, as it [the prohibition] benefits our dominion and royal preeminence. And we mandate that the viceroys, courts and governors not consent to or allow it; and they [indigenous governors] may only call themselves *caciques*, or principal governors; and if someone, against the tenor and form of this law, were to call or name himself such [señor], may the necessary punishments be meted out on him”]. English translation mine.

pues ellos tambien entre si tenian costumbre de tributar á sus Tecles, y Principales.” [Because it is just and reasonable, may the Indians who are pacified and reduced to obedience to us, and vassalage, serve us, and give tribute in recognition of the dominion and service that as our subjects and vassals is owed [us], since they too amongst themselves had the custom of giving tribute to their *tecles* and principal rulers.”]<sup>47</sup> As one of the earliest laws drafted after the fall of the Mexica empire, this provision points to the urgency with which the Spanish state sought to appropriate the indigenous tribute system used by the Mexica. The provision can only make this claim on indigenous tribute by citing the authority of the “tecles” within indigenous communities. Yet, the provision’s description of the authority of the “tecles” is severely truncated, limited to the element of indigenous governance that mattered most for colonial settlers: tribute.

In contrast to such legal discourse, the ethnographic work of Spanish missionaries and their indigenous collaborators provide a more capacious picture of the system of indigenous governance in central Mexico. Through these sources, we understand that the “tecle” is a Hispanicized version of the Nahuatl term *teuctli*. This term is spelled “tecutli” in Alonso de Molina’s dictionary and in the *Florentine Codex*. Molina defines “tecutli” in terms of chivalry, as “cavallero, o principal.”<sup>48</sup> The *Florentine Codex*, in contrast, translates “tecutli” as “senador” and “juez,” invoking, moreover, the severity of this figure and the fear he elicits: “El senador, tiene estas propiedades[:] conviene asaber, ser juez, y saber bien averiguar los pleytos, ser respetado, grave[,] severo, espantable, y tener presencia digna de mucha gravedad y reverencia, y ser temido de todos.”<sup>49</sup> The Nahuatl text reads: “jn tecutli tlatzontequini tlatzontecqui, tlatlaliani,

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., Ley 1. Translation mine.

<sup>48</sup> “tecutli,” Molina, Nahuatl-Spanish section, 93v.

<sup>49</sup> Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 10, Chapter 4, folio 9v. Retrieved from <https://www.wdl.org/en/search/?collection=florentine-codex>.

tetlatlaliliani, haquequelli, ixtleio, ixtequaio, teixmauhti, ihio” [The *teuctli* [is] a judge, a pronouncer of sentences, an establisher of ordinances, one who orders others. [He is] dignified, fearless, courageous. He is an authority, stern-visaged.”]<sup>50</sup> Sahagún’s Spanish translation describes the ideal *teuctli* as a serious counselor for whom respect also entails fear, in line with the concept of *mahuiztli* (“respect,” “fear”) discussed earlier. The analogous term here is *teixmauhti*, one who holds authority over others and who is physically imposing (“abultado,” according to Molina).<sup>51</sup> The term *teixmauhti* is the agentive form of *mauhitia* (“to cause fear in someone”), which, in turn, is the causative form of *mahui* (“to fear”). This latter verb, finally, transforms into the noun *mahuiztli*. More than the Spanish text, the Nahuatl text emphasizes the *teuctli*’s ability to establish rules, or laws, signifying a larger role in matters of governance. Indeed, the terms “senador” and “juez,” are only approximate titles for the *teuctli*; they are not part of the vocabulary of the Nahua grammarians who composed the Nahuatl text but rather the words of Sahagún interpreting that text within a Spanish juridical frame half a century after the Conquest. Those five decades would distance Sahagún significantly from the reality upon which the original Nahuatl texts was based. In this regard, the use of “juez” and “senador” represents an asynchronous grafting of European concepts onto Nahua ones.

Whereas Book 10 of the *Florentine Codex* describes the ideal traits of the *teuctli* as a member of the nobility, Book 8 (“Kings and Lords”), using the term “jtcutlatocahoan” (his, the *tlahtoani*’s, judges) places this official within more a more discernable hierarchy of governance. At the top of that hierarchy is the *tlahtoani*, whose holds ultimate authority in the trying of cases. Book 8 presents the *tlahtoani*’s appointment of *teuctlahtoque* thus:

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<sup>50</sup> Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Part XI (Book 10), Ch. 4, trans. Anderson and Dibble (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 19677), 15. I have provided my own English translation, as I believe Anderson and Dibble downplay the element of fear in their translation.

<sup>51</sup> “teixmauhti,” Molina, Nahuatl-Spanish section, 95v.

auh injc uel qujneltiliaia in tlatoanj in teneteilhujl anoço tetlatlacul  
 qujmjxquetzaia, qujnpepenaia in jtecutlatocahoan: iehoantin in tlaçopipilti, in  
 tlaiecultilo in oncã in qujnj, in qujquanj, in mocujttonoa, ioan tiacaoan, oqujchti,  
 in iauc omozcaltique, mjiec tlamãtli tecoco netolinjliztli, oqujmaujçoque: auh in  
 jzquj tlamantlj qualli neoapaoaliztli, nezcaltiliztli, in jnpiltian oqujmomachtique,  
 in calmecac neoapaoaliztli, in tiachcapa neoapaoaliztli, in tetlan neoapaoaliztli, in  
 calpan tetlan nemjliztli iauqujçaliztli, tlamaliztli.

[And in order that the ruler might verify one's accusations and guilt, there were placed in office, and [the ruler] chose, as his judges, the princes, those who were endowed with the necessities of life, those provided with drink and food—the rich; and the brave warriors and men [at arms], who had been reared in war and had gloried in all kinds of suffering and misery.]<sup>52</sup>

This passage establishes the *tlahtoani* (“tlatoanj” in the passage) as the preeminent judge, with the *teuctlahtoque* serving as subordinate judges, assistants to the *tlahtoani*. This is so even as they share in the *tlahtoani*'s sovereignty, having the rulerly title (*tlahtoani*) adjoined to their *teuctli* title. As subsidiaries of the *tlahtoani*, the *teuctlahtoque* benefit from the privileges of rulership. Yet while the *teuctli* in Book 10 is presented as a member of the nobility, here nobility and wealth is not a strict prerequisite for appointment as a *teuctlahtoque*. Even decorated warriors (“tiacaoan,” or “our warriors”) can attain this status. Noble and warrior, however, are not mutually exclusive but overlapping elements in the fabric of sovereign power. As Clendinnen shows, the education of noble children in the *calmecac* included the arts of war.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, Book 8, in Chapter 17, the first matter of proper of government is the management of war. In the above

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<sup>52</sup> Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Part IX (Book 8), Ch. 17, Paragraph 3, trans. Anderson and Dibble, 54.

<sup>53</sup> Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 120-121.



passage, suffering in war is presented as a qualification for the exercise of judicial authority. The affective experience of war would complement the ideal temperament of a judge. Nobles, above all, would acquire that temperament in their upbringing, as evidenced by the similar descriptions of nobles in Book 10 and rulers in Book 8 of the *Florentine Codex*.

The obsession with nobility in the *Florentine Codex* and in Chimalpahin's writings is mirrors a similar obsession on the part of Spaniards in the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Romanized alphabetic text, conditioned by European modes of history and writing, is one of the principal agents of this European inflection of indigenous expression. Indigenous and Spaniards alike recognized the affinities between their cultures, even through their vast differences. The recognition of those affinities, in turn, would have allowed a certain amount of intercultural appropriation. From a Spanish perspective, translating Nahuatl into Spanish would be the critical step toward this process of appropriation, that is, the process of understanding in order to appropriate. In the case of the *Florentine Codex*, Sahagún would undertake to write its Spanish section only toward the very end of the manuscript's production, between 1575 and 1577. And this task he undertook only upon the orders of the minister general of the Franciscans in Mexico.<sup>54</sup> Shortly thereafter, Philip II would order the sequestration of the work through Inquisitional authority in 1577 or 1578.<sup>55</sup>

Like the text of the *Florentine Codex*, the images in that work constitute another site of translation, albeit visual. Although these images are significantly delimited by a Romanized alphabetic text, they provide a window onto pre-Conquest life in a way that the alphabetic Nahuatl and Spanish text can only approximate. In that regard, Book 8 juxtaposes descriptions of

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<sup>54</sup> Ida Giovanna Rao, "Mediceo Palatino 218-220 of the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana of Florence," *Colors Between Two Worlds: The Florentine Codex of Bernardino de Sahagún*, eds. Gerhard Wolf, Joseph Connors, and Louis A. Waldman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 37.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

the *teuctlahtoani* with images that provide a different valence to their authority than the textual descriptions of their office. In Figs. 1abc, the *teuctlahtoani* are shown seated on a *tepotzoicpalli* (woven reed throne). These thrones are typically occupied by the *tlahtoani*, as in the illustration of Acamapichtli, first ruler of Tenochtitlan, in Fig. 1c. The clothing of the *teuctlahtoani* in Figs. 1a and 1b also resemble those of Acamapichtli in Fig. 1c. The clothing items include the finely decorated *tilmatli* (cape) and *xiuhhuitzolli* (turquoise headdress, or diadem).

The *xiuhhuitzolli* in particular has a long history as a symbol of sovereign power in Mesoamerica. In her illuminating study of the *xiuhhuitzolli*, Olko states that “the ideological-mythological meaning of the headdress [...] seems to have persisted from the Early Classic times: its association with the Creation and origins of legitimate power.”<sup>56</sup> The Mexica appropriation of the *xiuhhuitzolli*, as represented in the *Florentine Codex*, participates in this history of legitimation. While the *teuctlahtoque* in Figs. 1a and 1b both wear the decorated *tilmatli*, only those in Fig. 1b are shown with the *xiuhhuitzolli*. And even then, the *xiuhhuitzolli* do not rest on the heads of the *teuctlahtoque*, as is the case with Acamapichtli, but rather float above them. Commenting on similar depictions of the *xiuhhuitzolli* in the *Codex Mendoza*, Olko surmises that the non-*tlahtoani* officials in these images “did not wear [the *xiuhhuitzolli*] in reality but in the pictorial conventions it symbolically defined their function, obviously associated with performing the duties and executing law on behalf of the ruler.”<sup>57</sup> The presence of the *xiuhhuitzolli* thus indicates close proximity to the power of the *tlahtoani*.

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<sup>56</sup> Justyna Olko, *Turquoise Diadems and Staffs of Office: Elite Costume and Insignia of Power in Aztec and Early Colonial Mexico* (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2005), 136. The Early Classic period in Mesoamerica spans AD 300-600. The Mexica came to power in the Late Postclassic period, spanning AD 1200-1500. For an explanation of these periodizations, see Mary Miller and Karl Taube, *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya* (New York: Thames and Hudson Inc., 1993), 9-11.

<sup>57</sup> Olko, *Turquoise Diadems and Staffs of Office*, 124.

The symbolic import of the *xiuhhuitzolli* was not lost on Chimalpahin. Indeed, Olko relies a good deal on Chimalpahin, as well as the *Florentine Codex*, in her analysis of the *xiuhhuitzolli*. In his writings, Chimalpahin refers to this item variously as *copilli*, *xiuhhuitzolli*, *teuhctzontli*, *tlahtocayotl*, and, in Spanish, *corona*.<sup>58</sup> Thus, Chimalpahin creates an equivalence, in an extended series of metaphors, between rulership (note the use of *tlahtocayotl*) and the *xiuhhuitzolli*. Significantly, that series of metaphors ends with a reference to a Spanish equivalent, the crown. Elsewhere, in mediating between Spanish and Nahua conceptions of sovereignty, Chimalpahin uses the phrase “‘tlahtocayotl xiuhuitzolli mitra’” as a “reference to bishop’s miters, similar in shape to the pre-Conquest royal insignia.”<sup>59</sup> As Chimalpahin shows, Spanish sovereignty would override the *xiuhhuitzolli* as a symbol of Mesoamerican sovereignty. In the “Octava relación,” Chimalpahin writes that, with Cortés’ arrival to the valley of Mexico in 1519, “Mochi poliuh y huel nelli intlahtocayo xihuitzolli anoço copilli yn incorona catca mexica tlahtoque yhuan Nueva España tlaca” [In truth all the *tlahtocayotl*, the *xihhuitzolli*, the *copilli*, which were like crowns, of the Mexica and other rulers of New Spain were lost.”]<sup>60</sup>

In referencing the *xiuhhuitzolli*, Chimalpahin evinces the memory of sovereignty in pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica. Linking the *xiuhhuitzolli* to the fire serpent head prevalent in pre-Mexica states such as Teotihuacan and the Mayan kingdoms, Olko argues that Mexica drew on this symbolism and came to associate the *xiuhhuitzolli* headdress with the New Fire ceremony.<sup>61</sup> This ceremony, also known as the “binding of the years,” was carried out every 52 years, which represented a century in pre-Conquest Mesoamerica and thus a transition to a new era.

According to Boone, “People in the central valleys of Mexico began their fifty-two-year cycle on

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<sup>58</sup> Susan Schroeder, cited in Olko, *Turquoise Diademes and Staffs of Office*, 118-119.

<sup>59</sup> Olko, *Turquoise Diademes and Staffs of Office*, 118.

<sup>60</sup> Chimalpahin, “Octava relación,” 328.

<sup>61</sup> Olko, *Turquoise Diademes and Staffs of Office*, 128-129.

the year 2 Reed. When one cycle ended, they extinguished all fires throughout the land, and then drilled a new fire to bring in the new cycle. Mexica painters, much more so than their Mixtec counterparts, record these cyclical New Fire ceremonies in their histories.”<sup>62</sup>

Ritual sacrifice was an essential aspect of the New Fire ceremony. Using the information provided by the Nahua elders, Sahagún writes that a war captive was sacrificed on the New Fire altar:

Era señalado cierto lugar donde se sacaba y se hacía la dicha nueva lumbre, y era encima de una sierra que se dice Uixachtlan, que está en los términos de los pueblos de Ixtapalapa y Colhuacan, dos leguas de México; y se hacía la dicha lumbre a media noche, y el palo de donde se sacaba fuego estaba puesto sobre el pecho de un cautivo que fue tomado en la guerra y el que era más generoso, de manera que sacaban la dicha lumbre de palo bien seco, con otro palillo largo y delgado como asta, rodándole entre las palmas muy de presto con entrambas palmas como torciendo....

[There was a certain place where the new fire would be made, and it was on top of a hill called Huixachtlan, which lies on the border of the two towns of Ixtapalapa and Colhuacan, two leagues from México; and this fire was lit at midnight, and the bundle of sticks that was used to light the fire was placed over the chest of a captive taken who was taken in war and was the most generous, in such a way that they lit the very dry bundle using another long, skinny stick as a pole, turning it quickly with the hands in a twisting motion.]<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Boone, *Stories in Red and Black* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 41.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in Ferdinand Anders, Maarten Jansen, and Luis Reyes García, *El libro del ciuacoatl: Homenaje para el año del Fuego Nuevo, libro explicativo del llamado Códice Borbónico* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1991), 35. The English translation is mine.

In his “Séptima relación,” Chimalpahin describes the last New Fire ceremony prior to the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors. Mirroring Sahagún’s description, Chimalpahin writes that in the year 2 Reed (1507),

Ypan in toxiuh molpilli, Huixachtecatl yn icpac huetz tlecuahuitl, ycnauhtetl yn quilpillico mexica y ye ixquichica cate Tenuchtitlan; huel icpac yn Huixachtecatepetl Ytztapallapan yn tlemamallihuac. Yn oncan ynca momamal yn maltin tecoçautepeca, auh çatepan occequintin yn inca inca momamal çoçolteca; ye matlacpohualtica yn inca momamal ynic huetz tlecuahuitl, yhuan occenca yehuantin yn teuchtepeca yn inca momamal y noncan Huixachtlan. Yuh quihtohua, y noncan noncua yxcoyan quintlalli yn quintemacac Moteuhçcomatzin yn maltin, centecpantli n quinmictihque, no centecpantli quintlalli yn neçahualpilli Acamapichtli; ynic oncan ynca teuchtlahtoque yn tlemamalque, ypan cemilhuitonalli Nahui Acatl.

[On this day our years were bound, the fire stick fell on the Huixachtecatl, and it was the fourth time that the Mexica bound the years since arriving in Tenochtitlan; on top of the Huixachtecatepetl in Ytztapallapan the fire was lit. The fire was lit over captives from Tecoçauhtepec, and afterward over others from Zozollan; in all, 200 captives had the fire lit over them, including captives from Teuhctepec and Huixachtlan. It is said that Moteuczoma offered 20 of his captives to be sacrificed, and Nezahualpilli Acamapichtli likewise offered another 20; with this, the teuctlahtoque lit the fire, on the day-sign of 4 Reed.]<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Chimalpahin, “Séptima relación,” *Las ocho relaciones y el memorial de Culhuacan*, Vol. II, trans. Rafael Tena (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1998), 142. The English translation is mine.

In this way, Chimalpahin, like Sahagún, highlights the link between human sacrifice and state ceremony. Yet Chimalpahin is even more specific in identifying rulers as well as the number of sacrificial victims involved in the ceremony. His allusion to the *teuctlahtoque* as the ones who would light the fire signals their significant participation in the ceremony as elite members of the state hierarchy. These *teuctlahtoque* may be analogues of the four priests depicted lighting the New Fire in the *Codex Borbonicus* (Fig. 2).<sup>65</sup> Each of these priests is adorned with a *xiuhhuitzolli* headdresses in addition to other elite ceremonial accoutrements. The *xiuhhuitzolli* lends symbolic import to the New Fire ceremony as an exhibition of state sovereignty vested in the *teuctlahtoque*. In this way, the *teuctlahtoque* perform the sovereign power of the Mexica state through ritual ceremony, symbolically affirming the responsibility of the *tlahtoani*, ultimately to vitalize the state through human sacrifice.

In addition to the *xiuhhuitzolli*, the section on the *teuctlahtoque* in Book 8 presents paintings as another important accoutrement of rulerly power (Fig. 3). But whereas the *xiuhhuitzolli* serves a primarily symbolic purpose, in Book 8 paintings are presented as tools of the *teuctlahtoque*, the objects they use in determining judgements. Book 8 states that in the second Mexica *tecalli* (court room), “iujian iocoxca qujcaquja, in jneteihuyl cujtlapilli, atlapalli, in oqujchipauhque, in oqujectilique neteihuijlli, tlapallacujlolpan qujtlalia, injc vmpa qujtquj tlacxitlan in jpã qujntlapoujlia in tecutlatoque in tlaçopipilti, injc vmpa motzontequj” [Sagely they heard the complaints of the common folk. They defined and verified the complaint, they recorded it in paintings so that they might take it there to Tlacxitlan [the first *tecalli*], where they

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<sup>65</sup> A facsimile of the *Codex Borbonicus* accompanies the explanatory book by Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García, *El libro de ciuacoatl*. In that book, the authors provide a good introductory analysis of the New Fire ceremony as depicted in the *Codex Borbonicus*. Chief among the sources they cross-reference are Sahagún and Chimalpahin. In regards to the four priests, or “sacerdotes,” Anders, Jansen and Reyes García identify them with Yoalteuctli, the god of the night and “Patrono de la constelación de Mamalhuazti, ‘las Maderas para sacar lumbre.’” Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García, *El libro de ciuacoatl*, 223.

informed the judges who were princes, so that their judgement might be pronounced.”]<sup>66</sup> This passage suggests that the *teuctlahtoque*, particularly in the second *tecalli*, were themselves trained scribes, *tlacuiloque*. At the same time, the passage implies a hierarchy among the *teuctlahtoque*, with cases moving from the second *tecalli*, occupied by simple *teuctlahtoque*, to the first, comprised of noble *teuctlahtoque* (“in tecutlatoque in tlaçopipilti”).

The image in Fig. 3 places emphasis not on this hierarchy but rather on the use of paintings in hearing cases. It depicts a somber *teuctlahtoani* consulting a painting while listening to the testimony of an official or accuser, whose speech is manifested through a floating speech scroll. The official or accuser stands over the person being accused, speaking down towards him with an aggressive stance and hand gesture. These domineering qualities contrast with the stoic countenance of the *teuctlahtoani*, whose head tilts downward toward the painting. The particular objects (a cup, a turquoise necklace, and a wooden club) shown in that painting only hint at a potential narrative, perhaps the robbery of luxury items with the use of a club. Metonymically, the painting stands for truth, which the *teuctlahtoani* seeks to ascertain. Altogether, the scene in Fig. 4a emphasizes the activity of the *teuctlahtoque* in the *tecalli*. Meanwhile, the *xiuhhuitzolli* floating above the *teuctlahtoani*'s head as well as the *tecalli* reinforce the judicial power that underlies this activity. In this way material and symbolic accoutrements complement one another.

Likewise, the descriptions of the *teuctlahtoque* in Book 8 reinforce their connection to sovereignty, and in particular the sovereignty of the *tlahtoani*. The preeminence of the *tlahtoani* punctuates the following discussion of proper and improper behaviors of the *teuctlahtoque*:

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<sup>66</sup> Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Part IX (Book 8), Ch. 17, Paragraph 2, trans. Anderson and Dibble, 55.

“mjmatinj, in mozcalianj, in tlanemjlianj, in vellacaquj, in vellatoa, in motlaiollotianj, in amo ahaujllatoa, in amo cacamanaloo, in amo iliuuj moocnjutia, amo tlaooananj, cenca qujmaujzpia in tecuiotl, amo cochinj, cenca cochicanj amo tle qujcnuhchioa: amo tle qujtecoolicachioa, amo tlaxtlaujltica aujcaquj, anoço qujtzontequj: qujmjqujznaoatiaia, in tlatoanj: injc melaoac qujchioazque in jntequjuh, in tecutlatoolj: auh intlacamo, ca iehoantin conmotzacujlitiazque in tecutlatoque, in tlein qujtlacozque.”

[“the wise, the able, the sage; who listened and spoke well; who were of good memory; who spoke not vainly nor lightly; who did not make friends without forethought nor were drunkards; who guarded their lineage with honor; who slept not overmuch, [but rather] arose early; who did nothing for friendship’s or kinship’s sake, nor for enmity; who would not hear nor judge a case for a fee. The ruler might condemn them to death; hence they performed their offices as judges righteously. For otherwise, these judges could find excuse for the wrongs which they might do.”]<sup>67</sup>

Thus, while the *teuctlahtoque* participate in the *tlahtoani*’s sovereignty, the *tlahtoani* holds ultimate power over the sovereign decision and, above all, the right to kill. Indeed, the Nahuatl word for passing judgement on someone (*quitzontequi*), used in the passage above, implies capital punishment: qui (him/her) + tzon(tli) (head) + tequi (to cut).

This right to condemn someone to death finds emphasis in pictorial images accompanying the discussion of the *teuctlahtoque*. Fig. 1, for example illustrates an execution by strangulation before a judge. Here, two officials perform the task of execution with the use of a

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 54.



cord. The subject being executed wears garb similar to that of his executioners, possibly indicating his own status as an official. Fig. 2, meanwhile, depicts the incarceration and execution of an erring musician. Here, the execution is carried out with the use of a *maquahuitl* (a weapon consisting of a long piece of wood lined with obsidian blades). Both images depict execution in dramatic fashion: Fig. 4a presents the executed subject with his mouth agape, perhaps taking his last breath. The *teuctlahtoque* or *tlahtoani* (they are indistinguishable visually as they don the same garb) presides over the scene with a stern visage. He sits on a woven reed throne, while a turquoise diadem floats above his head. One official directs the execution while two others actively pull on the cord wrapped around the perpetrator's neck. The strained bodies of the executioners stress their effort. In Fig. 4b, tears stream down the musician's face both in captivity and during his execution, lending an emotional charge to the scene. The executioner holds his *maquahuitl* over the victim's head, blood already gushing out, as if pulling away or getting ready for another blow. Both images thus add subtle visual queues that heighten the gravity of execution.

The execution of the musician in particular highlights not so much the capriciousness of the ruler as a ritual economy of sovereignty. Dance and song were critical elements of the ritual economy that the *tlahtoani* would invoke as a galvanizing spectacle for his subjects, nobles and commoners alike.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, the scenes of execution in Book 8, even in their extremely truncated form, make reference to a larger apparatus of of sovereignty, consisting of rigorous codes of conduct. The *teuctlahtoque* too are beholden to these codes, all the moreso since they serve as proxie of the *tlahtoani*.

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<sup>68</sup> The role of musicians in this regard is detailed in Book 8, Chapter 17, Paragraph 3 of the *Florentine Codex*.

In the “Octava relación,” Chimalpahin mediates between the ideas of government expressed in the *Florentine Codex* and in the Spanish legal code. Spanish laws would aim to subsume indigenous governments under the Spanish empire. In this way, these laws would impose Spanish codes of conduct over the rights of indigenous rulers. While accepting Spanish sovereignty, Chimalpahin also pushes its boundaries in his critique of the colonial administration. In the face of Chalco’s crisis of government, he reaffirms the value of indigenous nobility and the rights of Chalco’s rulers and nobles.

### **Indigenous government in crisis**

Chimalpahin produced the *Octava relación* in response to a long-standing crisis of governance in Amaquemecan exacerbated by the Spanish Conquest of Mexico. As Chimalpahin narrates the history of Amaquemecan into the colonial period, he reminds the reader that the Mexica had previously conquered this *altepetl* and the larger Chalco confederation in 1465.<sup>69</sup> Following conquest by the Mexica, Chimalpahin notes both the disruption of local governance in Chalco as well as the loss of autonomy.<sup>70</sup> The crisis of governance presented in the *Octava relación* thus begins with the Mexica conquest. The colonial administration sought to appropriate indigenous modes of governance, relying on bicultural indigenous administrators—scribes and judges—to mediate between viceregal authority and local communities. Yet, as Chimalpahin shows, the employment of indigenous judges would lead to significant conflicts between indigenous communities and the colonial administration. The defiant response to the judge Andrés de Santiago Xochitototzin is a case in point. According to Chimalpahin, the Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza sent Xochitototzin to Chalco in 1547 in order to resolve a number of governorship disputes by appointing rulers. In carrying out this task, he would rely on the

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<sup>69</sup> Chimalpahin, “Octava relación,” 280. My translation.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 326-329.

genealogical records kept by community elders in Chalco. It is in this context that Chimalpahin presents an extended critique of the judge Xochitototzin and, by extension, the colonial administration. Specifically, Chimalpahin criticizes the judge's decision to disqualify José de Santa María Teuhctloçauhcatzin as legitimate ruler Panohuayan, a municipality of Amaquemecan.

Chimalpahin's critique of the judge revolves around the legitimacy of indigenous nobility and female indigenous nobility in particular. While the written colonial law allowed indigenous communities to retain their traditional systems of rulerly succession, in keeping with their *costumbres*, in practice such leeway was not guaranteed. That is, despite what the law would expressly allow, indigenous and Spanish customs in Mexico clashed. In the *Octava relación* this clash of cultures leads to the initial disqualification of José de Santa María Teuhctloçauhcatzin as governor of Panohuayan by the judge Andrés de Santiago. According to Chimalpahin,

Auh yn oyuh quittqu in omoteneuh don Andrés de S[anc]tiago Xuchitototzin yn iuh catqui ytlacatiliz ytlacamecayo yn omoteneuh don Joseph de Sancta María Teuhctloçauhcatzin, ynic çan cihuatlachihualli pillotica, auh in ittatzin çan macehualli quauhpilli, auh yn oyuqui quittaqu in omoteneuh juez huel yc amo quiceliaya çan quitlatzilihuiaya yn, çan niman amo quinequia ynic yehuatl tlahtocatiz Panohuayan, ca noço huel yehuatl yn quixquetza Panohuayan tlaça ynic intlahtocauh yez.

[Thus when the aforementioned Andrés de Santiago Xochitototzin saw how it was, the lineage and genealogy of the aforementioned José de Santa María Teuhctloçauhcatzin, who was noble only through maternal lineage, and whose father was only a commoner raised to the rank of quauhpilli, this judge really

would not accept it, he flatly rejected it; he did not want this José de Santa María to govern Panohuayan, even though the people of Panoyuahan had chosen him to be their *tlahtoani*.]<sup>71</sup>

Noticeably absent in this passage is the woman in question, that is, José de Santa María's mother. Presumably, José de Santa María had inherited the governorship of Panohuayan through her. Indeed, Chimalpahin affirms that she was the daughter of the previous governor of Panohuayan, Cuauhcececuitzin Tlamaocatlteuctli.<sup>72</sup> The names of this prior ruler and that of José de Santa María Teuhctlacoçauhcaztin are indicative of their rulerly credentials, both containing the *teuctli* title attached to different polities (Tlamoacatl in the case of Cuauhcececuitzin and Tlacoçauhcan in the case of José de Santa María).

Chimalpahin acknowledges the original commoner status of José de Santa María's father, named Chalchiuhecaztin,<sup>73</sup> while at the same time noting his vaunted military rank. In the above passage, the *quauhpilli* ("eagle warrior") title augments the *macehual* status of Chalchiuhecaztin, with "macehualli cuauhpilli" translating loosely to "commoner raised to the status of eagle warrior." Acquired through military valor, the *quauhpilli* title would make one a "meritocratic noble" but still less esteemed than hereditary nobles.<sup>74</sup> According to Hassig, however, "once a commoner became a *quauhpilli*, his sons were eligible for noble treatment, including warrior training in the *calmecac* [school for noble children.]"<sup>75</sup> Thus, we see varying degrees of nobility, with an ultimate emphasis on hereditary nobility as a requisite for governorship. Moteuczoma Ilhuicamina (Moteuczoma I), *tlahtoani* of Tenochtitlan between 1440 and 1469, created the

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<sup>71</sup> Chimalpahin, "Octava relación," 358.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 358.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, "Octava relación," 358.

<sup>74</sup> Ross Hassig, *Aztec Warfare: Imperial Expansion and Political Control* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 45.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

*quauhpilli* title in a context of imperial expansion.<sup>76</sup> His grandson, Moteuczoma Xocoyotzin (Moteuczoma II), *tlahtoani* of Tenochtitlan between 1502 and 1520, would eliminate the status of *quauhpilli* as he consolidated military and government positions among the Mexica hereditary nobility.<sup>77</sup> Thus, even before the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors, the *quauhpilli* title became a casualty of Moteuczoma II's restructured government. This would be a setback, then, for commoners hoping to enter into more vaunted ranks through military valor. Yet, the memory of the *quauhpilli* remains relevant in Chimalpahin's recollection of the dispute over governance in Amaquemecan, perhaps even signaling a desire on Chimalpahin's part to recuperate the lost nobility of his own ancestors.

While identifying as a *macehual*, Chimalpahin uses his name to claim a noble heritage. With some variation, Chimalpahin signed his name in his histories as Domingo Francisco de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin. He was likely baptized "Domingo" after his grandfather, Don Domingo Hernández Ayopochtzin, a descendant of the founding family of Chalco. "Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin" were the names of two famous noblemen from Tzaqualtitlan Tenanco, the latter having ruled as king (1418–1465). In Nahuatl, *Chimalpahin* means "Runs swiftly with a shield," and *Quauhtlehuanitzin* means "Rising Eagle." Additionally, Chimalpahin sometimes bestows on himself the Spanish honorific "don" as employed by the colonial indigenous nobility. Yet, Chimalpahin's actual relation to nobility was remote, and to his contemporaries in Mexico City he was probably known simply as "Domingo Francisco."<sup>78</sup> In a sense, Chimalpahin ties his lineage with that of Chalco's illustrious past, undermined first by the Mexica and further eroded under Spanish rule. Chimalpahin's critique of the judge

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<sup>76</sup> Manuel Aguilar-Moreno, *Handbook to Life in the Aztec World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 81.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>78</sup> Schroeder, *Chimalpahin and the Kingdoms of Chalco*, xvi.

Xochitototzin, then, is bound up with the memory of Mexica intervention in Chalco's political life, as evidenced in the use of the *quauhpilli* title.

After the Spanish invasion and colonization, the *quauhpilli* title would remain as a remnant of the prior Mexica conquest of Amaquemecan. Beyond textual accounts such as Chimalpahin's, the image of the *quauhpilli* survives in visual form as ceramic statue and in paintings (Figs. 5-6). The larger-than-life statue in Fig. 5 lends the *quauhpilli* figure an aura of invincibility. Yet, its naturalistic style creates the illusion that this statue could in fact be a real guard at the royal palace of the *tlahtoani*. Fig. 6a show the *quauhpilli* costume amongst the war regalia of the *tlahtoani*. Meanwhile, Figs. 6b-c portray the *quauhpilli*, along with the jaguar warrior, leading a group of warriors in battle and engaging in direct combat. Although Chimalpahin does not say so, one can imagine that the *quauhpilli* title, when it was in effect, would provide a commoner with the kind of clout necessary to marry a noblewoman. That the warrior class enjoyed certain privileges, including sexual privileges, is clear. Clendinnen states that Mexica commoners who became decorated warriors were allowed to keep concubines amongst other elite privileges.<sup>79</sup> Presumably, these concubines came from the lower strata of pre-Conquest Mexica society.<sup>80</sup> But as Chimalpahin suggests, and following Aguilar-Moreno, being a *quauhpilli* would not put one on par with hereditary nobles. Thus it is the nobility of the mother, according to Chimalpahin, that legitimated José de Santa María's claim to the governorship of Panohuayan. That focus on female nobility leads to Chimalpahin's defense of women's nobility in Amaquemecan.

Chimalpahin's preoccupation with women's nobility constitutes a symptom of dissatisfaction with the continuing influence of Mexica intervention. Indeed, it is plausible that

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<sup>79</sup> Clendinnen, 120.

<sup>80</sup> Clendinnen, 100.

Xochitototzin sought to honor Moteuczoma II's reversal of the *quauhpilli*'s access to nobility and, concomitantly, keep the governorship as close to the Mexica-sanctioned ruler Cuauhcececuitzin Tlamoatlteuctli as possible. At one point, Chimalpahin quotes a running dialogue between the judge and don Mateo Tetlilnelohuatzin Tecpanecatlteuctli, one of the men to whom the judge first offered the governorship of Panohuayan. Don Mateo was the son of the *tlahtoani* Cuauhcececuitzin Tlamaocatlteuctli, and the brother of José de Santa María's mother. In Chimalpahin's account, don Mateo refuses the post and insists that his nephew, don José de Santa María, be allowed to govern. The judge, in turn, identifies an alternative candidate to the governorship, don Juan de Ojeda Cuauhcececuitzin, whose father was himself a *tlahtoani* and whose mother, Papaloxochitzin, was the daughter of Cuauhcececuitzin Tlamaocatlteuctli. When the judge calls on the residents of Panohuayan to bring don Juan de Ojeda from his place of residence in Tlalmanalco, they refuse. Reluctantly, the judge accepts don José de Santa María as governor, but not without issuing the following warning: "Ca ye cualli, ma yhui, don Mateohé, ca motencopa ye nicmaca intlahtocayotl Panohuayan in momach don Joseph de Sancta María; yn amo huel yuh mochihuazquia, amo nehuatl notlahtlacol, ca tehuatl motlahtlacol" [Fine, don Mateo, if that is how you want it, I will give the governorship of Panohuayan to your nephew don José de Santa María; but it is not supposed to be like this—it will be your responsibility, not mine.]"<sup>81</sup> Chimalpahin thus characterizes this dispute as a clash between the local community and the judge as external agent representing both the Mexica system of government and Spanish colonial government at the same time.

In the dispute between the judge and the leaders of Panohuayan, we see the centrality of the old *tlahtoani* Cuauhcececuitzin Tlamaocatlteuctli. The various candidates to the governorship

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<sup>81</sup> Chimalpahin, "Octava relación," 360.

could all claim descent to this man. But for the judge, closeness to the old *tlahtoani* along with hereditary nobility (especially of both parents) overrode the nobility of a *quauhpilli*, thus disqualifying don José de Santa María from occupying the post of governor. Yet, Chimalpahin presents don José as the only plausible *tlahtoani* of Panohuayan, both in term of hereditary rights and popular consensus. The specific reason for choosing José de Santa María, however, remains unclear in Chimalpahin's account. The various descendants of Cuauhcececutzin Tlamaocatlteuctli were likely enmeshed in a complex web of filiations, as indicated in the judge's claim that Juan de Ojeda Cuaucececutzin was the son and grandson of don Mateo and others. Quoting the judge, Chimalpahin phrases this relationship as "amoxhuiuh amopiltzin" ["the son and grandson of you all"].<sup>82</sup> Here, the judge (through Chimalpahin) could simply be establishing Juan de Ojeda as the younger kin of don Mateo and other family members, perhaps his siblings. Yet, as Papaloxochitzin's son, he would more properly be the nephew of don Mateo rather than his son or grandson.

Keeping at bay the idea that Juan de Ojeda is simply the next of kin in the royal lineage, one of the factors that may be at issue is the kind of incestuous relationship that Markov posits in her study of a prolonged legal battle involving indigenous litigants in colonial Mexico. For Markov, that relationship—the marriage of a brother and sister—can only be surmised, as the indigenous litigants in her case study presumably would not incriminate themselves by revealing that fact before Spanish authorities.<sup>83</sup> Chimalpahin himself eschews any discussion of such matters, focusing instead on legitimate female rulership as the basis of his argument. For that

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 358.

<sup>83</sup> Gretchen Koch Markov, *The Legal Status of Indians under Spanish Rule*, diss. (University of Rochester, 1983. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1983), xiv.



matter, he provides little information about José de Santa María's mother, using her primarily as a place-holder for powerful men and thus obfuscating her role in the political affairs of Chalco.

## **Conclusion**

The "Octava relación" offers us a view onto the messy affairs of Chalco, a once-powerful indigenous polity in its confrontation with the Spanish state, a confrontation mediated by an indigenous judge in the service of the viceroyalty of New Spain. The problems that Chimalpahin identifies, namely, the disqualification of certain governors in Chalco, have antecedents in the previous century, in the Mexica conquest of Chalco in 1465. That prior conquest remains fresh in Chimalpahin's work as he offers his cases studies and accompanying critique of viceregal intervention in Chalco's governorship disputes. In this sense, the "Octava relación" becomes a Mexican commentary on what Foucault calls the "problem of government," which takes shape in the 16<sup>th</sup> century around the questions of "how to be governed, by whom, to what extent, to what ends, and by what methods."<sup>84</sup> These questions motivate Chimalpahin's presentation of the governorship disputes of 16<sup>th</sup> century Chalco as a series of cases studies that could guide further attempts to mediate between indigenous communities and the colonial government.

In the "Octava relación," Chimalpahin focuses on law as a site of struggle for Chalco's forms of government revolving around the privileges of the nobility and, above all, the right of the *tlahtoani* to govern autonomously in his community. Yet, while Chimalpahin features a largely male elite, he intermittently alludes to the nobility of Chalco's women, including two women who became rulers in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Noting the rarity of such women appearing in colonial-era records, Arthur J.O. Anderson states that "Where women rulers are portrayed in

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<sup>84</sup> Foucault, 89.

action [...] is in various of the *relaciones* (annals, accounts) of Chimalpahin.”<sup>85</sup> What purpose would women rulers have on Chimalpahin’s account of Chalco’s governorship disputes? The following chapter takes up this question, using the *Florentine Codex* and the *Siete Partidas*, once again, in a triangular analysis that reads Chimalpahin’s account in relation to the pre-Conquest past in Mexico, namely the Mexica era, and the realities of the colonial regime from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

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<sup>85</sup> Arthur J.O. Anderson, “Aztec Wives,” *Indian Women of Early Mexico*, eds. Susan Schroeder, Stephanie Wood, and Robert Haskett (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 83.

## Chapter 2. Women Rulers in Chalco and the Colonial Emergence of the *Macehual*

Shortly after toppling the Mexica capital of Tenochtitlan in 1521, the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés met with indigenous leaders in the province of Chalco to reconstitute their land. With an air of paternal authority, and through his indigenous interpreter Malintzin Tenepal, Cortés declared the following:

“Ma xiquimilhui yn nopilhuan tlahtoque yhuan yn imachhuan ca  
niquinnomaquilia ca ynmac nictlalia ynic quitzontequizque ynic quixexellozque  
yn tlalli y yaoyotica yn mitica chimaltica quincilica yn mexicatl yn tenuchcatl.  
Auh yn iuh quincuilli y yaoyotica yn mexicatl yn tenuchcatl, ca ono yuh  
niquincuilli”

[Tell my children the governors and their deputies that I give to them, I place in their hands (the authority) to judge and divide the land that the Mexica and Tenochca took from them through war, by spear and shield. And just as the Mexica and Tenochca took the land by war, I have also taken it from them.]<sup>86</sup>

In 1465, the Mexica had conquered Chalco after a 20-year war and more than a century of internecine battles.<sup>87</sup> The above quote, put in writing in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century by the Nahuatl scribe Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, paints Cortés not as invader but liberator, or, more precisely, restorer of *justicia*. The Mexica, in contrast, play the part of imperial oppressor that finally meets its match. Cortés’ magnanimous pronouncement indulges the desire of Chalco’s

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<sup>86</sup> Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, “Séptima relación,” *Las ocho relaciones y el memorial de Colhuacan*. Trans. Rafael Tena. 2 vols. (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional Para la Cultura y las Artes, 1998), 160-161. English translation mine.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-95.

leaders for recognition of the authority lost under the Mexica. Yet, as Chimalpahin tells us, by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Chalco's government had fallen into disarray, with noble pretenders appearing out of the woodwork to usurp governing roles, and new governments forming without regard to traditional protocols. The resulting governorship disputes provide the impetus for Chimalpahin's *Octava relación* as he shifts from an annals (year-by-year) historical style of the earlier *relaciones* to a more essay-style approach. While indigenous men form the chief protagonists of these disputes, indigenous women appear intermittently as phantom stewards of noble lineage and rulers in their own right—counterparts to Cortés' *pater familias*.

As Chimalpahin marshals a defense of Chalco's rightful nobility, slipping from annalist to polemicist, the noblewomen of Chalco's slide into historical view, albeit as phantom actors, in the political affairs of 16<sup>th</sup> century Amaquemecan. In her article, "The Noblewomen of Chalco," Susan Schroeder tracks the appearance of noblewomen in Chimalpahin's various histories. Echoing the work of Karen Bell on the "kingmakers" of ancient Mexico, Schroeder emphasizes the fact that noble lineages among Chalco's elite depended on noblewomen.<sup>88</sup> That affirmation would seem obvious enough, yet the historiographical record, Chimalpahin's work included, generally ascribes a secondary role to even the most prominent indigenous women in pre- and post-Conquest Mexico. While both Schroeder and Bell focus their analysis largely on pre-Conquest history, this chapter moves the analysis of Chalco's noblewomen further into the context of Chalco's, and by extension Mexico's, post-Conquest history, in the crossing of Chalco's government with the seat of Imperial power in Tenochtitlan/Mexico City. The crossing occurs on both geographical and temporal grounds, moving across territorial jurisdictions within

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<sup>88</sup> Susan Schroeder, "The Noblewomen of Chalco," *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* 22, 86. Karen Elizabeth Bell, *Kingmakers: The Royal Women of Ancient Mexico (Women Royalty)* (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1992).

the valley of Mexico and across imperial moments, from that of the Mexica (13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries) to Spanish colonization (from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onward). In the movement to Spanish colonial rule, a space of ambiguity emerges in which indigenous methods of government and assigning nobility vie with Spanish ones. We can add to this ambiguity the potential differences already at work among various indigenous polities, differences that the Mexica would have striven to reconcile as they expanded their imperial reach.

### **A Mexican Machiavelli and the Cihuatlahtoque (Women Rulers) of Chalco**

Reflecting on the turmoil of Chalco in the nearly full century after the Conquest of Tenochtitlan, Chimalpahin offers a political guide to his would-be readers, ideally an audience of educated Nahuatl readers—whether native speakers or Spaniards diligent enough to learn the language. In this way, and from his post in the modest chapel of San Antonio Abad in Mexico City, Chimalpahin participates in a larger trend already brewing in Europe—the explosion of treatises, spearheaded by Niccolo Machiavelli, written as so much advice to monarchs (princes) about how to govern. As stated in Chapter 1, Michel Foucault posits that such treatises formed in response to Europe’s crisis of government based on two factors: 1) a shift of power from monarchies to state governments and 2) the discovery of the Americas.<sup>89</sup>

We can thus think of Chimalpahin as a Mexican Machiavelli who brings the crisis of government to bear on central Mexico, and with this a peculiar fixation on the status of noble women, indigenous and Spanish. The invocation of Chalco’s noblewomen animates Chimalpahin’s mediation of the conflicting interpretations of rightful governorship. In the end, Chimalpahin does not specifically advocate for one party over another, but instead calls for a

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<sup>89</sup> Foucault, 295.

comparison of Spanish and indigenous forms of government and sovereignty.<sup>90</sup> For Chimalpahin, the misunderstandings surrounding nobility necessitate a consideration of Chalco's noblewomen: mothers, daughters, and wives of the nobility. The most prominent of these figures are the two *cihuatlahtoque* (women rulers) Xiuhtotztzin and Tlacocihuatzin, who governed in separate communities in Chalco: Xiuhtotztzin would be the seat of power in Tzaquatitlan Tenanco between 1339/40 and 1348, and Tlacocihuatzin in Itztlacoauhcan between 1392 and 1410.<sup>91</sup> In Chimalpahin's account, the *cihuatlahtoque* and other *cihuapilli* (noblewomen) continue to mediate power between men even in after the onset of colonization, beginning in 1521. The absence of their corporeal bodies, however, becomes emblematic of Chalco's crisis of nobility, simultaneously a crisis in government. For, indeed, how can nobility, or any lineage at all, be passed on in the absence of women? In lieu of the bodily noblewomen, Chimalpahin presents us with their blood, passed on to their progeny.

The immediate object of Chimalpahin's critique is the indigenous judge Andrés de Santiago Xochitototzin who, a native of Xochimilco whom the Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza sent to Chalco in 1546 or 47 to settle the governorship disputes that had erupted there. According to Chimalpahin, the judge Xochitototzin rejected José de Santa María Teuhctlacoauhcatzin's right to govern in the *altepetl* of Amaquemecan because only his mother had been a noble while his father had been a *macehual* ("commoner") turned *quauhpilli* ("eagle warrior," as discussed in the prior chapter). Chimalpahin interprets the judge's decision as a denial of José de Santa María's mother's nobility, and of women's nobility in general. Rafael Tena, however, contends that Chimalpahin's critique of the judge is unjustified, that the decision to deny José de Santa

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<sup>90</sup> Chimalpahin, "Octava relación," *Las ocho relaciones y el memorial de Colhuacan*, trans. Rafael Tena. 2 vols. (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional Para la Cultura y las Artes, 1998), 368-369.

<sup>91</sup> Susan Schroeder, "The Noblewomen of Chalco," Table 4a.

María the governorship rested on his father's commoner status and not on whether a woman's nobility was valid or inferior to a man's.<sup>92</sup> Susan Schroeder, in contrast, suggests that Chimalpahin's royal genealogies exhibit a preoccupation with paternal lineage over maternal lineage. Schroeder concludes that "contrary to Chimalpahin's emphasis on patrilineal descent within a *tlatocayotl*, it seems that the royal line and title were perpetuated through the marital alliance of a daughter."<sup>93</sup> The difference between Tena and Schroeder's arguments hinges on the perspective they emphasize: Tena stresses Xochitototzin's position while Schroeder excavates the rules of royal succession at play within Chalco. Both, however, rely principally on Chimalpahin's work to understand Xochitototzin's reasoning and the patterns of rulership in Chalco.

Culling through the *Octava relación*, it appears that the assignment of nobility in Chalco differed from the assignment of rulership, such that nobility and royal lines passed fluidly through matrilineal and patrilineal descent while governorship was typically assigned to the closest male relative of a male *tlahtoani*, whose claim to the governorship derived, ideally, from his ties to the founding rulers (also identified as male) of the *altepetl* to which he belonged. In the absence of a clear male successor, however, women (also with close ties to a male *tlahtoani*) governed as placeholders for the next male governor. This situation explains Chimalpahin's interest in maternal lineage, which he references opportunistically as it suits his advocacy of Chalco's largely male leadership. And the confusion over leadership arises principally with the Mexica invasion of Chalco, causing some leaders to go into exile and others to lose their governorship outright. Chimalpahin states that for a time after the Mexica conquest of Chalco,

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<sup>92</sup> Rafael Tena, "La estructura textual de las relaciones primera y octava de Chimalpahin," *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* 28 (UNAM, 1998), 363-364.

<sup>93</sup> Susan Schroeder, *Chimalpahin and the Kingdoms of Chalco*, 66.

there were no *tlahtoque* but rather councils consisting of *cuauhtlahtoque* (deputy governors).<sup>94</sup> Thus, Tena's argument about Xochitototzin is only partially correct. Following Chimalpahin's narrative, Xochitototzin's most important criterion for seeking a replacement for José de Santa María was the proximity of each candidate to Quauhcececuitzin Tlamaocatlteuctli, declared *tlahtoani* of Panohuayan upon its restoration (still under Mexica rule) and who governed from 1487 to 1519; he was also one of three *tlahtoque* from Amaquemecan, moreover, to meet with Cortés upon his arrival in Chalco in 1519.<sup>95</sup>

In this regard, Chimalpahin's discussion of women rulers serves as a historical comparison of the assignment of nobility. To this end, he provides examples of women rulers in both pre-Conquest Chalco and in Spain. As stated previously, his examples from Chalco, and more specifically Amaquemecan, are the *cihuatlahtoque* Xiuhtotzin and Tlacocihuatzin. His Spanish examples, in turn, are Isabel la Católica and her daughter Juana.<sup>96</sup> These pairing of women serve to create symmetry, a sense of commonality, between Spanish and Nahua modes of governance. By comparing these Nahua and Spanish rulers, Chimalpahin buttresses the legitimacy of Xiuhtotzin and Tlacocihuatzin and, by extension, indigenous women's nobility. From Chimalpahin's perspective, the two are indeed co-extensive. At least, this is the case for Chimalpahin's Chalco. At least one pre-Conquest painted history, the *Codex Selden*, of probable Mixtec origin, depicts a woman as ruler: Lady 6 Monkey.<sup>97</sup> Yet, unlike the authors of the *Codex Selden*, Chimalpahin writes well after the Conquest and in a context of competing Mesoamerican and European systems of government, and along with the latter, the fervor of the Inquisition.

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<sup>94</sup> Chimalpahin, "Séptima relación," 120-121, 150-151.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 126-127.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, "Octava relación," 372-373.

<sup>97</sup> Boone, *Stories in Red and Black*, 72-77.



As if to shield himself from accusations of spreading falsities, Chimalpahin assures the Christian reader that his histories are verified in the paintings created by indigenous elders (both men and women) long ago.<sup>98</sup> With this reference to the ancient histories, the *huehuetlahtolli*, we glimpse another realm in which women held an important position within pre-Hispanic Nahua society, that is, as *tlacuilos* in their own right.<sup>99</sup> While it is now known that women occupied important political positions within Nahua society,<sup>100</sup> Anderson notes that Chimalpahin's account is one of the few instances in which indigenous women are shown as active rulers.<sup>101</sup> For Chimalpahin, the historical facticity of women's rulership is of paramount importance. In this way, in order to appease European sensibilities, he presents his examples of the *cihuatlahtoque* in pre-Hispanic Mexico.

### **Women and the justice of execution**

Chimalpahin's discussion of Xiuhtoztzin and Tlacocihuatzin, revolves around the issue of legitimate governance. Indicating that he had not stressed the point enough in the original composition of the "Octava relación," Chimalpahin would reaffirm the capabilities of these two women rulers in the margin of his text, stating that

Ca omonecque oquipiaco yn nican omoteneuh ontlayacatl altepel, atle  
opolhuililoque ynic cihua yn inhuelitiliztica, yn iuh yehuantin toquichtin tlahtoque  
catca huelitia yn ipan yntlamaniutiliz catca yhuan ypan ynic justicia quichihuaya  
no quinmiquiztlatzontequiliaya yn inmacehualhuan catca, ono tlamamauhtico yn

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<sup>98</sup> Chimalpahin, "Octava relación," 360.

<sup>99</sup> Rabasa pays certain homage to these female *tlacuilos* in *Tell Me the Story of How I Conquered You* by referring to the *tlacuilo* in the feminine ("she"). He bases this gesture on the female *tlacuilo* that appears in folio 30r of the *Codex Telleriano-Remensis*.

<sup>100</sup> See Susan Kellogg, "Marina, Malinche, Malintzin: Nahua Women and the Spanish Conquest," *José Limón and La Malinche: The Dancer and the Dance* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 79-94.

<sup>101</sup> Arthur J.O. Anderson, "Aztec Wives," *Indian Women of Early Mexico*, eds. Robert Haskett, Susan Schroeder, and Stephanie Wood (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 83.

icceenyaca yntlahtocatian, yn ihcuac yn ayemo yuh totech hualacia yn  
 itlanextzin yn ineltocacatzin im nelli Dios ytlacomahuizcentepiltzin Jesuchr[ist]o  
 yn iuh axcan ye totech catqui y ye tictomacehuia tlaneltoquilizchristianoyotl.  
 [Because it was necessary, they came to govern in these two *tlayacatl* in the  
*altepetl*, and in no way was the power of these women diminished, for they had  
 the same capacities, following their custom, as our male rulers; and in the  
 administration of justice they could also condemn their subjects, the *macehualtin*,  
 to death; and they came to be feared each in their respective rulership, when the  
 light of faith of Jesus Christ, the only child of the true God, had not yet reached  
 us, and which [light] is with us now, for now we are deserving of the Christian  
 faith.]<sup>102</sup>

Chimalpahin thus likens the authority of women rulers (“ynic cihua yn inhuelitiliztica”) to that of ruling men (“yehuantin toquichtin tlahtoque catca”). In doing so, he characterizes rulership as the ability to command respect among the *macehualtin* (commoners). This affirmation of rulerly power mirrors the descriptions of female rulers in the *Florentine Codex*, which describes the good *tlahtocacihuatl* (equivalent of *cihuatlahtoani*, woman ruler) as “tlauehmamanitiani, atl cecec, tzitzicaztli quitecani quitlaçani, tealcececaui, tetzitzicazui, caco, nepechtequililo, tlatecpana, naoatillalia” [“a provider of good conditions, a corrector, a punisher, a chastiser, a reprimander. She is heeded, obeyed; she creates order; she establishes rules.”]<sup>103</sup> The idea of punishment thus looms large in Chimalpahin’s text and in the *Florentine Codex*. Chimalpahin takes this idea a step further in discussing the two female rulers, putting special emphasis on their ability to condemn their own subjects to death (“quinmmiquiztlatzontequiliaya yn

<sup>102</sup> Chimalpahin, “Octava relación,” 364.

<sup>103</sup> Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Part XI (Book 10), Ch. 13, trans. Anderson and Dibble, 46.

inmacehualhuan”). In doing so, he suggests that the pre-Hispanic female rulers of Amaquemecan were proper stewards of justice.

The images in the *Florentine Codex* provide yet another perspective on female rulers, one that emphasizes their influence primarily within a community of women (Fig. 7). The images shown in Fig. 7 accompany the descriptions of the *cihuateuctli* (mistress, or lordly woman) and the *tlahtocacihuatl* in Book 10 (On the People). In contrast to the images of male rulers and judges in the *Florentine Codex*, the images of noblewomen do not include the characteristic symbols and accoutrements of rulership. Rather, these images emphasize a community of noblewomen, suggesting that women rulers exercised their power primarily among other women. Indeed, the scenes in Fig. 7 depict forms of counsel and care among women. The top half of Fig. 7a even shows one woman, a healer, treating another with medicinal herbs. The accompanying text says nothing of such activities as part of the responsibilities of noblewomen. These activities only appear in the *Florentine Codex*’s descriptions of common women. Notably, the chapter on common women in Book 10 immediately follows the chapter on noblewomen, thus creating a certain continuum despite class differences.

The images of noblewomen in the *Florentine Codex* underscores their role as counselors within a community of women. Conversely, the *teuctlahtoque* (male judges) in the *Florentine Codex* are shown only with other male judges, and their power is more overtly expressed through the ruler’s paraphernalia. Seen in this light, then, the *Florentine Codex* is ambiguous in its representation of women rulers: the text describes them as having the same authority as male rulers, yet in the images only men carry out death sentences. This visual negation of women’s sovereign power in the *Florentine Codex*, however, does not necessarily negate the authority of women as rulers. According to Susan Kellogg, gender dynamics under the Mexica can be

characterized as “parallel and equivalent,” whereas under Spanish rule the status of indigenous women diminished as the genders became “separate but unequal.”<sup>104</sup> It could be that the *Florentine Codex* plays into Spanish expectations for rulership precisely by separating women from men, concurrently eliding the power of indigenous women. Indeed, in its prose text as well as its images, the *Florentine Codex*, the administration of justice, and capital punishment in particular, is shown as a particularly male-centered activity. Read alongside the *Florentine Codex*, Chimalpahin’s emphasis on the power of women rulers to sentence their subjects to death is revealing of the power that indigenous women, at least in Chalco, could wield. It becomes a point that Chimalpahin could exploit in highlighting, without explicitly saying so, the ability of Chalco’s ruling women to administer justice in the Spanish sense of execution, a strategy that reverses the separation of genders in the *Florentine Codex*. And more than the *Florentine Codex*, Chimalpahin displays a willingness and motivation to use key Spanish terms such as *justicia* as loanwords.

The sovereign performance of execution in both Spain and Mesoamerica grounds Chimalpahin’s use of *justicia* as a loanword. The Spanish, and Western, concept of justice revolves around the sovereign right to execute one’s subjects. For example, the text of the *Siete Partidas* states that cases involving the death penalty ultimately fall under sovereign authority, that “tal poderío, de juzgar tales pleytos como estos llaman merum imperium; que quiere tanto dezir, como puro, e esmerado Señorío, que han los Emperadores, e los Reyes, e los otros grandes Principes, que han a juzgar las tierras, e las gentes de ellas.”<sup>105</sup> Chimalpahin’s discussion of the

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<sup>104</sup> Susan Kellogg, “From Parallel and Equivalent to Separate but Unequal: Tenochca Mexica Women, 1500-1700,” *Indian Women of Early Mexico*, ed. Susan Schroeder, Stephanie Wood, and Robert Haskett (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 123-124.

<sup>105</sup> *Siete Partidas*, Partida 3, Título 4, Ley 18. I use Gregorio López de Tovar’s 1555 edition of the *Siete Partidas*, which was the version most commonly used in Latin America.

*cihuatlahtoque* thus resonates within a European juridical frame. That resonance is based on a common element between pre-Conquest Mesoamerica and Europe: force. In Chimalpahin's Mesoamerica, European law would have to contend with already-existing Mesoamerican governments.

In the face of that alterity, European law found a new impetus. Following the *Leyes de Toro*, which effectively activated the *Siete Partidas*, we can understand Spanish laws up to the 16<sup>th</sup> century as predominately customary despite the prior codification of the *Siete Partidas* in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>106</sup> The activation of the *Siete Partidas* in 1505 made them simultaneously applicable to Spain and the New World as an extension of Spanish dominion.<sup>107</sup> It was this push for imperial expansion that motivated the codification of Spanish law. But even before that, in Mesoamerica, as the Mexica-led Triple Alliance crystallized and expanded its own imperial domain, its codes of conduct became increasingly streamlined. In the state of Texcoco, part of the Triple Alliance, the ruler Nezahualcoyotl took these codes of conduct, solidified as custom, and enshrined them as laws.<sup>108</sup> Offner characterizes these laws as a prime example of an Aztec juridical system. For her part, Brumfiel identifies similar formalization of customs in Moteuczoma I's increasingly complex and strict sumptuary laws in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, this being evidence, moreover, of intensified state hierarchies.<sup>109</sup> And as discussed in Chapter 1,

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<sup>106</sup> Woodrow Borah, *Justice by Insurance: The General Indian Court of Colonia Mexico and the Legal Aides of the Half-Real* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 8-9.

<sup>107</sup> See Markov's discussion of *Dominio Absoluto* in Appendix A of *The Legal Status of Indians under Spanish Rule*, diss. (University of Rochester, 1983. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1983), 392-439.

<sup>108</sup> Offner considers Nezahualcoyotl, *tlahtoani* of Texcoco from 1429 to 1472, "the outstanding legislator of the Aztec world," who "instituted a set of eighty laws that was divided into four parts; the enforcement of each part was the responsibility of one of the four supreme councils of Texcoco. Jerome Offner, *Law and Politics in Aztec Texcoco* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 66. Further, citing Pomar, Offner writes that "the Texcocans enforced the legal rules sanctioned by death 'without remission' (*'sin remisión'*), 'with the greatest observance' (*'con más observancia'*)." Offner, *Law and Politics in Aztec Texcoco*, 67.

<sup>109</sup> Brumfiel, *Aztec State Making*, 276. See also Frances Berdan and Patricia Rieff Anawalt, *The Essential Codex Mendoza* Vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 17.

Moteuczoma II further concentrated power in the hands of the noble elites by tightening hereditary governorship in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. In the meeting of Mesoamerican and European societies, we see not a simple application of Spanish law, but an amalgamation of complex and evolving laws out of custom.

In this struggle, Chimalpahin concentrates on the status of indigenous women as rulers and inheritors of nobility in the transition to Spanish rule. He directs this critique at the most visible agent of colonial justice, the judge Andrés de Santiago Xochitototzin. In particular, he calls into question the judge's decision to invalidate José de Santa María's governorship of Panohuayan. According to Chimalpahin,

Auh ynin nican omoteneuh tlahtolli yca ynin, ytla ya nelli yxtlamatini  
catca omoteneuh juez Andrés de S[anc]tiago Xuchitototzin, ynic nican  
tetlahtocatlallico ypan etlayacatl ahnoço nautlayacatl altepetl  
Amaquemecan, yehuatl in ytech canazquia, ypan in yazquia ynic amo  
quitzohtzonazquia amo quitlatzilhuizqua yn itlacatiliz yn itlacamecayo  
ynic cihuapiltlachihualli yn omoteneuh tlapac don Joseph de Sancta  
María Tlamaocatlteuhctli ynic quitlahtocatlallico Panohuaya, yehica ytla  
ye nica oquimatico oquittaco oyttitiloc onextililoc in quenin nican ypan  
ontlayacatl oncan omotlahtocatillico omentin cihuatlahtoque ye huecauh  
yn oquipiaco altepetl.

[Given the relation presented here, if the judge Andrés de Santiago Xochitototzin had truly been knowledgeable (about our customs), (when) he came to appoint governors in the three or four *tlayacatl* in the *altepetl* of Amaquemecan, he would have taken advantage of the relation, he

would have gone with it, and he would not have questioned or rejected the birth and lineage of the aforementioned don José de Santa María Tlamaocatlteuchtli, whom [the judge] appointed [anyway], on the grounds that he was noble only through maternal lineage; because surely here he came to know, he saw, it was shown to him, how, there in the two *tlayacatl*, there came to govern two female rulers long ago in the *altepetl*.]<sup>110</sup>

Chimalpahin mounts his critique on one central point: that custom in Amaquemecan allows for nobility to pass through maternal lineage alone. He buttresses his argument with a reference to the prior women rulers, the *cihuatlahtoque*, who came to govern, in fact governed (*omotlahtocatillico*), in Amaquemecan. Chimalpahin adds this information to the case that the community elders of Panohuayan made on behalf of don Santa María Tlamaocatlteuchtli in 1547. In supporting the purported arguments of the village elders, Chimalpahin draws on the pre-Conquest tradition of the *tlacuilo*, now transferred to the colonial period. As a *tlacuilo*, Chimalpahin presents his historical outlook on indigenous societies as a negotiation between Spanish and indigenous forms of governance. This negotiation revolves around the ability of women to pass on their nobility. And in a more radical sense, it depends on the recognized sovereignty of female rulers in pre-Conquest Chalco.

### **From women's rulership to women's nobility**

In this sense, we see the weight of Nahua nobility in matters of governance. But when Chimalpahin presents nobility as property, we also begin to understand the scope of his masculinist bias. Nonetheless, the male privilege he describes continues to rely on women as

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<sup>110</sup> Chimalpahin, "Octava relación," 366.

carriers of nobility. I take the following passage as emblematic of these conflicted, yet intertwined, tendencies:

Oyehuatl in, yn quitlatzihuico omoteneuh juez in  
tlahtocacihuapiltechihualiztli ynic piltihua çan itechpa nantli, yn amo  
yehuatl yca tahtli. Auh macihui yn iuh motenehua yn, yn cequintin pipiltin  
yn çan cihuapiltlachihualtin yc piltin, yece yn ipan mellahuac justicia  
camo tel yc mahuizpolihui, ca tel huel no monequizque yn ihtic altepetl  
ynic huel piltizque tlahtocatizque quipiazque yn altepetl, yc canin  
intlacatian motenehua yquizcan yyolcan yn innantitzinhuan; occenca ypan  
yn axcan chrisianoyotl, y noncan huel teoyotica sacramentotica  
ochihualloque tepilhuan, ca ytla nel huel macehualtzintli toquichtin yntla  
teoyotica sacreamentotica quimonamictiz yn tlahtocacihuapilli, yc pahti yc  
yectia yn innepilhuatiliz, cually tlatliztli yc tlati yn inpilhuan, ynic  
huel ynemac mochihuaz tlahtocayotl yn anoco gobernación y noncan  
ytlacatyan ynnantitzinhuan.

[Thus the aforementioned judge rejected the rulerly inheritance of those who were made noble solely through maternal lineage, but not those who derived nobility from their fathers. But although it has been said that some nobles are only so through maternal lineage, in all justness their dignity is not therefore lessened; rather, they should be accepted in the *altepetl*, as true nobles and rulers of the *altepetl* where they are born, where they reside, in the the native land of their mothers; this is even more imperative now in Christianity, when children are made in the holy sacrament (of



marriage), and if a male commoner marries a *tlahtocacihuapilli* in holy matrimony, with this his progeny is remedied and rectified, his children have good birth, and in this way they inherit the rulership or the governorship in the native lands of their mothers.]<sup>111</sup>

Chimalpahin emphasizes the authority of male rulers who have inherited nobility through their mothers, insisting that maternal lineage does not perish from one generation to the next. The operative word here is *mahuizpolihui*. This word combines the noun *mahuiztli* and the verb *polihui*. The 16<sup>th</sup> century grammarian Alonso de Molina defines *mahuiztli* as “miedo, o persona digna de honra.”<sup>112</sup> He defines the abstract form *mahuizotl* as “honra, o dignidad de grandes.”<sup>113</sup> The combination of both of these nouns, *mahuiztli* and its abstract form *mahuizotl*, links respect for a ruler with fear. These elements constitute the ruler’s dignity.

The above passage mirrors Chimalpahin’s earlier discussion of authority of the two *cihuatlatoque* of Amaquemecan, especially their ability to instill fear. Only now, Chimalpahin makes reference to potential disintegration of that authority. This potential loss is indicated by the verb *polihui*. This term (written as “poliui” in Molina) conveys not merely the idea of being less than, but, in a more dramatic sense, to disappear or waste away: in Molina, “perecer, o desaparecer, o perderse y destruirse.”<sup>114</sup> In other words, Chimalpahin contends that a noblewoman’s lineage does not disappear, or expire, from one generation to the next. Rather, it remains intact. The tangible proof of this durability is the respect that the community continues to show towards the offspring of the noblewoman. In making this argument, Chimalpahin

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<sup>111</sup> Chimalpahin, “Octava relación,” 366-368.

<sup>112</sup> “mauiztli,” Molina, Nahuatl-Spanish section, 54v.

<sup>113</sup> “mauiçotl,” *ibid.*, 54r.

<sup>114</sup> “poliui,” *ibid.*, 83r.

appeals to the concept of justice, present here as paying proper respect to the noble lineage of women, and female rulers especially.

In another affirmation of women's nobility, Chimalpahin speaks of the different possibilities of obtaining nobility, through either one's father or mother:

Yn anoco axquitica tlatquitica yn ipan pilotl huel nemaquehque yezque yn  
tlahtocacihuapiltlachihualti, ca amo yqu itlachui ca amo quichicoquixtia y cualli  
yectli tlatiliztli yn tlahtocayeztli y tlahtocatlacamecayotl; auh ca canno yuh  
tlaçotli y tlahtocapiltechihualiztli oquichtica ca no yuh patyoque yn  
cihuapiltlachihualtin [sic]. Auh yehica ypmampa tleyn ocque extli quipia ynpil  
oquichtlachihualli, amo can ye no yuhqui yn cihuatl quipia?

[And if the children of a female ruler participate in nobility, then they have rights over the governorship as well; and the good, straight lineage and rulerly genealogy is not therefore broken, the rulerly blood is not sullied; and male rulerly descent is just as valuable, because with it the descendants of female commoners are remedied [made noble]. Therefore, if the male child takes something from the blood [of both parents], does the female [daughter] not do so as well?]<sup>115</sup>

Through a series of equivalences and comparisons, Chimalpahin defends the ability of women, as daughters, to inherit nobility. The emphasis on women's nobility, in turn, speaks to the more general value of nobility in Nahua society. By emphasizing the value of women's nobility, Chimalpahin responds to the intervention of colonial authority in Chalco.

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<sup>115</sup> Chimalpahin, "Octava relación," 366.

Chimalpahin's explanation of nobility in Chalco, moreover, runs counter to the criteria for nobility outlined in the *Siete Partidas*. There, the law on nobility states that

Hidalguia segund diximos en la ley ante desta, es nobleza que viene a los omes por linaje. E porende devé mucho guardar los que han derecho en ella que non la dañen, ni la menguen. Ca pues que el linaje haze que la ayan los omes assi como herencia, non deve querer el hidalgo que el aya de fer de tan mala ventura, que lo que en los otros se començo e heredaron, mengue o fe acabe en el. E esto es quando el menguasse en lo que los otros acrescentaron, casando con villana, “o la fidalga con el villano.” Pero la mayor parte de la fidalguia, ganen los omes, por honrra de los padres. Ca maguer la madre sea villana e el padre hidalgo: hidalgo es el hijo que de ellos nasciere. E por hijodalgo se puede contar: mas no por noble. Mas si nasciesse de hijodalgo, y de villano, non touieron por derecho, que fuese contado por hijodalgo, porque *fiempre* los omes el nome del padre ponen primeramente delante, quando alguna acosa quieren dezir. Ni otrosi la madre, nunca le seria mentada, que aduensto no fe tornasse del hijo, e della. Porque el mayor denuesto, que la cosa honrrada puede aver, es quando se mezcla tanto con la vil, que pierde su nome, e gana el de la otra.

[*Hidalguia*, as we have stated in the law immediately preceding this one, is nobility that men acquire by lineage. And, therefore, it is incumbent on those who hold rights within nobility to not sully it, to not dilute it. And because lineage is passed onto men in this way, as inheritance, the *hidalgo* should not want nobility to pass into decadence, such that what others started and inherited is sullied and ends with him. And this happens when the noble dilutes his stock, while others

have strengthened theirs, by marrying a common woman, “or the *hidalga* with a common man.” But by and large, men attain *hidalguia* by their parents’ honor. And even if the mother is a commoner and the father an *hidalgo*, the son born to them is an *hidalgo*. And an *hidalgo* he can be considered, but not noble. Moreover, if he is born from an *hidalga* and commoner, he would not have the right to be counted as an *hidalgo*, because men always put the name of their fathers first, when they want to say something. But not so with the mother—her name would never be mentioned, and outside of insult it should not be used as the son’s principal name, nor hers. Because the greatest insult that can happen to the honorable thing is when it mixes so much with the common that it loses its name, and gains that of the other.]<sup>116</sup>

As an outline of the limits to nobility, the law privileges men as the principal carriers of noble lineage (“*Hidalguia*, as we have stated in the law immediately preceding this one, is nobility that men acquire by lineage”). The term *hidalguia* refers to the condition of being an *hidalgo*, a shortening of the phrase “hijo de algo,” written in the passage as both “hijodalgo” and “higodalgo,” which can also be expressed in the feminine (“hijadalgo”). *Hidalgo* and *hidalga* translate literally as “son of something” and “daughter of something,” that “something” referring to the worthiness, the worth, of one’s name. More precisely, *hidalgo* and *hidalga* refer to “a person who by lineage pertained to a lower stratum of the nobility.”<sup>117</sup> The above law describes nobility, in turn, as the most privileged form of *hidalguia*. In effect, the law retroactively codifies the social hierarchies already established through custom and the exclusionary practices maintaining them; it merely confirms, for example, the practice of placing the father’s name first,

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<sup>116</sup> *Siete Partidas*, Partida 2, Título, 21, Ley 3.

<sup>117</sup> “hidalgo,” Real Academia Española. Web. 13 March 2016.

a grammatical ordering that prioritizes the father over the mother. This affirmation of naming conventions underscores the disdain directed at the fatherless (bastard) child and, indirectly, his husbandless mother. Given the priority of the father, the law states that the son of an *hidalgo* and a common woman is an *hidalgo* (though not noble), but that the son of an *hidalga* and common man is not an *hidalgo* at all. The privilege of Spanish nobility thus rests primarily with the noble man, a privilege propagated through noble marriage.

The descriptions of nobility in the *Siete Partidas* resonate with the judge Xochitototzin's decision to reject José de Santa María's claim to governorship—given that his mother was a hereditary noble but his father originally a commoner before becoming a *quauhpilli*. We might even say that there is an elective affinity between Mexica and Spanish forms of nobility, the two complementing each other (purposefully or not) as the judge proposes alternative (male) governors based on their closer relationship to the patriarch Cuauhcececuitzin Tlamoacatlteuctli. Yet, the judge does not explicitly disqualify José de Santa María based on his mother's nobility. Chimalpahin, on the other hand, perceives the rejection of José de Santa María precisely as a devaluation of women's nobility. In between Spanish and Mexica-era nobility, however, there exist important differences that make it difficult to establish neat parallels between the two: for example, the concepts of "honor" and "bastard" children in Spanish society, and a non-hereditary nobility (the *quauhpilli*) among the Mexica. Yet, in both societies, the most privileged positions in government were reserved for men, and this situation is born out within the written law and in practice, as we see in Chimalpahin's Chalco.

Even Chimalpahin assimilates this presumption of governorship is an occupation dominated by men, while women rulers as an exception to male rule. That is, women rule only in the absence of obvious male heirs. In turn, Nahua men take priority in their relationships with

Nahua women. We see this hierarchy manifest itself in the above passage, when Chimalpahin asserts that a male commoner (*macehual*) could rectify his lineage by marrying a noblewoman. In this regard, the male, even as *macehual*, is depicted as the active agent in the act of marriage. The noblewoman, in turn, becomes the means, the vehicle, through which the *macehual* can create a new noble lineage. Chimalpahin provides no such argument for women. Rather, noblewomen appear as either inheriting nobility from their parents or passing it on to their progeny. Yet, the contradictions that arise in the intersection between gender and nobility do not simply disappear but rather push Chimalpahin to reconsider the Spanish conception of law and justice in the final pages of the *Octava relación*. It is in the face of this alterity, before Spanish legal culture, that Chimalpahin, even with faint noble stock, identifies as a *macehual*.

#### **Out of rulership, the emergence of the *macehual***

The actions of the judge José de Andrés Xochitototzin prompt Chimalpahin to call for a better understanding of Spanish customs (*intlahtocanenahuatilitzin* and *inemachtzin*) and laws (*intlahtocanenauatilitzin*).<sup>118</sup> It is with this urgency that the concept of the *macehual* comes into relief. According to Chimalpahin,

Auh ynic nelti ynin yxquich nican omoteneuh tlahtolli, ma ticnehnehuilican ma ytech machiyotl toconanacan in tehuantin timacehualtin nican ypan Nueva España titlaca; ynic no ypan tiyazque tictocazque yn intlahtocayeliztztin yn intlahtocanenahuatilitzin yn ipan mocuica y quimotoquilia y yehuantzintzin y huel occenca tachcahuan tlaneltoquiliztica, yhuan huel occenca huehuentin ynic tlahtoque yn reyes y emperadores yn omotlahtocatillico yhuan yn axcan

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<sup>118</sup> Chimalpahin, “Octava relación,” 368.

motlahtocatilia yn ompa España, yn iuh ca inmемachtzin yn iuh ca yn  
intlahtocanenahuatiltzin motenehua ley yn quimotoquilia yn ipan mohuica.  
[And to verify all that has been said here, let us bring together and compare  
examples, we indigenous commoners here in New Spain; and in this way we will  
understand the customs and laws that they follow and upon which they govern,  
especially our elder brethren in the faith and the great rulers, the kings and  
emperors who have governed and who govern now there in Spain; thus [will we  
know] the customs and rulerly laws, the aforementioned *ley*, that they follow and  
upon which they govern.]<sup>119</sup>

In these lines, the term *timacehualtin* (“we commoners,” first-person plural of *macehual*, tribute-paying commoner) implies subordination to both indigenous nobles and Spaniards.<sup>120</sup> Following pre-Conquest tradition, Chimalpahin equates *macehual* status with vassalage to the indigenous nobility. In the colonial context, however, even the indigenous nobility is ultimately subordinate to the Spanish state. Within this context, Chimalpahin includes himself among the *macehualtin*, despite his own noble name. His use of the first-person plural *timacehualtin* signals his changing subjectivity. That changing subjectivity corresponds 1) to the compression of Nahuatl hierarchies and 2) the new racial configurations of the colonial regime.

While Nahuatl hierarchies continued to function in a state of relative autonomy, the imposition of Spanish rule ultimately diminished the privileges and power of indigenous nobles. Those privileges depended principally on the ability of the *pipiltin* to extract labor from the *macehual* population. Lockhart argues the loss of privileges among the *pipiltin* was neither

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> In his translation, Tena recognizes the appositive use of *timacehualtin* and *titlaca*, but privileges the latter and elides the former. As such, Tena eschews the class and racial elements latent in the concept of *macehual*.

immediate nor linear, and that “it is conceivable that nobles actually increased their hold on commoners in the immediate postconquest years.”<sup>121</sup> But as Gibson shows, the colonial regime gradually undercut the privileges of the indigenous nobility. Citing the case of the descendants of Totoquihuatzin, the *tlahtoani* of Tacuba at the time of the conquest, Gibson finds that by the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century “the family came to be ‘treated as maceguales and *plebeyos*,’ and the cacique heir, José Jorge Cortés Chimalpopoca, was placed on the tribute lists.”<sup>122</sup> Inclusion in the tribute list would constitute a severe if not definitive blow to one’s noble status. The threat to one’s noble status would create a constant tension with the legal apparatus that coopted indigenous nobles in the first place. This tension reveals the overriding function of Spanish law in the appropriation of Mesoamerican state forms, especially the cooptation of an already existing tribute system. This system, in turn, was based on the exploitation of the commoner class within the indigenous population.

While Lockhart contends that Nahua hierarchies remained in effect throughout the colonial period,<sup>123</sup> from a political economic perspective it is clear that the power of the indigenous nobility declined significantly and that a larger commoner class formed as a result. And these changes appear to have occurred rather quickly following the Conquest. Drawing on archival sources related to Chimalpahin’s protagonist, don José de Santa María, Gibson finds that

The five cacique dynasties of Amecameca underwent many stresses and crises after the sixteenth century, all of immediate concern to the individuals involved but sufficiently uniform to suggest the limits within which legitimate cacicazgo

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<sup>121</sup> Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, 112.

<sup>122</sup> Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule*, 164.

<sup>123</sup> Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest* 117.



could survive and function. Joseph de Santa María, cacique of Panohuayan in the middle sixteenth century, had received weekly tributes of 300 cacao, one Spanish chicken, the work of one male and one female servant, 20 Indians to work his fields, and 300 pesos per year from the town treasury. But his son and heir, Felipe Páez de Mendoza, received none of this.<sup>124</sup>

Gibson's archival sources thus pick up where Chimalpahin leaves off, providing a fuller picture of the plight of the caciques, or *tlahtoque*, of Panohuayan following the Conquest and interventions of colonial officials in indigenous governance. Thus, we can appreciate the urgency with which Chimalpahin wrote the "Octava relación," since, having grown up in Amaquemecan in the late 1500s, he would have seen firsthand the way in which indigenous governance had declined.

The loss of autonomy looms heavily over Chimalpahin's discussion of the *cihuatlahtoque* in Amaquemecan and indigenous nobility. For Chimalpahin, the loss of respect, of recognition for these female rulers goes hand in hand with the devaluation of indigenous nobility within the colonial regime. The diminution of pre-Conquest forms of nobility leads to a radical shift in subjectivity in the construction of a new, subaltern indigenous identity. Even Lockhart acknowledges that

By around 1600, "macehualli" was, even more than earlier, the primary word applied to the bulk of the indigenous population; its competitors and modifiers had largely dropped out of sight. Perhaps for this reason, by the early seventeenth century, the word was being used in the plural as a designation for indigenous

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<sup>124</sup> Gibson, 161.

people regardless of rank, as opposed to Spaniards, blacks, or those of mixed descent.<sup>125</sup>

If certain indigenous hierarchies persisted, the inertia of colonial racism, in tandem with the labor needs of the Spanish colonial empire, helped to erode ethnic difference among indigenous communities.

The obsession with nobility works along both racial and class axes. The preservation of indigenous nobility depended on the continued exploitation of the indigenous commoners in particular. With Spanish colonialism, this class status was racialized into an racial category, that of subaltern ‘Indian.’ Chimalpahin’s use of the term *macehual* speaks to this colonial intersection of race and class in the creation of a subaltern ‘indigenous’ subjectivity. His self-identification as *macehual* is not only indicative of the changing nature of *macehual* status under Spanish rule, but a recognition and acceptance Spanish sovereignty. Chimalphin recognizes the Spanish state as sovereign over and above indigenous governors in Mexico. I say the Spanish state because Chimalpahin characterizes sovereignty in terms of “reyes” and “emperadores.” In other words, he refers not merely to the king but to the apparatus of Spanish government broadly.

Chimalpahin’s expression of government, however, retains an acutely Nahuatl tenor. We can understand the allusion to “reyes y emperadores” not as a simple redundancy but as a double phrasing typical of elevated Nahuatl speech. I have mentioned above the use of *timacehualtin* (we commoners) and *titlaca* (we people) in the passage above. The use of “reyes y emperadores” is a similar example. At the same time the reference to “reyes y emperadores” follows and supplements the Nahuatl word for rulers, “*tlahtoque*.” And “*tlahtoque*” comes to encapsulate “*tachcahuan tlanetloquiliztica*” and “*huehuentin*.” These phrasings refer to Spanish leaders, both

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<sup>125</sup> Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, 114.

in secular and religious governance. Chimalpahin creates a double appositive when he combines these Nahuatl and Spanish terms for ruler, “*tlahtoque yn reyes y emperadores.*” With this Nahua formula of coupling phrases, Chimalpahin juxtaposes Nahua and Spanish concepts of rulership. He uses this Nahua formula, incorporating Spanish loanwords, precisely as a way of creating the comparisons he calls for.

Indeed, we can understand the above passage as strategic use of Nahua rhetorical formulas through which Chimalpahin juxtaposes Spanish and Nahua conceptions of rulership. Using a formula of multi-layered appositions, Chimalpahin describes the agents of Spanish governance (“*yehuantzintzin y huel occenca tachcahuan tlaneltoquiliztica, yhuan huel occenca huehuentin ynic tlahtoque yn reyes y emperadores*”), how these imperial agents go about governing (“*ipan mocuica y quimotoquilia*” and “*yn quimotoquilia yn ipan mohuica*”), and the customs and laws through which they govern (“*yn intlahtocayelitztzin yn intlahtocanenahuatiltzin*” and “*yn iuh ca innemachtzin yn iuh ca yn intlahtocanenahuatiltzin*”). These appositional phrases mirror the elevated speech patterns of classical Nahuatl.

Similarly, Chimalpahin uses the classical Nahua phrase *intlil, intlapal* (their black tint, their colors) to refer to the books of his indigenous ancestors. That phrase is just one of the many Nahua metaphors expressed through a set of analogous terms, each term lending a different cadence to the metaphor. Many of these metaphors were associated with rulership, as shown in the extensive list of *difrasismos* at the end of Book 6 (Rhetoric and Moral Philosophy) of the *Florentine Codex*. Indeed a metaphor for rulership in Book 6 reads “*Tavevetl, in tipochotl, motlan moceovalhviz, moiacalhviz in maceoalli*” [Thou art a cypress, thou art a silk cotton tree. Beneath thee, the common folk will seek the shade; they will seek the shadow.]<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Part VII (Book 6), Ch. 43, trans. Anderson and Dibble, 252.

Chimalpahin's repeated phrasings for laws and customs thus resonate with the rhetorical strategies of classical Nahuatl, a filtering of the concept of law through a Nahua lens. This filtering is most evident in Chimalpahin's use of Spanish loanwords and his subsequent explanation of them in Spanish. Indicating his awareness of Spanish juridical terminology, Chimalpahin makes careful use of the Spanish terms for "custom" and "law" ("intlahtocayelitztzin yn intlahtocanenahuatilitzin" and then "innemachtzin yn iuh ca yn intlahtocanenahuatiltzin motenehua ley").

It is telling that Chimalpahin only provides the Spanish word for law at the end of the passage, after he has already mentioned it twice in Nahuatl. The second reference to law in Nahuatl is now juxtaposed with the Spanish loanword "ley." By deferring this use of the loanword, Chimalpahin emphasizes a Nahua conception of law, as that which the rulers order ("intlahtocanenahuatilitzin" and "intlahtocanenahuatiltzin"). At the same time, he places equal emphasis on the concept of custom, expressed as "intlahtocayelitztzin" (customs in matters of governance) and "innemachtzin" (customs in terms of teachings or beliefs). The use of the term *ley*, coupled with the second mention of customs and laws in Nahuatl, signals its overarching quality as a mode of governance and set of customs, rather than any particular legislation.

These Spanish and Nahua terms substitute and supplement each other in Chimalpahin's conception of Spanish governance. That process of substitution and supplementation, that is, the lack of one-to-one translations, speaks to the ultimate non-universality of law and Castilian law in particular. The limits to universal law find expression in the meeting of conflicting state forms. Indeed, the universalization of Spanish law depended on the appropriation and nullification of pre-Conquest Mesoamerican governments. Chimalpahin gives expression to these processes through the issue of women's nobility and rulership.

My analysis of the “Octava relación” is guided by the idea that the negotiation of governance in 16<sup>th</sup> century Mexico involved a tenuous translation of law. According to Owensby,

Law and its processes [...] can be thought of as politics by another name, a means to ‘reclaiming the political’ for the colonial period. Law in early modern New Spain was not only about how the colonizers controlled the colonized. It was also about how the crown sought to exert control over its Spanish vassals who so often flouted royal decrees, especially those regarding treatment of the Indians, and how Indian subjects went about trying to have those laws enforced.<sup>127</sup>

For Owensby, law is an important category for studying the agency of subaltern colonial subjects in their interactions with colonial elites. At the same time, Owensby’s acknowledges the harsh treatment that indigenous people experienced under Spanish rule, both in spite and because of the law. In one sense, we can understand colonial law as a means to mitigate the coercion and force of the colonial state. As such, law cannot encompass the entire realm of the political, but only a limited piece of it. Moreover, Owensby notes the problem with his use of the term *politics*, namely “that the word *politics* is an anachronism. For seventeenth-century Spaniards, *politics* still carried its Aristotelian sense of good governance in a properly constituted *polis*. It had not yet taken on the ‘pejorative’ sense it acquired in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.”<sup>128</sup> The *politics* Owensby refers to is *policía*, or good government. Owensby thus emphasizes the idea of governance in a colonial context. Within that context, law becomes a critical component of governance, the mechanism by which governance will be maintained. The imposition of Spanish governance and would require a mediation of the concept of law.

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<sup>127</sup> Owensby, 11.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 316, note 46.

In Chimalpahin's writing, the convergence of Nahua and Spanish society manifests itself as an acute crisis of governance. Chimalpahin's works through this crisis of governance historiographically, by appending Spanish history to pre-Conquest Nahua history. That historiographical task, in turn, mirrors the ongoing processes of adaptation and negotiation between Nahua and Spanish societies. I thus argue that Chimalpahin conveys an acute historical consciousness about the changing composition of indigenous society. And this historical consciousness centers on legitimate and illegitimate governance. While law cannot fully encompass the breadth of contact and conflict, it does constitute a key site of interpellation and resistance to the colonial state apparatus. Woodrow Borah's work on Spanish legal system in colonial Mexico lays the foundation for the turn to negotiation as historiographical model. His assertion that the General Indian Court represents the culmination of "a millennium of thinking in Western Europe"<sup>129</sup> is particularly provocative in this regard. This conclusion is all the more significant when we consider that the *Siete Partidas* were formally re-activated in 1505, with the publication of the *Leyes de Toro*. The *Siete Partidas* would provide the over-arching template for Spanish governance in the New World. But the terms of governance were open to contestation by indigenous populations.

The "Octava relación" conveys an acute historical consciousness of the governmental conflicts at play in 16<sup>th</sup> century Mexico leading to the subalternization of indigenous communities in central Mexico by the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The move to a subaltern position is concomitant with a loss of local autonomy in governance. Yet, even this loss was not complete but, rather, circumscribed by the unequal power relations between the Spanish empire and the former pre-Conquest Mesoamerican empires, in this case the imperial Mexica. In this regard,

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<sup>129</sup> Borah, 119.

what Laura Benton describes as “quasi-sovereignty”<sup>130</sup> is the flip-side of Baber’s idea of “relative autonomy.” But what the concept of sovereignty in particular does is to remind us of the state forms that informed indigenous claims to autonomy in the colonial period. This is especially so for the claims of indigenous elites—nobles and governors—to certain privileges within the colonial regime. At the least, it is important to distinguish, whenever possible, elite indigenous autonomy from the autonomy of indigenous communities more broadly. Indeed, the privileges of the indigenous nobility in the colonial period depended on the continued exploitation of indigenous commoners, what Chimalpahin calls the *macehualtin*. His own identification as a *macehual*, however, draws our attention to the attrition of the body of indigenous nobles and the racialization of indigenous commoners. At stake in these processes was the relative value of indigenous blood.

## **Conclusion**

Chimalpahin’s discussion of governance alerts us to the way in which gender inhered in the re-valuing of indigenous blood. His discussion of women rulers is nothing less than a staunch valorization of indigenous noble blood and, ultimately, a defense of indigenous governance. The memory of pre-Hispanic forms of sovereignty lingers strongly in his historiographical reappraisal of indigenous nobility in Amaquemecan. Crucially, these forms of sovereignty include both the right to condemn one’s subjects to death and the ritual economy of the state. These elements of sovereignty find visual form in the *Florentine Codex* and ornamental

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<sup>130</sup> Laura Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 293-294. Commenting on British colonialism in India in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Benton states that “In one sustained exercise to try to construct a formal model that accommodated both expansive power and irregular, negotiated sovereignty, imperial officials and international lawyers devised a coherent typology of polities with different degrees of sovereignty. Attempting to enumerate the subset of qualities of sovereignty held by, and granted to, quasi-sovereign entities within European empire, jurists imagined an imperial order that reserved full sovereignty for European imperial governments while defining precisely the nature of partial sovereignty in subordinate but semi-independent colonial polities.”

monuments such as the *quauhpilli* statue. Yet, very much a product of colonialism, as well as Mesoamerica, Chimalpahin gives expression to the synergy between Spanish and Nahua male privilege. This synergy is evident, for example, in Chimalpahin's characterization of Spanish clergy and secular leaders as "yehuantzintzin y huel occenca tachcahuan tlaneltoquiliztica, yhuan huel occenca huehuentin ynic tlahtoque yn reyes y emperadores yn omotlahtocatillico yhuan yn axcan motlahtocatilia yn ompa España" ["our elder brethren in the faith and the great rulers, the kings and emperors who have governed and who govern now there in Spain"].<sup>131</sup> The operative term here is "tachcahuan."

Spoken by a male, the term *tachcahuan* describes one's older brothers or cousins<sup>132</sup> or, in the pre-Conquest context, "masters of the youths."<sup>133</sup> According to the *tlacuilos* of the *Florentine Codex*, one became a *teachcauh* (singular, "master of the youths") after taking three captives in war; the newly appointed *teachcauh* would then take up residence at the *telpochcalli* ("the young men's house") and educate the next generation of male youths.<sup>134</sup> The *telpochcalli* "instructed boys on proper behavior and thought and prepared them to be soldiers, and organized them for community service"<sup>135</sup> In using this term, Chimalpahin reinscribes pre-Conquest hierarchies in the fraternal relationship between Nahua and Spaniards. Within that relationship, the Spanish clergy and secular leaders replace the leaders of the *telpochcalli* in a new system of power relations. Nonetheless, the memory of indigenous sovereignty continues to resonate within the colonial regime and with a masculinist edge.

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<sup>131</sup> Chimalpahin, "Octava relación," 368.

<sup>132</sup> See Lockhart, *Nahuatl as Written: Lessons in Older Written Nahuatl, with Copious Examples and Texts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 232.

<sup>133</sup> Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Part IX (Book 8), Chapter 17, Paragraph 3, trans. Anderson and Dibble, 56.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 21, trans. Anderson and Dibble, 76.

<sup>135</sup> Susan Toby Evans and David L. Webster, *Archeology of Ancient Mexico and Central America* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2001), 253.



Chimalpahin's concern with gender is thus based on his will to preserve indigenous nobility. His own relationship to nobility is problematic, as he includes himself among the class of indigenous commoners, the *macehualtin*, while defending the rights of nobility. These rights were predicated on the exploitation of the *macehualtin* before and after the Conquest. Indeed, while Chimalpahin adamantly affirms the legitimacy of pre-Conquest women rulers and women's nobility, he takes for granted the use of indigenous common women as objects of exchange between indigenous leaders and Spaniards. In the "Octava relación," Chimalpahin writes that upon Hernán Cortés' arrival in Amaquemecan in 1519, two rulers, including Cuauhcececuitzin Tlamaocatlteuctli of Panohuayan, gifted him 40 *macehual* women along with a number of gold jewels.<sup>136</sup> Of course, in the pre-Conquest period as well as in the Conquest, noblewomen were also subject to exchange, albeit of a different kind. As scholars have noted, the exchange of noblewomen was a strategy of political control among primarily male rulers in pre-Hispanic central Mexico.<sup>137</sup>

Yet, the gifting of *macehual* women, and men for that matter, carries a different tenor, one that resonates with the protocols of sacrifice, war, and tribute payment. We can recall, for example, Chimalpahin's description of the 20 sacrificial victims offered by Moteuczoma II and Nezahualpilli each for the New Fire ceremony in 1507. The number of victims given in that instance equals the number of women gifted to the Spaniards by the two leaders of Chalco in 1520. As *macehual* women, and not noblewomen, the 40 women gifted to the Spaniards by the

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<sup>136</sup> Chimalpahin, "Octava relación," 331.

<sup>137</sup> See Susan Schroeder, "The Noblewomen of Chalco," 86. Schroeder emphasizes the importance of women not as mere political pawns but as agents in the creation of political alliances. Karen Elizabeth Bell takes up a similar perspective in "Kingmakers: The Royal Women of Ancient Mexico" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1992). A broader body of literature on women in pre-Conquest and colonial Mexico argues that western conceptions of equality between genders cannot simply be applied to pre-Conquest Mesoamerican culture. Within this literature, scholars have proposed the concept of gender parallelism and complementarity rather than strict notions of equality and inequality. This line of argument is developed in the contributions to Haskett, Schroeder, and Wood, *Indian Women of Early Mexico*.

leaders of Chalco would thus appear to be a form of sacrifice or tribute. In the context of the Spanish Conquest of Mexico, the gifting of women serves as a crucial factor in the meeting of European and Mesoamerican state forms, representing the double aspect of state appropriation as cooption and cannibalization. Yet this gifting not only involved women but a range of objects and people that held various degrees of value in the pre-Conquest Mesoamerica. The giving of things and bodies from indigenous to Spanish leaders constitutes a pivotal moment in the reconfiguration of values and value systems between Europe and Mesoamerica. In the chapter that follows, I turn to this issue, this gifting (and taking) as a fundamental act of appropriation in the Conquest.

### Chapter 3. Tribute Women and Noble Strategies in the Conquest of Mexico

The previous chapter explored the importance of women rulers in Chimalpahin's critique of colonial governance. The social hierarchy that allows Chimalpahin to extol noblewomen is also what makes *macehual* (common) women expendable. Such is the case of the 40 young women provided to Cortés by the Chalco's leaders Cacamatzin Teohuateuctli of Tlailotlacan and Cuauhcececuitzin Tlamaocatlteuhctli of Panohuayan.<sup>138</sup> Previous meetings between Spaniards and indigenous groups set a precedent for Chalco's reception of Cortés. According to various accounts, leaders in Cempoala gave Cortés 20 women (daughters of nobles), Potonchan (in present-day Tabasco) provided 20 women, Tlaxcala gave 300 women who had been condemned to death for their crimes such as prostitution, and Cuahnahuac (Cuernavaca) provided an unspecified number of women.<sup>139</sup> If Bernal Díaz del Castillo's account of the Conquest is any indication, indigenous women were highly valued by the Spaniards. Yet, we must also be aware of the tendentiousness of his comments, which carry with them an ethos of chivalry that belies the violence involved in the presentation of indigenous women as gifts. As we will see later, Bartolomé de las Casas, in decrying the crimes of the Spaniards during the Conquest, pulls over the veil of that chivalry. Regarding the gifts received by the Spaniards in Potonchan, Bernal Díaz states that indigenous leaders

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<sup>138</sup> Chimalpahin. *Las ocho relaciones y el memorial de Culhuacan* Vol. 2, ed. and trans. Rafael Tena (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional Para la Cultura y las Artes, 1998), 330-331.

<sup>139</sup> Hernán Cortés, *Cartas de relación*, ed. Mario Hernández (Madrid: Historia 166, 1985), 42; Diego Muñoz Camargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala* (Ms. 210 of the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris), ed. Luis Reyes García (Tlaxcala: Universidad Autónoma de Tlaxcala, 1998), 189-191; Juan de Torquemada, *Monarquía Indiana* Vol. 1 (Mexico City: Porrúa, 1969), 399, 434-435.

trajeron un presente de oro, que fueron cuatro diademas, y unas lagartijas, y dos como perrillos, y orejeras, e cinco ánades, y dos figuras de caras de indios, y dos suelas de oro, como de sus cotaras, y otras cosillas de poco valor, que yo no me acuerdo qué tanto valía, y trajeron mantas de las que ellos traían e hacían, que son muy bastas; porque ya habrán oído decir los que tienen noticia de aquella provincia que no las hay en aquella tierra sino de poco valor; y no fue nada este presente en comparación de veinte mujeres, y entre ellas una muy excelente mujer, que se dijo doña Marina, que así se llamó después de vuelta cristiana.<sup>140</sup>

Leaders in Chalco responded to the desires of the Spaniards by selecting the most beautiful women from the macehual population. These women were offered to Cortés along with gold jewelry. While the Chalcan leaders tailored their gifts to Spanish expectations, they also drew upon Mesoamerican strategies of war and state-building.<sup>141</sup> Tribute and marriage were two strategies. Chimalpahin's Nahuatl phrasing for gifting, *Quimonnamictihque quintlauhtihque*, encompasses the enmeshed relationship between marriage and tribute.

Much has been written about doña Marina, or Malintzin, yet there has been scant attention focused on the many other women given to or taken by the Spaniards in the Conquest. What are we to make of these other women? Bernal Díaz recalls, for example, that in Tlaxcala,

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<sup>140</sup> Díaz del Castillo, *Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de Nueva España* (Madrid: Historia 16, 1998), 153.

<sup>141</sup> On the tribute system of pre-Hispanic Mexico, see Ross Hassig, *Trade, Tribute, and Transportation: The Sixteenth-Century Political Economy of the Valley of Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985); Frances F. Berdan, Elizabeth Hill Boone, and Michael E. Smith, *Aztec Imperial Strategies* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1996); and Rhoda H. Halperin, "The Political Economy of Mesoamerican States: An Economic Ethnographer's View," *The Political Economy of Ancient Mesoamerica: Transformation during the Formative and Classic Periods*, eds. Vernon L. Scarborough and John E. Clark (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007), 175-184. On women in royal marriages, see Carrasco, Pedro. "Royal Marriages in Ancient Mexico." *Explorations in Ethnohistory*. Eds. H. R. Harvey and Hanns J. Prem. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 41-81; Karen Elizabeth Bell, *Kingmakers: The Royal Women of Ancient Mexico*, Diss., University of Michigan, 1992; Susan Schroeder, "The Noblewomen of Chalco," *Estudios de cultura nahuatl* 22.1 (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1992), 45-86.

indigenous leaders led by Xicotencatl the Elder gave the Spaniards “cinco indias hermosas, doncellas y mozas, y para ser indias eran de buen parecer y bien ataviadas, y traían para cada india otras mozas para su servicio, y todas eran hijas de caciques.”<sup>142</sup> It is not completely clear whether Bernal Díaz’s reference to all the women includes the servants as well, that is, whether the servants were also noblewomen, “hijas de caciques.” Nonetheless, this reference to servants indicates a desire to continue indigenous nobility, and thus indigenous hierarchies, in marriage with the Spaniards. As they had done before the Conquest, indigenous women would help to preserve nobility via marriage.

At least initially, the arrival of the Spaniards did not represent a complete end to pre-Conquest lifeways. And in neither context were women mere pawns without agency. For example, just as they had in the pre-Conquest period, women in the colonial period could control both moveable and real property.<sup>143</sup> The confrontation between indigenous and Spanish cultures, however, put indigenous women in a precarious position as community leaders. The dismantling of pre-Conquest forms of governance, carried out over the course of the colonial period, would erode the status and power of male and female indigenous governors alike.<sup>144</sup> The degradation of indigenous governance goes hand-in-hand with dispossession of indigenous land and labor. Seen

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<sup>142</sup> Díaz del Castillo, 269.

<sup>143</sup> See the following collections of testament wills from colonial Mexico: S.L. Cline and Miguel León Portilla, *The Testaments of Culhuacan* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1984); Constantino Medina Lima, Teresa Rojas Rabiela, and Elicia Leticia Rea López, *Vidas y Bienes Olvidados: Testamentos Indígenas Novohispanos*, 3 Volumes (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores, 2000); Caterina Pizzigoni, *Testaments of Toluca* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007). For a study on indigenous women’s property in colonial Mexico, see Susan Kellogg, “The Woman’s Room: Some Aspects of Gender Relations in Tenochtitlan in the Late Pre-Hispanic Period,” *Ethnohistory* 42.4 Women, Power, and Resistance in Colonial Mesoamerica (Autumn 1995), 563-576.

<sup>144</sup> On the general trends of indigenous political disenfranchisement and property dispossession, see Charles Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule: A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519-1810* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964). On the disenfranchisement of indigenous women in particular, see Susan Kellogg, *Law and the Transformation of Aztec Culture: 1500-1700* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995).

in this light, the gifting of women is a case of ordinary colonial violence that indigenous leaders, and possibly women rulers, facilitated.

In many colonial-era accounts, indigenous women are not so much individuals as a multitude, save for exceptional cases such as Malintzin and Doña Luisa. Chimalpahin's text, however, describes the social dynamics of indigenous communities that made certain women more valuable than others. These hierarchies would ostensibly determine the fate of women as brides or tribute. Yet, in Chimalpahin's narrative, the leaders of Amaquemecan deceptively invert these hierarchies. As Xicotencatl's betrothal of doña Luisa indicates, indigenous leaders were loath to immediately offer their daughters to the Spaniards. By giving the Spaniards the daughters of commoners or even other nobles, rulers could preserve their own lineages until absolutely necessary. In fact, the Tlaxcaltecas initially fought with the Spanish invaders, with alliance coming only after military defeat.<sup>145</sup>

In the face of extermination, the traffic in women is not so much a vehicle for mestizaje as an incipient form of eugenics. After all, the purpose of nobility, in indigenous or Spanish culture, is to reproduce the "well-born." The concept of blood purity, transposed to the New World, ramped up the desire to accumulate nobility. As Patricia Seed states, "Only in the new World [...] did all ethnic Spaniards consider themselves noble, see the Indians as plebeian, and the blacks as slaves."<sup>146</sup> If social standing in Spain was practically unchangeable, the New World offered fresh opportunities for Spaniards to acquire nobility. The desire for status, consequently, entailed a re-creation of social hierarchies, and within that, the subordination of the indigenous population.

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<sup>145</sup> Andrea Martínez Baracs, *Un gobierno de indios: Tlaxcala, 1519-1750* (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores de Antropología Social, 2008), 38.

<sup>146</sup> Patricia Seed, *To Love, Honor, and obey in Colonial Mexico: Conflicts over Marriage Choice, 1574-1821* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 24.

The gifting of indigenous women lies at the heart of the Conquest and colonization of Mexico. Chimalpahin provides us with a Nahuatl vocabulary for understanding this gifting. At the same time, his narrative is in dialogue with Spanish histories. Among these histories, what similarities arise in the trope of gifting? In what ways do they differ? How does this trope fit within the larger narrative of the Conquest and colonial settlement?

### **Gifting and colonization**

Marriage records from colonial Mexico show a consistent effort to attach racial labels to each marriage partner and their witnesses—a way of controlling not just the conjugal partners but their larger communities, or more appropriately, a way of controlling diverse communities through the conjugal pair. Spanish/Christian expectations for marriage included the union of one man and woman, racial and class homogeneity, and reproduction. Non-conformance to these standards includes homoeroticism, bigamy, polygamy, incest, and mixed-race marriage.<sup>147</sup> The subversion of pre-determined marriage practices, inscribed in law, opens up non-normative possibilities. Prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, pre-Conquest indigenous societies had their own rules governing sexual relationships. Among the Nahuas, adultery, for example, was strictly forbidden. Rulers, nobles and warriors, however, could have multiple wives and/or mistresses. With the advent of Spanish rule, some pre-Conquest practices were no longer valid and became

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<sup>147</sup> Studies on these topics in the context of colonial Mexico include Patricia Seed, *To Love, Honor, and Obey in Colonial Mexico: Conflicts over Marriage Choice, 1574-1821* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Richard Boyer, *Lives of the Bigamists: Marriage, Family, and Community in Colonial Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995); Serge Gruzinski, ed., *El placer de pecar y el afán de normar* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología; Editorial Joaquín Mortiz, 1998); Pete Sigal, "(Homo)Sexual Desire and Masculine Power in Colonial Latin America: Notes toward an Integrated Analysis," *Infamous Desire: Male Homosexuality in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Pete Sigal (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 1-24; Nora E. Jaffary, "Incest, Sexual Virtue and Social Mobility in Late Colonial Mexico," *Gender, Race and Religion in the Colonization of the Americas*, ed. Nora E. Jaffary (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), 95-108.

non-normative. These practices include polygamy and homoeroticism.<sup>148</sup> For Spaniards and Nahuas alike, the Council of Trent created new, more stringent incest laws in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. These laws, however, conflicted with the desire of Spaniards to reproduce with other ethnic Spaniards as a means of accumulating wealth.<sup>149</sup>

As gifts of the Conquest, indigenous women become harbingers of colonial gender and race relations. They are, on the one hand the actual objects of wealth taken by the Spaniards. On the other hand, as sexually exploited bodies, they are vehicles for race mixing. As such, they represent a disruption of racial categories. The colonial state would strive to contain this mixing through marriage.

The sexual violence of the Conquest precedes colonial mechanisms of sexual control. Bernal Díaz del Castillo's descriptions of "excellent" indigenous women such as Malintzin provide a chivalric cover for sexual violence.<sup>150</sup> Bartolomé de las Casas cuts through the veil of chivalry in revealing the full onslaught of Conquest violence. In one episode of his *Breve historia*, he states that "Un mal cristiano, tomando por fuerza una doncella para pecar con ella, arremetió la madre para se la quitar, saca un puñal o espada y córtala una mano a la madre, y a la doncella, porque no quiso consentir, matóla a puñaladas."<sup>151</sup> From de las Casas' Christian

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<sup>148</sup> On homoerotic performance in pre-Conquest Mexico, see Pete Sigal, *The Flower and the Scorpion: Sexuality and Ritual in Early Nahua Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>149</sup> "Spaniards' proclivity for desiring to marry their cousins and other relatives was likely an extreme manifestation of their pronounced pattern of endogamous marriage in colonial society, undertaken in the interest of creating and transmitting wealth and status within the Hispanic community." Jaffary, 99.

<sup>150</sup> Regarding Malintzin, Frances Karttunen discusses rape within the frame of survival: "With no hope of escape from a group of men, in the face of inevitable rape, doña Marina managed to do what today's women's survival books advise. Exploiting her only asset, her multilingualism, she succeeded in attaching herself to what primatologist would call the alpha male (Cortés), who would not willingly share her with the others. (When he did relinquish her to Jaramillo, it was with a legitimate wedding and an income.) She worked hard at making herself one of the men, ever ready day or night to serve, always helpful and outgoing. Bernal Díaz characterized her as cheerful and 'without embarrassment.' For a woman in her situation, any other strategy would have been suicidal. Frances Karttunen, "Rethinking Malinche," *Indian Women of Early Mexico*, 311. I would add that Malintzin's body was another asset that could be exploited alongside her interpreting skills.

<sup>151</sup> Bartolomé de las Casas, *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 2013), 59.



perspective, the unmitigated violence of this scene is compounded by the presumed virginity of the young woman (“doncella”). Cortés, Bernal Díaz and other Spanish chroniclers aver such episodes. Instead, they quantify women as so many goods as well as souls to be saved. Cortés’ letters are most emblematic of the effort to catalogue the things obtained in the Conquest. Lists of jewels, capes, feather headdresses, gold disks and people served as an inventory of Spain’s new wealth.

For indigenous leaders, however, the act of gifting demonstrated their own power. Moteuczoma’s gifts to Cortés serve as a case in point. According Inga Clendinnen, these gifts “were statements of dominance: gestures of wealth and unmatched liberality made the more glorious by the extravagant humility of their giving.”<sup>152</sup> Molly Basset, in turn, suggests that Moteuczoma’s gifts prepared Cortés for ritual sacrifice as a *teixiptla* (god impersonator).<sup>153</sup> These analyses overturn Spanish narratives of indigenous capitulation and Cortés’ inevitable triumph. They signal the economic value and magical properties of Moteuczoma’s gifts.

By appropriating the gifts of indigenous rulers, Spanish soldiers appropriated their tribute system as well. The ultimate expression of the Mesoamerican tribute system in religious terms was sacrifice, above all human sacrifice to the gods. Linking sacrifice with consumption, Bataille proffers that, for the Mexica,

Consumption loomed just as large in their thinking as production does in ours.

They were just as concerned about *sacrificing* as we are about *working*.

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<sup>152</sup> Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 269.

<sup>153</sup> Molly Bassett, “Meeting the Gods: Apotheoses and Exchanges of the Early Encounter,” *Material Religion* 8.4, 416-439.

The sun himself was in their eyes the expression of sacrifice. He was a god resembling man. He had become the sun by hurling himself into the flames of a brazier.<sup>154</sup>

Spaniards could not abide by the human sacrifices carried out in temples in elaborate ceremonies. Ending them was of the utmost importance for Cortés. As others have noted, military conquest gave way to a “spiritual conquest.” Yet, the matter is not just military or spiritual.

We can say that the Spaniards were horrified not just at the bloodiness of sacrifice. After all, in the New World they carried out massacres on a mass scale—a veritable holocaust. Along with the seemingly demonic aspects of sacrifice, Spaniards would have been offended by the consumption of human life, rather than its use toward labor and wealth creation. The saving of souls for the Christian God had its obverse in the saving of bodies for work. The Spaniards needed so many people to work for them during and after the Conquest: as carriers (*tlamemeh* in Nahuatl), as cooks, as textile workers, and as laborers in mines and *haciendas*. In a sense, Mesoamerican sacrifice was replaced with a biopolitical regime of production based on the notion of *sacred man* proposed by Agamben: “who *may be killed and yet not sacrificed*.”<sup>155</sup> Indeed, the work imposed by the Spaniards, particularly in the mines, led to a path of death, but not before wealth could be extracted from the labor of the indigenous population.

Just as religious beliefs supported the indigenous tribute system, so did Spanish Catholicism support Spain’s mercantile economy. Luis de Molina, a Spanish theologian, summarized medieval economic thought in his 16<sup>th</sup> century treatise on “just price.” There he lays

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<sup>154</sup> Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share* Vol. I: Consumption (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 46.

<sup>155</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 35.

out, from a Catholic perspective, the protocols for engaging in mercantile activity. Notably, while Molina characterizes certain mercantile practices as immoral, he grants freedom to merchants even if it harms the wider populace. For example, writing about merchants who buy up scarce goods, he states, “no veo razón por la que los comerciantes que encarecen los bienes comprando del modo indicado estén obligados a restituir el daño originado. No lo veo porque no considero que pequen contra la justicia al producir accidentalmente (<<per accidens>>) la carestía de los mismo, sino que solo pecan contra la caridad o amor debido al prójimo.”<sup>156</sup> For Molina, the accidental, or incidental, depletion of necessary but scarce goods is a risk that merchants are allowed to take in carrying out their work.

What Molina outlines, then, is a principal of “free trade.” It was from that perspective that he conceived of Spanish relations with New World populations, naturalizing Spanish commerce in the Americas. Take for example, the following passage on Spaniards returning to Spain from the New World and, with their newfound fortunes, buying up goods in the homeland: “Esta práctica está aceptada por la costumbre, y yo no me atrevo a condenarla, pues, ciertamente, las cosas valen más cuando es mayor el número de compradores que, procedentes del Nuevo Mundo, traen dinero y están deseosos de comprar. Porque si los bienes no fueran suficientes para satisfacer también a los naturales, es claro que subiría el precio de los mismos al ser mayor la demanda total.”<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Luis de Molina. *La teoría del justo precio*, ed. Francisco G. Camacho (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1981), 146.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 152. As Elvira Vilches shows, however, Spanish economic theorists in the early modern period had serious reservations about unchecked markets and, in particular, the rise of credit: “The juggling of money through bookkeeping was perceived as confusing and mysterious; it seemed not only complicated but diabolical.” Elvira Vilches, *New World Gold: Cultural Anxiety and Monetary Disorder in Early Modern Spain* (The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 160. Luis de Molina is no exception to such sentiments. At the same time, reading Molina’s text, one notices the priority that he gives to merchants above the public good as well as the state.

The conquistadores took this naturalized vision of commerce to the New World. They would, ostensibly, generate wealth for themselves and their homeland. Yet, from another perspective, the whole enterprise, (and it was conceived precisely as an enterprise, a “negocio”) ran as an extensive credit network. David Graeber argues that debt was the prime catalyst for Cortés’ invasion of Mexico.<sup>158</sup> The networks of credit at play, from the King to the lowly soldier, made meticulous record-keeping of goods essential. As such, Cortés’ inventory of indigenous tribute attaches specific monetary values to the objects he received, particularly objects made of gold and silver. This monetary transformation would be consummated by smelting the gold and silver objects, exquisite art pieces, and reissuing them as Spanish currency. Muñoz Camargo narrates this transformation regarding Moteuczoma’s treasures:

Solo referiremos cómo fue gran suma de riqueza de oro y pedrería, la que en aquella salida se perdió. La cual fue del tesoro de Motecuhzomatzin, que como fuese muerto, mandó Cortés que la mayor parte se fundiese, porque en piezas y joyas y oro labrado hacía mucho volumen, lo que no haría derritiéndolo y hecho en barras y ladrillos; y así se puso por obra, que lo que estaba en hoyas, brazaletes, patenas, y bezotes y orejeras, todo se hizo fundir, sin lo que estaba en tejos y barras que era gran suma.<sup>159</sup>

The obsession with precious metals allowed the Spaniards to write off other indigenous tribute objects as curiosities and *exotica*, that is, when they were not directly condemned as idols.

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<sup>158</sup> The chain of debts, and thus the financial imperative, made it difficult to mitigate abuses against indigenous populations: “Charles V himself was deeply in debt to banking firms in Florence, Genoa, and Naples, and gold and silver from the Americas made up perhaps one-fifth of his total revenue. In the end, despite a lot of initial noise and the (usually quite sincere) moral outrage on the part of the king’s emissaries, such decrees were either ignored or, at best, enforced for a year or two before being allowed to slip into abeyance.” David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (New York: Melville House Printing: 2011), 319.

<sup>159</sup> Muñoz Camargo, 220.

For Bernal Díaz, outside of gold and women, indigenous tribute objects held little value. Here, too, de las Casas brings us closer to the actions and raw attitudes of Spanish soldiers in the moment of the Conquest. He describes how one Spanish soldier, “se loó e jactó delante de un venerable religioso, desvergonzadamente, diciendo que trabajaba cuanto podía por empreñar muchas mujeres indias, para que, viéndolas preñadas, por esclavas le diesen más precio de dinero por ellas.”<sup>160</sup> De las Casas captures the opposed attitudes towards women’s bodies as imminently disposable and potentially profitable.

From this perspective, women’s bodies were veritable gold mines. In Book 12 of the *Florentine Codex*, this conflation becomes all too literal. There, the authors describe the how Spanish soldiers inspected the bodies of Mexica women as they escaped Tenochtitlan: “Auh in izquican antica tetlatlaçaltiaia in Españoles in teucuitlatl quitemoa amo tle ipan quitta, in chalchivitl, in quetzalli yoan in xivitl: novian nemia in inxila in incuetitlan in cioatzintzinti” [“And along every stretch [of road] the Spaniards took things from people by force. They were looking for gold; they cared nothing for green-stone, precious feathers, or turquoise. They looked everywhere with the women, on their abdomens, under their skirts”].<sup>161</sup> Lockhart notes the euphemistic sense in which he translates *inxila* as “their abdomens.”<sup>162</sup> Molina translates *xillan* as “en la barriga, o vientre.” Kartunnen holds to Molina’s translation, only adding the noun ending *-tli* to the unpossessed *xillan*. Following Lockhart’s suggestion, we can imagine the Spaniards searching through, and in, the vagina and uterus of the Mexica women for any gold that might have been hidden there. Here, again, the womb bears a potential profit. Only this time

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<sup>160</sup> las Casas, 64.

<sup>161</sup> James Lockhart. *We People Here: Nahuatl Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 248. The translation to English is Lockhart’s.

<sup>162</sup> “Inxilla (in the Nahuatl): A word of broad application, *xillan* encompassed (in addition to metaphorical meanings) abdomen, belly, and womb, and the reference here might be to the inspection of the vagina.” Lockhart, 311, note 213.

it is not profit via human reproduction, but the possibility of finding actual gold ensconced in the bodies of indigenous women.

The search for gold in women's genitals points to the overlap between the plunder of riches and the sexual violence of rape, two sides of the same coin. While it has become commonplace to think of the Conquest of the Americas as a metaphorical rape of land and populations, this more literal rape, of individual women, however faceless, lies close to the surface of Conquest accounts, a truth that Spaniards and native *tlacuilos* alike could represent only obliquely. Within Conquest histories, written from the perspective of powerful men, rape appears as a naturalized phenomenon, as the prerogative of the victors, an assumption buried within the pomp of and decorum of male grandeur. In this vein, the beauty of the women taken by the Spaniards is similar to the lustre of gold as the immediate prize of the Conquest. Indeed, the same Book 12 of the *Florentine Codex* states that Spanish soldiers picked out beautiful, yellow-skinned women as the Mexica fled Tenochtitlan. The term used to describe these women is *coztic* (spelled *cuztic* in the *Florentine Codex*): “yoan quimanaia, quinpepenaia in Cioa in chipavaque, in Cuztic innacaio in cuztique” [And [the Spaniards] took, picked out the beautiful women, with yellow bodies].<sup>163</sup> Pre-Conquest Nahuas also used the term *coztic* to describe gold, which they called *coztic tecocuitlatl* (“yellow god-excrement”). Silver, in turn, was called *iztac teocuitlatl* (“white god-excrement”). While pre-Conquest Mesoamerican communities had distinct ethnic identities, skin color did not figure into ethnic, religious or class hierarchies.<sup>164</sup> In

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> On Nahua ethnic identities, see *Ethnic Identity in Nahua Mesoamerica: The View from Archaeology, Art History, Ethnohistory, and Contemporary Ethnography*, ed. Frances Berdan (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2008); scholars have also discussed the “othering” of the Huastecs in Nahua, and more specifically Mexica, sources. See Patrick Johansson K., “La imagen del huasteco en el espejo de la cultura náhuatl prehispánica” *Estudios de cultura Náhuatl* 44 (2012), 65-113.

contrast, Spaniards viewed lighter-skinned women as already being more pure than their darker-skinned counterparts.

In the passage cited, the Nahuatl text is even more emphatic about skin color than Lockhart's translation indicates. The text first describes the yellow skin of these women (*innacaiō in cuztique*) and then the women themselves as yellow, or the yellow ones (*in cuztique*). Sahagún's Spanish interpretation elides these descriptions altogether. The Spanish text merely describes the women taken by the Spaniards as young and beautiful: "ninguna cosa otra tomauan sino el oro y las mujeres moças hermosas."<sup>165</sup> As in the text of Bernal Díaz, indigenous women and gold stand out as the two things most valued by the Spaniards. The Spanish text of the *Florentine Codex* takes this relationship for granted. The Nahuatl text, however, captures the conflation of skin color with gold.

In the heart of the Conquest, the selection of women based on skin color represents an incipient racial eugenics. This selection is rooted in the concept of blood purity. In the Conquest, this notion is transposed to skin color, with yellow-skinned indigenous women serving as an approximation of fair-skinned (presumably Christian) Spanish women. Implicitly, darker-skinned women, whether in the Old or New World, were less pure. Miscegenation with non-Christian women would sully good Christian blood. Without knowing the history of blood purity, indigenous women understood the Spaniards' intentions and responded accordingly: in fleeing Tenochtitlan, some women covered themselves with dirt to avoid being picked out by the Spaniards: "Auh in cequintin cioa inic motetlaçaltiaia, miçoquivique, yoan tatapatli in quimocuetiq tzotzomatli in quimovipiltique, çan moch tzotzomatli in intech quitlalique" [And how some women got loose was that they covered their faces with mud and put on ragged

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<sup>165</sup> Lockhart, *We People Here*, 249.

blouses and skirts, clothing themselves all in rags].<sup>166</sup> By covering themselves with mud and dressing in rags, the Mexica women play with codes of beauty. They use the dirt of their homeland to make themselves ‘ugly’ and, in this sense, invisible to the Spaniards. In making the women undetectable, the dirt has a positive, almost magical effect.

In fact, in Mesoamerican cosmology, filth represented a necessary duality opposite cleanliness. Pre-Conquest Nahuas represented filth in the form of the goddess Tlazolteotl and cleanliness as the goddess Chalchiuhtlicue. The two complemented each other. For example, both filth and cleanliness were necessary elements in the birth of a child: the filth coming out of the womb along with the baby would be washed away with the waters of Chalchiuhtlicue.<sup>167</sup>

In the flight from Tenochtitlan, filth begins to take a different valence. The application of dirt prefigures a new racial caste system. To be indigenous would become synonymous with dirtiness, lack of purity, outwardly and inwardly. Like gold, indigenous women had to be purified and converted in order to circulate among the Spaniards. Specifically, they needed to be baptized and given new, Christian names. Baptism provided holy sanction to Spanish-indigenous sexual relations. This holy sanction is the religious counterpoint to Bernal Díaz’s affirmation of the beauty and excellence of indigenous women.

#### **“Quimonnamitihque quintlauhtihque,” or, the slippages between marriage and gifting**

In Chimalpahin’s account, the decision to give Cortés 40 macehual women entails an elaborate process. Chimalpahin’s description of this process provides a brief glimpse onto the lives of the women involved in these preparations. According to Chimalpahin,

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 248-249.

<sup>167</sup> See the descriptions of birth in Book 6 of Sahagún’s *Florentine Codex*. Chapter 23 contains incantations to *Chalchiuhtlicue* during the birth process.



Auh ynin omentin tlahtoque ontecpanitli yn cihua quinnehicoque in cenca cuacualtin mahuiztique in chipahuaque catca, can nican macehualtitzinti ymichpochhuan catca; quimitlanilique yn omoteneuhque tlahtoque catca yhuan occenquintin tlaçopipiltin catca ynic quimitlanque quinmochpochtihque, quinchiuhque quinmacaque in quenami yhcuaç on quinemiltiaya tlahtoque yncihuahuan, in mahuiztic cueytl yhuan huipilli yc quinchiuhque, yhuan yuh mihtohua quintenque quimaaltihque temazcalco, quinyexotoçonhuique quinyeyectzicahuazhuique quinxauhque. Auh i ye oquincencauhque, inca tenamicque in omoteneuhque omentin tlahtoque, quimonnamictihque quintlauhtihque yn españoles, yhuan quimonnamictihque chicontzontli ypan matlacpohualli pesos ypan ca in coztic teocuitlatl y nepapan cozcatl yc tlachiuhtli.

[The two tlahtoque gathered 40 beautiful women, young daughters of the macehualtin [indigenous commoners] here [in Amaquemecan]; the said tlahtoque and some nobles required that the women be young. These women were groomed and provided for as if they were the wives of rulers. They were dressed in impressive skirts and blouses. It is also said that they were bathed in the sweat bath, had their feet cleaned, their hair beautifully combed and that they were shaved. When the women were thus groomed, the two tlahtoque went to present them to the Spaniards as wives, as gifts. During this meeting, the tlahtoque also provided the Spaniards with 3,000 pesos' worth of various gold jewels.]<sup>168</sup>

This episode, first of all, calls for comparison with other Conquest histories since these texts echo and even borrow from each other.

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<sup>168</sup> Chimalpahin, 330.

The friar Diego Durán rivals Chimalpahin in the attention he gives to the methods of beautifying the women of Amaquemecan. He writes that

Donde los de Amequemecan le salieron a recibir, y, además de llevar rico presente, de joyas de oro y piedras de mucho valor y muchas en cantidad, y plumas y braceletes riquísimos y ropa de mantas y huipiles y naguas muy galanas, le ofrecieron muchas mozas, hermosas, muchachas de muy poca edad, todas muy galanas y bien vestidas y aderezadas, atadas a las espaldas muy ricos plumajes, y en las cabezas todo el cabello tendido y en los carrillos puesto su color que las hermozeaba mucho. Los soldados las recibieron con agimiento de gracias y les agradecieron el presente.<sup>169</sup>

Like Chimalpahin, Durán notes the various items presented to the Spaniards along with the young women. While noting the beauty of the women presented to Cortés, however, he provides details that Chimalpahin does not, notably, the rich plumage tied on their backs and the color applied to their cheeks. With both Chimalpahin and Durán's account, then, we have a sense of the labor that went into beautifying the women of Amaquemecan before their presentation to the Spaniards. This labor and its product, the young women, were the crux of the meeting between the leaders of Amaquemecan and Cortés and his soldiers. Durán's description of the Spanish response, receiving the women "con agimiento de gracias," conveys their enthusiasm for this gift.

While Durán, like Chimalpahin, draws out the scene in Amaquemecan, other Spanish historians treat this event in clerical fashion, as another round of inventory of things taken by the

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<sup>169</sup> Fray Diego Durán, *Historia de las Indias de nueva España e islas de la tierra firme* Tomo II, ed. Ángel María Garibay (México: Porrúa, 1967), 535.

Spaniards. Yet their inventories have some discrepancies. Cortés claims that he received 40 slave women, 3,000 castellanos, and food in Chalco-Amaquemecan. Bernal Díaz, in contrast, states that only eight women were provided along with gold worth more than 150 pesos by Chalco-Tlalmanalco, Amaquemecan, Acazingo and other unspecified towns. López de Gómara's states that in Amaquemecan, Cortés received 40 slave women and 3,000 gold pesos and learned secrets about Moteuczoma. Cervantes de Salazar echoes López de Gómara's account. There is no evidence that Chimalpahin had access to the writings of Cortés, Bernal Díaz, or Cervantes de Salazar. He did, however, read López de Gómara's *Historia de la conquista de México*, which he proceeded to copy and amend. Thus, we can gather that Chimalpahin drew on López de Gómara for his information on the gifts given to Cortés in Amaquemecan. Although Chimalpahin worked through a significant portion of Gómara's work, this project would remain unfinished. In a broader sense, however, Chimalpahin's Nahuatl histories continue the project of amending 'official' Spanish histories while providing an indigenous perspective.

From that standpoint, it is interesting to consider what Chimalpahin included and left out of his version of events in Amaquemecan. In contrast to López de Gómara, he characterizes the 40 women as daughters of *macehuales*, not as slaves. By characterizing these women simply as slaves, the Spanish sources assume a position of moral superiority. That is, in taking these women, the Spaniards effectively "saved" them. Women provided as gifts were baptized and brought into communion with God. This was, after all, the purported mission of the Spaniards, to Christianize the population and thus add to glory of the Spanish crown and the Catholic Church. The use of the term "slave," moreover, elides a more complex understanding of Nahua social hierarchies, ignoring or eliding the notion of *macehual*. Chimalpahin reinscribes the *macehual* in his version of Gómara's history.

For Chimalpahin, Christian glory hardly factors into the gifting of women. Instead, he focuses on indigenous social hierarchies and codes of beauty. The rulers (*tlahtoque*) and nobles (*tlazopiltin*) are quite deliberate in their choice of women: they are to be commonwomen, young and beautiful. The choice to bequeath common women to the Spaniards reflects a specific strategy on the part of the two *tlahtoque* of Amaquemecan: appeasement without strict alliance. That is, the leaders of Amaquemecan were willing to provide the Spaniards but not at the cost of mixing their noble lineages with those of the Spaniards. The conflation of beauty and nobility allowed these leaders to pass off the common women as nobles. The association of beauty with high social standing would have been familiar to the Spaniards. In having common women pass as noblewomen, Amaquemecan's leaders were thus able to simulate noble marriages, playing to Spanish egos. After all, Spanish soldiers were generally not of noble stock. If nobility in the Peninsula was originally gained via war against the Moors, war in the New World offered a new opportunity for social advancement. The Mesoamerican tribute system, however, offered not just status but access to a large pool of tribute labor, *tequitl* in Nahuatl. In this sense, the 40 women provided by the leaders of Amaquemecan were brides and tribute but also potential conduits for further tribute extraction.

Within a Mesoamerican worldview, however, the gifting of women does not simply signify defeat but contestation. Chimalpahin's Nahuatl provides us with clues onto this aspect of the bride-gift. The noun *tenamicque* (te-namic(tli)-que) signifies spouses, in this case wives. The Nahuatl term for wife is *namictli*. As a rule, Nahuatl words for relatives and spouses are possessed. The prefix *te-* denotes this possession, signifying "people." The use of the term Chimalpahin's wording thus anticipates the marriage of the 40 macehual women—they are already possessed, taken. Their transfer into Spanish hands activates that marriage,

simultaneously an extension and transfer of power over women's bodies. Further in the passage, the verb *quimonnamictihque* (-quim-on-namic-ti(a)-que) solidifies that marriage. Here, the noun *namictli* is modified to form the verb *namictia*, "to provide someone with a spouse, or contend or have a dispute with someone."<sup>170</sup> The verb *quimonnamictihque* is further accentuated by the prefix *on*, signifying movement. And it places the indigenous leaders as active agents in that movement. They go to not only meet with the Spaniards, but to contend with them, to negotiate, as the varied meanings of the verb *namictia* suggest. The *macehual* women gifted to the Spaniards thus affirm indigenous as much as Spanish power.

In the double-phrase "quimonnamictihque quintlauhtihque," the slippage between wife and gift becomes even more palpable. The term *quintlauhtihque* (quin-tlauhti(a)-que) refers specifically to the act of gift-giving via the verb *tlauhtia*. In presenting women as gifts, the Nahuatl leaders allow themselves the upper hand in their tenuous relationship with the Spaniards. The reception of the Spaniards as guests and potential combatants goes hand in hand with the ambiguous status of the forty women as wives and gifts. That ambiguity is heightened by the mutual alterity between the two groups. Even in the seemingly simple act of gift-giving, meaning would have to be negotiated. At stake in this negotiation is the very relationship between Spaniards and Nahuatl in the early stages of the Conquest. Each moment of contact would provide different indigenous communities with new opportunities to adjust their alliances.

In giving away common women, the leaders of Amaquemecan bought time and, perhaps, a modicum of trust. They did so by manipulating the codes of beauty attached to women's bodies. The 40 women become pawns in this game of appearances. Their grooming works as a deliberate attempt to trick the Spaniards into accepting these women as brides rather than taking

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<sup>170</sup> "namictli," Molina, Nahuatl-Spanish section, 62v. My translation.

actual noblewomen, the daughters and wives of nobles. Beauty marks indigenous class difference, particularly between commoners and nobles. Chimalpahin's detailed description of the grooming process emphasizes class hierarchies in Amaquemecan and the manipulation of those hierarchies by Amaquemeca's male leaders. The objects of that manipulation are the bodies of the 40 commonwomen who become counterfeit noblewomen.

Chimalpahin's descriptions of grooming hint at a community of women. Chimalpahin specifically mentions two groups of women: the forty common women and the wives of the rulers and nobles. Another group of women goes unmentioned: the servants who presumably groomed the 40 commonwomen before their presentation to the Spaniards. The daily interactions among noblewomen and their servants would entail a certain level of intimacy. Those interactions are replicated in the grooming process that Chimalpahin describes: the shaving of the women's legs, the preparation of their hair, their bathing in the sweat lodge (*temazcalli*). During these preparations, we might imagine the women consoling each other or giving advice. It is difficult to determine the subject position of the servants who would have groomed the 40 commonwomen. Were these servants predominately women? Did they identify more closely with commoners or with nobles? Or, were they a class unto themselves? In any case, they had the important task of preparing the 40 commonwomen for their meeting with Spaniards. That job would have been emotional as well as physical.

### **Affect and community within conquest: the case of Tlaxcala**

We do not know the affective response of the 40 women in Amaquemecan—what they said, thought or felt as they were given to the Spaniards. Such insight falls outside the scope of Chimalpahin's history, lost among the machinations of indigenous leaders hoping to negotiate with the Spanish newcomers. The case of Tlaxcala, however, serves as a useful analogue for the

events in Amaquemecan. As Diego Durán intimates, when Tlaxcalan leaders led by Xicotencatl the elder offered Cortés gifts, they set a precedent that the leaders of Amaquemecan followed:

Los tlaxcaltecas lo hicieron con mucha voluntad y diligencia y le dieron mucho número de soldados y tamemes para las cargas, y les presentaron muchas mujeres para su servicio, las cuales tomaron los soldados de muy buena gana y voluntad, para que los sirviesen. Donde dice la historia que desde este día a donde quiera que llegaban les presentaban indias mozas y hermosas e hijas de señores para que les sirviesen. Lo cual se dice muy en particular de Amequemecan.<sup>171</sup>

In fact, Muñoz Camargo depicts a number of moments in which Tlaxcalan leaders, led by Xicotencatl the elder, give women to the newly arrived Spaniards: 1) a gift of 4 elderly women along with other items such as jade and feathers as a test to ascertain whether the Spaniards were men or gods and, if the latter, whether benevolent or wrathful; 2) a gift of 300 slave women, for ritual human sacrifice or service to the Spaniards; and 3) noblewomen as wives. Chief among these noblewomen was the daughter of Xicotencatl, doña María Luisa Tecuilhuatzin, or simply doña Luisa as she is more commonly known. Doña Luisa would marry Cortés' second-in-command, Pedro de Alvarado, or *Tonatiuh* (Sun), as the Nahuas called him. These moments convey a sense of the emotional reactions of the women gifted as well as the community, and hierarchies, among them.

In the case of the 300 slave women, as Muñoz Camargo calls them, what stands out is their grief at the thought of their imminent sacrifice to the gods:

“Estando pues los nuestros en este buen alojamiento, presentaron a Cortés más de trescientas mujeres hermosas y de muy buen parecer y muy bien ataviadas, las

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<sup>171</sup> Durán. 534-535.

cuales las daban para su servicio, porque eran esclavas que estaban dedicadas para el sacrificio de sus ídolos, y estaban condenadas a muerte por excesos y delitos que habían cometido contra sus leyes y fueros; y pareciendo a los caciques que no había adonde mejor emplear, las dieron en ofrenda y sacrificio a los nuestros, las cuales iban llorando su gran desventura, a padecer crueles muertes considerando el cruel sacrificio que habían de padecer, y después de muertas comérselas los dioses nuevamente venidos.”<sup>172</sup>

The anticipation of sacrifice compounds the lowly status of these women, while their “excesses” and “crimes” mark an overlap between slave and criminal. There is a moral baggage, then, attached to the women that makes them expendable. Further down, Muñoz Camargo insists that these women were indeed slaves, and that such women might be captives taken from outside communities and that many of them were from slave families.<sup>173</sup> In this sense, the grief of the 300 women perhaps stands as the cumulative response to their social standing, to an original violent separation from their communities and final destination as sacrificial tribute. The terribleness of sacrifice conveyed by Muñoz Camargo signals in no small quantity a Christian sensibility toward that practice.

And yet, while these 300 women are given specifically as sacrificial tribute, Cortés and his army receive them as potential wives. That misunderstanding, in turn, produces a new understanding of the status of the 300 women, one that slides from sacrificial victim, or slave, to bride. According to Muñoz Camargo, Cortés, holding to Christian protocols for marriage, initially rejected the women as brides:

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<sup>172</sup> Muñoz Camargo, 190.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.



Finalmente, que estas trescientas mujeres se dieron y ofrecieron al capitán Cortés para que le sirviesen a él y a sus compañeros; y al tiempo que se las presentaron no las quiso recibir, sino que se las tornasen a llevar, respondiéndoles que se lo agradecía mucho e que no las quería recibir, porque en su religión cristiana no se permitía aquello, porque si no fuesen cristianas bautizadas no se podía hacer, y cuando esto hubiese de ser, había de ser para tomallas por su única mujer y compañía por orden de la Santa Madre Iglesia; que no las podían tener porque su ley lo vedaba, como adelante mediante nuestro señor lo verían. Mas con todo esto, con grandes ruegos y persuasiones, las recibió a título de que se recibían para que sirviesen a Malintzin, advirtiéndoles de que se sienten mucho a los indios cuando no les reciben los presentes que dan, aunque sea una flor, porque dicen que es sospecha de enemistad y de poco amor y poca confianza del dante y del que presenta la cosa, que así se usaba entre ellos. (190-191)

Here, baptism serves as the mechanism for changing the status and use of the 300 women. While not quite acceptable as wives, they are nonetheless given use as the servants of Malintzin. We see a slip in Muñoz Camargo's depiction of the women, one that acknowledges the presence of a community of women in service to another. We would do well to recall that Malintzin was herself part of a gift to the Spaniards. In Tlaxcala, rather than being the gift, she now receives it. That is, she receives the women as so many servants but, perhaps, as a community of women as well. And as a community, these women serve as the grounds of a Nahuatl-Spanish alliance, the price of community, and communion, with the Spaniards.

It is only after this gift that Tlaxcalan leaders present their own daughters to the Spaniards, these noblewomen acting at the conduits for the continuation of indigenous governance in the future:

Y así fue que el buen Xicotencatl dio una hija suya, hermosa y de muy buen parecer, a don Pedro de Alvarado por mujer, que se llamó doña María Luisa Tecuilhuatzin, porque en su gentilidad no había más matrimonio del que se contraía por voluntad de los padres, y así daban sus hijas a otros señores, que aunque se usaban muchas ceremonias de sus ritos gentílicos, como atrás lo dejamos declarado, los señores absolutamente tomaban las mujeres que querían, y se las daban como a hombres poderosos; y por esta orden se dieron muchas hijas de señores a los españoles, para que quedase de ellos casta y generación por si fuesen de esta tierra.<sup>174</sup>

In offering their own daughters to the Spaniards the leaders of Tlaxcala draw, once again, on their own codes of diplomacy in war. And within this last act of gifting, we see a movement runs across a broad spectrum of the relative expendability and value of women between powerful men: from old women at the end of their lives to slaves/sacrificial victims to the daughters of rulers.

If the 300 women represent a completely consumable form of human tribute, doña Luisa and other noblewomen represent continued access to the tribute of commoners. Indeed, in Bernal Díaz's account, the commoners provide gifts upon doña Luisa's marriage to Pedro de Alvarado: "Antes que más pase adelante, quiero decir cómo de aquella cacica hija de Xicotenga, que se llamó doña Luisa, que se la dio a Pedro de Alvarado, que así como se la dieron, toda la mayor

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 191.

parte de Tlaxcala la acataba y le daban presentes y la tenían por su señora.”<sup>175</sup> The relation between Tlaxcalan women and tribute, and the status of women as tribute, finds pictorial expression in the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, in a scene entitled, appropriately enough, “Quitlauhtique,” or “They Gave Him Gifts” (Fig. 8). This scene has appeared in a number of studies, its significance being attached to the figure of Malintzin as Cortés’ mediator and translator. In this scene, Malintzin mediates between the Spaniards and Tlaxcalan leaders. The group of women underneath the indigenous men, however, have received no attention in and of themselves, forgotten amidst the diplomatic meeting above. Could these women represent the 300 slave women, or would they more closely approximate the noblewomen given to the Spaniards afterward? In any case, their status as tribute is evident in their positioning, as they occupy the same space as the tribute objects to their right, the color yellow standing out as a sign of gold. Yet, the fine clothing on the women hints at their own adornment and preparation of the meeting with the Spaniards. This detail belies their potential status as slaves while approximating the appearance of noble brides.

Although Muñoz Camargo purportedly had a hand in the creation of the *Lienzo*, this particular scene elides any of the emotional angst exhibited by the 300 slave women in Muñoz Camargo’s prose. Instead, their countenances appear placid, almost cheerful, a happy reversal of the grief of the slave women. In this regard, it bears keeping in mind that the *Lienzo* is above all a celebration of Tlaxcalan-Spanish alliance. Even Muñoz Camargo’s text presents the 300 slave women as, effectively, “saved” by the Christian Spaniards, put to new (and more holy) use via religious conversion. That conversion, is at the same time, a conversion of their value, exploitable between indigenous and Spanish men alike. Nonetheless, Muñoz Camargo also

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<sup>175</sup> Díaz del Castillo, 271-272.

provides us with a window onto the emotions of the women passed to the Spaniards as well as their entangled relationships to one another. In this regard, one must ask: could there be consolation for the grieving women? What could possibly be said to them, or among them?

### **Words between women in consolation and reproach**

The shifting status of women as gifts finds expression in Chimalpahin's account of the 40 common women of Amaquemecan. Indeed, within that episode, in Chimalpahin's text, the 40 common women stand somewhere between tribute and wife, able to signify both at the same time, a new twist in indigenous strategy from Tlaxcala to Amaquemecan. It could also be that, not having the same access to tribute as Tlaxcala, or Tenochtitlan for that matter, the leaders of Amaquemecan did not have ready access to a pool of "slaves" would could be given in tribute to Cortés. The 40 women of Amaquemecan, then, would be the prime resource for indigenous leaders in their first encounter with the Spaniards.

In the case of Amaquemecan, however, we have no record of how the 40 *macehual* women reacted as they passed into Spanish hands. Beyond Conquest histories, other sources such as the *Florentine Codex* and the *Huehuetlahtolli* (speeches in Nahuatl) collected by Andrés de Olmos clue us into the ways Nahua women interacted with each other during important occasions such as birth, marriage, or the passage to adult life. These speeches might approximate the words and sentiments exchanged with the 40 women in Amaquemecan.

Andrés de Olmos' collection of *huehuehlahtolli* contains typical speeches among women—mothers, daughters, and acquaintances. The speeches between mother and daughter convey a concern for the daughter's behavior away from her parents' home, as adult and wife. The words of both mother and daughter are inflected by the expectations of nobility. Yet, although Olmos' *huehuehlahtolli* concerns itself with the words of nobles, one senses that

similar words might have been spoken across social classes. In one passage, the mother instructs her daughter on performing her work and caring for others:

Auh in tehuatl ma timoxiccauh, ma timonencauh, ma timoteputzcauh, in tinocozqui, in tinoquetzal; ma ontlami immitzin, immoyollotzin yhuan immacoltzin, immocuitlapantzin, immomolictzin, motetepontzin, intla itlan ximaquiti in tlachpanaliztli, in tlacuicuiliztli, in tematequiliztli, in teixamiliztli, in tecamapaquiliztli, huel xicacocui imolcaxitl, in chiquihuitl. Huel xicmana, huel ciquicuani in teixpan, in tenehuac.

[Y, tú, no te abandones, no seas desperdiciada, no te quedes atrás, tú que eres mi collar, mi pluma de quetzal; no se dañe tu rostro, tu corazón, ni tu hombro, tu espalda, tu codo, tu rodilla, si te pones a barrer, a limpiar, a lavarle las manos, a lavarle la cara, la boca a los demás. Y también ponte junto al agua, el metate, y bien coge, toma el molcajete, el canasto; ante las personas, junto a ellas, acomódalos, sepáralos.]<sup>176</sup>

The passage begins with an exhortation for the daughter to value herself. A common expression of endearment (“in tinocozqui, in tinoquetzal,” “tú que eres mi collar, mi pluma de quetzal”) reaffirms the daughter’s worth as a person. Similar expressions appear in soliloquies directed to newborn children in the *Florentine Codex*. These, for example, are the words from the midwife to a newborn girl: “Oticmjhijovilti, oticmociavilti noxocoiouh, notlaçopiltzin: cozcatl, quetzalli, tlaçotli otimaxitico” [“Thou hast suffered exhaustion, thou hast suffered fatigue, my youngest one, my precious noble one, precious necklace, precious feather, precious one. Thou hast come

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<sup>176</sup> Fray Andrés de Olmos. *Huehuetlahtolli: Testimonios de la antigua palabra*, ed. Miguel León Portilla, trad. Librado Silva Galeana. (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2011), 316-317.

to arrive”].<sup>177</sup> In a sense, the occasion of birth mirrors the transition to adulthood: in both cases, the daughter leaves her mother’s protective space, womb and home. If the daughter may rest after birth, it is only until she becomes an adult. As allusions to one’s worth, the quetzal feather and necklace mark these moments of transition.

The references to the body in Olmos’ *huehuetlahtolli* point to afflictions of adulthood and work. The first body parts mentioned, the face and heart (“immitzin, immoyollotzin”), is a metaphor for a person’s character. The mother exhorts her daughter not only to avoid physical harm but injury to her emotional and intellectual being. Yet the concept of injury (*dañar* in the translation above) only partially encapsulates the phrase “ma ontlami” in the Nahuatl text. Following Molina, the base verb in this phrase (*tlami*) can be understood as consumption and thus the eating away of the body and spirit through work. Through references to the psyche and body, the mother conveys the need for her daughter to care for herself while caring for others.

The daughter’s response in Olmos’ *huehuetlahtolli* mirrors the words of the mother, expressing both endearment and humility:

Otinechmocnelilitzino, nopitzin, in nimocoqui, in nimoquetzal. ¿Campa nel  
tinechmocahuilitiuh? ¿Can tinechmotemaquilitiuh? Ca moxillampatzinco,  
motozcatlanpatzinco oniyol, initlacat, in nipiltontli, in niconetontli. Maca yuh  
nicma, maca yuh nimitznottli, in tinonantzin, in tinopitzin, in tinotatzin.

[Me has favorecido, mi hermana mayor, a mí que soy tu collar, tu pluma preciosa.

¿A dónde en verdad me irás a dejar? ¿A dónde me irás a entregar? Porque en tu

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<sup>177</sup> Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Part 7 (Book 6), Ch. 30, ed. and trans. Arthur J.O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, 168.

seno, en tu pecho he vivido, he nacido, yo muchachita, niñita. Que así yo lo tome, que así yo vea en ti que tú eres mi madre, mi hermana mayor, mi padre.]<sup>178</sup>

Here, the daughter accepts the epithet given to her, as the necklace and quetzal feather of the mother. In this sense, the daughter's being, her body and character, is not wholly her own, but that of the mother. The daughter's entrance into the adult world is thus likened to the giving of tribute. The mother's children, after all, might be the most valuable of her possessions. The daughter's references to the mother's body buttress this sense of possession, the child as something that the mother holds near to her heart. As in the mother's speech, the mother's body figures as the protective space of the child, before and after birth. More than that, the mother herself comes to stand in for the family, as mother, older sister and father. On the other hand, these familial epithets also imply the different faces of the mother as caretaker, companion and authority. But the allusion to family is key. The individual gestures of endearment and the speeches as a whole signal not just a transition into adulthood, but separation from one's family. They reaffirm community in the face of that separation.

While the *huehuetlahtolli* exude the humility of its speakers, we cannot expect that a Nahua woman's speech was always so humble or endearing. Turning to the *Primeros memoriales*, the scope of women's speech widens. There, we see women not only counseling but scolding one another. In one passage, an argument between noblewomen is presented thus:

Çivapiltin ynic maoa yn iquac tlein ic mopevaltia. Quimolhuia noconetzin ma çã no ximotlamachtitinemi ma cocoliztli ticmocuiti tlein ticmitalhuja cuix mo totequiuh ÿ tlei ticmotenevilitzinoa y tlein ticmitalhuitzinoa noçivapiltzin ma çã ximotlamachtitinemi camo tinemiuhqui y tiçivapilli camo motechmonemiqui in ticmochivilia camo

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<sup>178</sup> Olmos, 330-331.

motechmonequi in ticmochivilia ma ximixtilli ma ximomaviztili nochpuchticatzin ma xictlalli moyollotzin anoçoc ytla mitzmocolhuiz ma oallanj etc.

Auh ÿ monamiqui no uh quitoa etc.

[Noblewomen thus quarrel when for some reason one is provoked. She says to [the other]: “My child, my lady, do not fall, my child, just consider. Let sickness not seize you. What are you saying? Is what you are stating, is what you are saying not our affair? My lady, just consider. You do not behave as if you were a noblewoman. What you are doing is not required of you. Consider yourself; respect yourself, my maiden. Be of good cheer. Perhaps something may injure you. Let this end.” Etc.

And the one whom she meets also speaks thus. Etc.]<sup>179</sup>

Here the speaker casts herself in a maternal light, mirroring the mother’s speech in Olmos’ *huehuetlahtolli*. But in contrast to the *huehuetlahtolli*, this speech is tinged with condescension rather than consolation. We do not know what originally prompted the dispute. Did one of the women speak out of turn, make a crude joke, or speak badly of someone? In any case, the speaker charges her counterpart with crossing a dangerous line, behaving as a commoner rather than noble. The exhortation to avoid “injury” refers not the individual body but rather to the nobility of the women, and thus to the nobility as a corporate body.

The *Primeros memoriales* juxtaposes the restraint of the noblewomen’s quarrel with the unhinged words of commoners. In mimicking an argument among commoners, the *Primeros memoriales* presents the speech of common women as more colorful and biting:

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<sup>179</sup> Bernardino de Sahagún, *Primeros memoriales*, ed. and trans. Thelma D. Sullivan (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 295.



Auh ynic maoa çiva macevalti quimolhuia / ay civato ma nachca quẽ  
tinechpevaltia / cuix tinonamic cuix tinoquichvi / ay / tlei / çivato / tẽtlatlatzicpol  
ma ximotlalli tlẽ tinechilhuia aviyanito / cuix tinochauh quẽ tinechpeoaltia cuix  
mopã nicacalactica cuix no ze mopal ninemi / cuix tinechtlaecoltia/ cuix mopal  
notlatlaqua / ay / çivato quatzomapol / quatatapapol / ximocao tẽtlatlatzicpol  
ixtlaveliloc tlavelilocatontli / cacalacapol. Xixipevi / atle quiquani / achilova /  
aizteyoa / tzincuecuetzocpol / tzinapizmiqui / ay / ma nachca / teixpã  
titlatlamatiznequi / quẽ titechivaz cuix teoa tatiz. Titepetiz. Tlavelilocatõtli tetla  
chochol ma nachca xoquiça ma nimitztopeuh / mach atle ipã titlatlachiya / mach  
nicã taatlaminemi / cuix tiçivapilli timocuepaznequi / amo çã timaceualtõtli /  
mach nicã teixco tinemj / campa tivalla ma xiyauh aço iuhcã ÿ mohcã / amo  
iuhca ÿ nicã ticeititiz / ticnopiltotomacpol ticnopillaveliloc cen / ca tzatzi ÿ  
nixquich quitoa ÿ teoa çã no ixquich yn quitoa ÿ monamiqui tlaacolooa mocha  
tlacatl quicaqui auh çan õca yn amo tenãnquilia çã quicaquin tlatollij çã choca.

[And when female commoners quarrel with one another, one says to [the  
other]: “Ah, little woman! Away! How will you dispute with me? Are you my  
husband? Are you my spouse? Ah! Little woman of some sort with the mouth  
stuck shut, sit down. What are you telling me, little pleasure girl? Are you my  
concubine? How do you dispute with me? Do I keep entering houses with you?  
Or do I live thanks to you? Do you give me what I need? Do I eat thanks to you?  
Ah, little woman with a mop of forehead hair, with disheveled hair, leave off. Her  
mouth is stuck shut.<sup>180</sup> She is an impudent little wicked one, a house-enterer, a

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<sup>180</sup> A better translation for the term *tentlatlatzicpol* would be “big lazy mouth” or “miserable one with a lazy mouth,” taking into consideration the meaning of *tlatzihu(i)* as “lazy, slothful, idle” as Kartunnen, following Molina,

flayed one. She eats nothing. She has no chili; she has no salt. [She has] an itching rump, a starved rump. Ah, away! Will you in public pretend to be a jester? How will you send us away? Do you rise to become the sovereign state? You are a wicked little one, inept with people. Away, go away! Let me not hit you. It seems that you disdain things; it seems that here you live in pride. Do you pretend to be a noblewoman? Are you not just a little commoner? It seems that here you lack respect for one. Where do you come from? Go away! Is perhaps your home that sort of place? What you will make it appear like is not like that. Ungrateful, miserable wicked one!” They yell a good deal. All this they say when they abuse one. Likewise they say all [this] when they confront one another. People gather around. Everyone hears them. But there are those who just do not answer; they only listen to the words; they only weep.”]<sup>181</sup>

One would imagine this scene taking place in a public area, perhaps a market. Here again, however, we do not know what would have been said to spur this scolding. Yet, similar to the noblewoman’s speech, the common woman accuses her adversary of crossing a line, of transgressing or betraying her own social standing as woman and commoner. Accusations of being a “pleasure girl,” a “concubine,” of “entering houses” connote sexual promiscuity if not prostitution. At the same time, the references to sexually loose women imply a certain latitude for speaking more freely than a typical noblewoman or commoner. These references to sexual promiscuity intermingle with affirmations of a woman’s place in relation to men (“Are you my

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does. See Frances Karttunen, *An Analytical Dictionary of Nahuatl* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 301.

<sup>181</sup> Olmos, 297-298.

husband?"). Implicitly, then, a woman who speaks too much, or out of place, or badly of another person, behaves as a man, or his concubine, would.

Sexual transgression, then, is coextensive with gender and class transgression in the common woman's speech. And, indeed, it is in the realm of prostitution where people of different social standing could intermingle, outside of the parameters reinforced in marriage. In this vein, the imagined speaker intersperses insults of poverty in her speech, claiming that her adversary has no chili or salt. In the common woman's speech, poverty overlaps with sexual hunger ("[She has] an itching rump; a starved rump"). Sickness, too, is coterminous with sexual deviance. The "itching rump" could very well refer to a venereal disease. Yet, that "itch" also connotes an unsatisfied, and perhaps insatiable, sexual desire.

The *Florentine Codex* portrays harsh punishments for sexual transgression, particularly adultery. Concubinage, however, fell within the bounds of sexual conduct for those with power, particularly rulers and warriors. As mistresses or secondary wives of powerful men, concubines may have had liberties not afforded to other women, less restrained speech being one such liberty. That relative freedom stands in contrast with the status of a "flayed one," that is, one destined for sacrifice, or a slave. This epithet is yet another insult deployed by the commonwoman in the above passage. Flaying, that is, the flaying of skins, had an important role in state ceremony. During the *Tlacaxipehualiztli* ("the flaying of skins") ceremony, priests and warriors would remove the skins of sacrificial victims and wear them in ritual dance. The words of the commonwoman appear to disregard this ceremonial element, instead focusing on another theme: the lack of control over one's body. This lack of control brings us back to the theme of sexual deviance, as the inability to control one's sexual desire. It appears that prostitutes were among the most devalued women in pre-Conquest Nahua society. It may be that devaluation that

made them ripe for the taking when there was a need for sacrificial victims, whether it was in ceremonial sacrifice or, later, when the Spaniards arrived. And yet, from another perspective, the power of women, through sexuality, over men would not have been lost on indigenous leaders as they confronted the largely male Spanish army.

As indigenous elites passed indigenous women, whatever their status, to the Spaniards, whether as wives or slaves or concubines, it is likely that other women did the work of preparing them for this exchange. That work would have included consoling the women being prepared in addition to the physical preparations themselves, the work of grooming and adorning the women. And the women to be delivered as gifts may have been quite young, perhaps adolescents. Let us recall that Diego Durán describes the women gifted in Amaquemecan as “muchachas de muy poca edad.”<sup>182</sup> For his part, Chimalpahin describes them as the young, unmarried daughters of commoners (“macehualtzitzinti ymichpochhuan”). Chimalpahin’s terms, particularly his use of *ichpochtli*, place the young women between early youth and nubility (but after adolescence), following López Austin.<sup>183</sup>

In this sense, the words of the mother to her daughter in the *huehuetlahtolli* would resonate with the kinds of words of consolation offered to the young women in Amaquemecan, who may have had little understanding of what exactly their gifting signified or entailed. What could have prepared these young women, after all, for leaving their families and communities? The words of mother and daughter can only partially encapsulate the kinds of exchanges that would have occurred among the women involved in the preparations of the 40 women. For that reason, it is important to understand how Nahuatl women would have spoken with each other, as

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<sup>182</sup> Durán, 535.

<sup>183</sup> Alfredo López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology: Concepts of the Ancient Nahuas* Vol. 1, trans. Thelma Ortiz de Montellano and Bernard Ortiz de Montellano (Salt Lake city: University of Utah Press, 1998), 287.

commoners or nobles, in consolation or in argument. And this is so even as the *Florentine Codex* and the *huehuetlahtolli* provide us with selective texts filtered through men.

The dialogue that would have occurred among the 40 women of Amaquemecan would have been complimentary, or supplementary to the work of preparing them for their meeting with the Spaniards. Returning to the *Florentine Codex* as well as the *Primeros Memoriales*, we see the special care that went into preparing Nahua women for momentous occasions such as agricultural celebrations and marriage. Bathing holds particular importance in this regard, not only as a means of cleansing but as a marker of slavery and prostitution. Even as slaves or sacrificial victims, women as well as men would undergo a process of beautification that included bathing as well as painting and adornment of the body, ultimately leading to the spectacular disfiguration of the body through sacrifice. On the other hand, an overzealous preoccupation with such enhancements was associated with pleasure women, who were likened to slaves. The *Florentine Codex* points to an overlap in Nahua perceptions of beauty between reverence and disdain, nobility and slave. Similar attitudes may have been directed toward the 40 women from Amaquemecan, commoners who, beyond and possibly against their will, simulated nobility, who were presented to the Spaniards as tribute and brides.

### **From newborn to prostitute: the significance of bathing**

In the *Florentine Codex* and the *Primeros Memoriales*, bathing is most strongly associated with birth and prostitution. In between those poles, it also figures in agricultural festivals and marriage. Within those ceremonies, the painting and adorning of women's bodies figure more prominently. Yellow and red paints, along with iron pyrites were applied to the faces of young women, for example, during the festival of *Hueyi Tozoztli* as well as in marriage

ceremonies. Outside of ceremonial uses, however, the enhancement of one's beauty would verge on moral transgression. Prostitutes embodied this transgression as provocateurs of sexual desire.

The excessive bathing associated with prostitutes stands in moral contrast to the abundance of water involved in child birth. During a woman's pregnancy, the *temazcalli* (sweat bath) appears as both therapeutic and communal. Above all, it is a space for women. The following passage, from the *Florentine Codex*, is indicative of the *temazcalli* as a space of female community:

Manoço nelle axcan, manoço itech xicmaxitili in ixuchicaltzin toteujo: in vncan motetetzavilia in nantli, in tecitzin, in tlatcatl in iooalticitl: manoço qujcuj, manoço qujmottiti in temazcaltzintli: anca ça ne lie cue lei, navui metztlī in chipinpiltzintli: quen ticmottilia, ma ne tontlacocolizcujtiti, acacemo pacholonj.

[Verily now, introduce her into the xochicaltzin of our lady, the place where the mother, the grandmother, the lady Yaolticitl fortifieth [the body of the baby]. May we take to, may she encounter the sweatbath since, indeed, the droplet of a baby is already there [or] four months [formed]. How dost thou regard it? Let us not cause her to sicken; perhaps it is not [the time] to massage her.]<sup>184</sup>

In this passage, the Yaolticitl (“Warrior Midwife”), as a spiritual force, represents a community of women across generations. Meanwhile, the unborn child, as a single “droplet” (*chipipinpiltzintli*), complements the effluvial qualities of the *temazcalli*, where water changes into vapor while drawing out sweat. In its therapeutic dimension, the *temazcalli* could heal (the pregnant woman) or wash away vice (off the newborn).

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<sup>184</sup> Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* Part 7 (Book 6), ch. 27, eds. and trans. Anderson and Dibble, 151-152.

The concept of healing is thus twofold, curing both bodily pain as well as well as moral laxity. These two aspects of the *temazcalli* are put on display in the following passage, where the midwife, or *ticitl*, washes the newborn female child.

Auh in cihoapiltontli, qujcencavilia cuentontli, vipiltontli,, ioan in jxqujch cioatlatqujtl, tanatontli, malacatl, tzotzopaztli, much itoalnepantli qujoalteca. In jquac maltia cioapiltontli: iancujc, ilvicac conjiaoa: jman concuj in atl: achtopa conpaloltia: njman ijelpan contlalilia: njman iquanepantla contequjlia in atl,

Qujnotztinemj in piltontli in iehoatl ticitl: qujlvitinemj. Ma itech ximaxiti, ma xicmocelili in monantzin in chalchiuhtli icue:

In jquac qujpaloltia atl in ticitl, in piltontli: qujlvia. Izcatquj in monantzin, in tocennan, in Chalchiuhtli icue: xicmocujli, xicmocelili, ximocamachalolti: izcatquj injc tinemjz, injc tiultinemjz tlalticpac:

In jquac ijelpan, ijollopan qujtlalilia atl, in ticitl, in piltontli: qujlvia. Xicmocujli, xicmocelili: izcatqui injc titzmolinjz, injc ticeliaz, in qujxitiz, auh in qujchipaoaz, auh in qujtzmolinaltiz in tlaçotli, in [206] motocaiotia tlaçotli: iehoatl in toiollo: oc cenca iehoatl in eltapachtli:

Auh in jquc iquanepantli qujtequjlia atl: qujlhvia. Izcatquj in jtztic, in celic in Chalchiuhtlicue, in cemjac itztica: in aic qujtta, in aic itech aci in cochiztevitzoctli, in choiziaiatli: ma motlan iauh, ma mjtzmonaoatequjli: ma icuexanco, ma imacochco mjtzmaqjli: unjc titztinemjz tlalticpac.

Auh injc novian qujpapaca, in jmac, in jxcic, muchu qujtlatollotia: in jmac, qujl qujpaqujlia in jchtequjliztli: in novian itlacapan: in jquexilco, qujl qujpaqujlia in teuhtli, tlaçulli:

Qujtotinemj. Canjn tica injc otimotlaloc noconetzin: izcatquj in tonan in chalchiuhtli icue, xictlalacavi xatoco, xipolivi:

Injn ic qujtoa itlatol, in manoço itlatlatlauhtiliz: amo naoati, çan motenpepeionjtinemj, çan popolcatinemj.

[And they prepared for the baby girl a little skirt, a little shift, and all the equipment of women, the little reed basket, the spinning whorl, the batten. They place it all in the middle of the courtyard. When the baby girl was bathed, the midwife placed the water in a new basin. Then she uncovered the baby. Then she raised it as an offering in the four directions; then she lifted it up, she raised it as an offering to the heavens. Then she took the water. First she made it taste the water; then she placed water on its chest; then she poured water on the crown of its head.

The midwife proceeded addressing the baby; she proceeded saying to it: “Attain, receive thy mother Chalchiuhtli icue.”

When the midwife made the baby taste the water, she said to it: “Here is thy mother, the mother of all of us, Chalchiuhtli icue. Take it, receive it; open thy mouth. Here is wherewith thou wilt endure, wherewith thou wilt continue to live on earth.”

When the midwife placed the water on the chest, on the heart of the baby, she said to it: “Take it, receive it. Here is wherewith thou wilt grow, wherewith thou wilt develop. [Here is] that which will cause growth of that which is precious.” That which is named precious, this is our heart; especially is it the liver.



And when she poured water on the crown of its head, she said to it: “Here is the coolness, the tenderness of Chalchiuhtli icue, who is eternally awake. She never considereth, never approacheth somnolence, drowsiness. May she go with thee, may she embrace thee, may she take thee in her lap, in her arms, that thou mayest continue watchfully on earth.”

And as she washed it all over, its hands, its feet, she gave a talk to all. Its hands, it was said, she cleaned of thievery. Everywhere on its body, its groin, it was said, she cleaned it of vice.

She proceeded saying to it: “Wheresoever thou art which hath caused harm to my child, here is our mother Chalchiuhtli icue. Leave [the child]. Flow away. Disappear.

This her speech or her prayer she said not in a loud voice; she only continued speaking between the teeth—continued speaking barely intelligibly.]<sup>185</sup>

Just as *Yaolticitl* governs the *temazcalli* in its spiritual dimension, *Chalchiuhtlicue* (“She of the Jade Skirt”) is evoked in the bathing of the newborn. If *Yaolticitl* represents a community of women, or the generalized work of midwives, *Chalchiuhtlicue* represents water in abundance, or flows of water. In that sense of abundance, *Chalchiuhtlicue* stands in for sustenance, the recognition of water as an essential element for life. The work of washing the baby brings to mind the work alluded to in Olmos’ *huehuetlahtolli*, in the words of the mother to her daughter, the counsel she gives her to wash the hands, faces and mouths of others. The advice of the mother to avoid damage to one’s body, in the *huehuehtlatolli*, resonates with the great care of the individual parts of the child’s body here in the *Florentine Codex*, performed by the *ticitl*. The

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., ch. 38, 205-206.

physical cleansing of the child coincides with moral cleansing, with a washing away of “vice” and “thievery.”

Yet, after birth, the possibility for corruption, within a Nahua moral system, remains. In the *Florentine Codex*, the *Auiani* (Pleasure Woman), or *Auilnenqui* (Carnal Woman) embodies the moral depravity into which women could fall. The base, *auil-li*, of these nouns refers to pleasure or joy.<sup>186</sup> *Auiac*, for example, would be a “cosa suave y olorosa, o cosa gustosa” (“something smooth, fragrant, or pleasant.”)<sup>187</sup> The verb *auia*, in turn, is defined as “to have what is necessary or be content.”<sup>188</sup> Finally, *ahahuilli*, the reduplication and intensification of *auilli*, also *ahuilli*, signifies licentiousness.<sup>189</sup> As the personification of pleasure, and sexual pleasure above all, the *auiani*’s transgresses not only sexual boundaries but standards for beauty. The *Florentine Codex* describes her adornments and beauty regimen, including bathing, as an overflow, an excess, of her sexuality:

Moiecoa, moioma, moquecinmachmati, caninmach quimati, queninmach momati, quipolotlali, moieiecquetza, moiecchichioa moecenmati, mosuchiquetza, motopalquetza, motopalchichioa, motezcauia, matezcauia, maltia, motema, mopapaca, maxpetzcoa, maxixipetzcoa, tlaaltinemi, mosuchimiccanenequi, aquetztinemi, tlaxocotinemi miuintitinemi momixiuitinemi, monanacauitinemi, moxaoa, moxaxaoa, mixtlapaloatzaluia, mocacantlapaluia, motlamiaoa, motlannochezuia, itzon quiquequemi, mochicoaztlaoa, motzotzoquauhtia,

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<sup>186</sup> Frances Karttunen, *An Analytical Dictionary*, 8.

<sup>187</sup> “*auiac*,” Molina, Nahuatl-Spanish section, 9v.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 9v.

<sup>189</sup> Karttunen, *op. cit.*, 4.

Mocuecueloa, cuecuetznemi, aquetztinemi moqualaztinemi, tlaelnemi,  
auilnemi, teuhtica tlaçoltica milacatzotinemi,

[She parades; she moves lasciviously; she is pompous. Wheresoever she seduces, howsoever she sets her heart [on one], she brings him to ruin. She makes herself beautiful; she arrays herself; she is haughty. She appears like a flower, looks gaudy, arrays herself gaudily; she views herself in a mirror—carries a mirror in her hand. She bathes; she takes a sweat bath; she washes herself; she anoints herself with *axin*—constantly anoints herself with *axin*. She lives like a bathed slave, acts like a sacrificial victim; she goes about with her head high—rude, drunk, shameless—eating mushrooms. She paints her face, variously paints her face; her face is covered with rouge, her cheeks are colored, her teeth are darkened—rubbed with cochineal. [Half] of her hair falls loose. Half is wound about her head. She arranges her hair like horns.

She goes about haughtily, shamelessly—head high, vain, filthy, given to pleasure. She lives in vice.]<sup>190</sup>

In terms of moral significance, the *auiani*'s bathing differs markedly from the bathing of the pregnant woman and the newborn baby in the *Florentine Codex*. In the latter two cases, bathing has a regenerative, healing quality: it cleanses the body of physical dirt and moral vice. In the case of the *auiani*, however, her excessive bathing is part of her vice. The Nahuatl texts expresses this vice as *milacatzotinemi* ("She lives in vice"), the base of this phrase being *ilacatzoa*, which Molina defines as "boluer el cuerpo por no ver ni mirar al que aborrece, o ceñirse la culebra al árbol," ["to turn one's back on someone whom he/she despises, or for a

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<sup>190</sup> Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* Part 11 (Book 10), ch. 15, eds. and trans. Anderson and Dibble, 55.

snake to wrap itself around a tree”].<sup>191</sup> The physical twisting in both definitions connotes a twist in moral character. The snake, wrapped around a tree, is similarly evocative of the *auiani*'s dangerous seduction. The reference to the snake also evokes the Christian conception of sin, one tied to women and temptation. Indeed, the characterization of the *auiani* in this passage complements Christian attitudes toward female sexuality. It may be that the authors of the *Florentine Codex* played to these attitudes, using the *auiani* as a contrast to the rectitude of proper women, especially among the nobility.

The *auiani*'s bathing parallels her excessive adornments and grooming. The flashiness of the *auiani*'s clothing matches in intensity the application of red paints (rouge and cochineal) on her face and teeth. Cochineal, extracted from an insect of the same name, has a particularly rich hue. It was a common colorant among pre-Conquest Nahuas, who pressed it into “tortilla-like cakes” and used it to dye hides and paint surfaces. The tortilla form apparently facilitated the transport and sale of it in markets. During the colonial period, it would become the most important export item from the Americas. Valued as a clothing dye, it reached European and Chinese markets. The “rouge” on the *ahuiani*'s face could have been derived from cochineal as well, or other sources such as *palo de Campeche*, *achiotl* (derived from a flower), *tezoatl* (derived from a hotland shrub). And these sources, in turn, could have been mixed with metals such as aluminum to enhance their color.<sup>192</sup> Cochineal, in turn, enhances the allure of the *auiani*'s mouth. The application of the cochineal on the teeth suggests a flashing of teeth themselves, perhaps a smile, something that we do not see people do in Nahua pictorial texts or

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<sup>191</sup> Molina, Nahuatl-Spanish section, 37r.

<sup>192</sup> For information on the sources for red paints I draw on Piero Baglioni et. al. “On the Nature of the Pigments of the *General History of the Things of New Spain: The Florentine Codex*,” *Color Between Worlds: The Florentine Codex of Bernardino de Sahagún*, eds. Gerhard Wolf et. al. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2011), 82-87. Although the authors of that article focus on the pigments used to make the *Florentine Codex*, they also indicate that the pigments were used on other surfaces, as well. I highlight the human body as one of those surfaces.

any other colonial text. There must have been something unrepresentable about a smile in these contexts, where people were represented as generic types rather than for their specific emotional states. The closest thing we see to a smile in pre-Hispanic images, whether paintings or statues, are not joyous but rather monstrous—mouths agape, tongues sticking out, such as representations of the (potentially female) earth deity *Tlalteuctli*.

In similar manner, this prose depiction of the *auiani* hovers between alluring and monstrous. Her disheveled hair, half done, half slack, is indicative of her sensuality or beauty as being escaping her own control. Her physical appearance is complemented by her consumption of alcohol (in the form of *octli*, or pulque) and (presumably psychoactive) mushrooms, also suggestive of her body's unrestrained appetite for pleasure. That consumption and its deleterious effects are amplified in the following passage:

Ixtimal, ixtimalpol, temaneloa, teixnotza, teicopilvia, teixcapitziua, teixcapitzalua, teixtlaxilia, temanotza, mixtlaça, uetzca, uetzcatinemi, moxuchtia, mususuchtia, tlaohana, xocomiqui, tlatlaoana, motlanênequiltia, motlanenectia, motenectia, motenenectia, tetlanectia, teiztlacauitinemi, teca mocaiauhtinemi, tlahchiuhtinemi, tetlanochilia, tetlanochilitinemi, tenamaca, tetzinnamaca, tetlaixcuepilia.

[She is a pretender, a fraud. She waves her hand at one, gestures with her head, makes eyes at one, closes one eye at one, winks, beckons with her head, summons with the hand, turns her face. She laughs—goes about laughing; she vomits—vomits constantly; she drinks wine; she is drunk—she constantly drinks wine. She is covetous; she becomes wealthy. She woos; she wishes to be coveted; she makes herself desirable. She goes about making a fool of one—deceiving one.

She is importunate. She is a procuress; she goes about procuring, selling persons, providing prostitutes, corrupting others.]<sup>193</sup>

The *auiani*'s bodily intoxication mirrors her intoxicating charms, adding to her allure. If she is out of control, she causes others to lose control as well. In other circumstances, intoxication would be acceptable within ritual ceremony. The *auiani*'s intoxication, however, falls out of those bounds, unregulated by religious or state authorities, an extension of her unchecked sexuality.

And yet, in both of the previously cited passages, one senses that the *auiani* wields a tremendous amount of control, both over herself and others. The term *moieiequetza* in the first of the two passages conveys not so much gaudiness as the polishing of oneself. This idea of polishing counterbalances the flamboyance of the *auiani*'s clothing, the splashes of red on her face, and her wayward hair. The second passage, in turn, emphasizes the *auiani*'s economic power as seller of her own and others' bodies. A series of closely related terms describes her desire and her ability to create it: "motlanênequiltia, motlanenectia, motenectia, motenenectia, tetlanectia." Diverging from Anderson and Dibble's translation, we can understand the first two terms as equivalent, both meaning "covetous." On the other hand, the second term may also serve as a homonym if not relative of *tlaneuhtia* ("to rent oneself"). This alternative definition overlaps with the third term, which we can translate as sharing oneself with others or making others desire oneself. The fourth term intensifies the third, meaning the *auiani* greatly or constantly makes others desire her. The fifth term, finally, refers to the action of making others want things in general, to "woo" others. Along these lines, we see a transposition of desire from person to person and from people to objects: the *auiani* wants things for herself (covets); she

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<sup>193</sup> Sahagún, op. cit., 56.

makes others covet her, and in this way profits from desire; she also creates a more generalized desire for things or people. The final descriptor fits with her work as a procuress. Her status as a Nahua madame inverts the claim in the previous passage that the *auiani* “lives like a bathed slave, acts like a sacrificial victim.” In this second passage she is herself the seller of people, a manipulator of desires as well as bodies. That status implies a hierarchy, network, and, perhaps, community of women as prostitutes and intermediaries—relationships controlled by the *auiani* in her dual role as prostitute and procuress. Given her potential power as seductress and procuress, the comparison between the *auiani* and slaves is curious. Notions of beauty, and the significance of bathing in particular, are key to this comparison.

**“The bathed one” as slave and sacrificial offering**

The association of the *auiani* and slavery hinges on pre-Conquest Nahua meanings of bathing. In the *Primeros memoriales* and the *Florentine Codex*, slaves and sacrificial victims are commonly regarded “the bathed ones,” and slave dealers “bathers of slaves.” The *Florentine Codex* characterizes the slave dealer thus:

Tecoani, Tealtiani

in tealtiani, puchtecaiacatl, tlapanuia, tlacaa, in innecuiltonol,  
mocuiltonoa, motlamachtia, totecuiio itlaiximach, totecuiio iicniuh.

In qualli tealtiani: molpilian, tlapachoani, tlapiani, tlateumatini,  
tlamauiçoani, tlatlaçocamatini, quimiiiaoaiotia, quiiacapitzaoa, in puchtecaiotl,  
molpilia, tlamauiçoa tlateumati.

In amo qualli tealtiani, mapach, mapachpol: macpalcocoioc,  
macpalcocoiocpol. Cioapaiatl, cioapaiapol, tlaauilquixtia, tlaauilicitta,  
tlaauilpoloa, tlatollantilia, mocnauia, tlatlameti, tzotzocati.

[The Slave Dealer, the Bather of Slaves

The bather of slaves [is] a leading merchant. He excels [all others]; his wealth is [as] a possessor of slaves. He is rich—rich in possessions. [He is] acknowledge by our lord—a friend of our lord.

The good bather of slaves [is] a conserver of his resources, a guardian of his assets, a caretaker; a devout man, admiring, grateful [to our lord]. He takes the top, the lead in merchantry. He conserves his resources; he admires, he is devoted [to our lord].

The bad bather of slaves [is] rapacious, predacious; prodigal, wasteful, ... He squanders his possessions; he dissipates, he wastes his possessions... He is self-indulgent, avaricious, stingy.]<sup>194</sup>

Placing the slave dealer at the front of the merchant class, this passage points to the preparation of slaves, destined for exchange or sacrifice. The act of bathing encapsulates that process, thus becoming synonymous with slavery itself.

As the description of the slave dealer suggests, cleanliness of the slave held great importance in the realm of state ceremony, and ceremonial sacrifice especially. Within the intertwined ceremonial and political practices of the Mexica empire, and prior Mesoamerican empires, human tribute held perhaps the greatest value of all tribute items, human flesh being necessary to feed the sun and sustain life. In the terrestrial realm, these beliefs were carried into praxis in agricultural ceremonies. The following passages illustrate the centrality of the “bathed ones” in these ceremonies. The celebration of *Quecholli*, held on the 24<sup>th</sup> of October, combined a ceremonial ‘burying’ of succulent plants with the beating and sacrifice of “the bathed ones”:

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<sup>194</sup> Sahagún, op. cit., ch. 16, p. 59.



Quecholli, iquac çacapã quixoaya. Auh in ipan j motenevaya temixcovatlatlavitecoya inic muchivaya, no micovaya, in miquia tlacutlj, anoço mallj. Auh inic motenevaya temixcovatlatlavitecoya inic muchivaya, tlapã quitecaya in tenopallj, y netzollj, in teumetl, ixco quitzetzeloyaya çacatl uncã muchivaya in mixcovateupã. Auh in malli anoço tlaaltli quinmailpiaya: ioã quimicxilpiaya, vncan quintlatlavitequia: çatepã quimeltequia: ÿ vncã tlapac mixcoateupã ioan netotiloaya çanioque: in oquichti yoã quĩcuicatiaya inteteuatzitzi.

[Quecholli, “Roseate Spoonbill” (*Ajaja ajaja*),” was the time when there was going out on the straw. And at this time was performed what was called “The Striking of the People by the Lightning Rays of Mixcoatl.” There were deaths also; slaves or captives died. And when [the rite] called “The Striking of the People by the Lightning Rays of Mixcoatl” was performed, thus was it done: They placed prickly pears, thorny cactus, and the fine *octli* magueys on the earth [and] sprinkled straw over them; this was done in the Temple of Mixcoatl. And they bound the hands and feet of captives or bathed ones and there they beat them. After this they cut open their breasts on top of the Temple of Mixcoatl, and there was dancing of only the men; god-keepers sang to them.]<sup>195</sup>

Meanwhile, during the “Izcalli Ends” ceremony, held on January 12<sup>th</sup>, an impersonator of the god Ixcozauhqui was killed. Thereafter,

auh in aquĩ tealtiaya quimictiaya in ixcozauhq’ ioã netotiloaya. Auh inic mitoa tealtianj yehica yn itlacauh muchipa caltiaya atotonjltica in ixquichcauh cempalilhuitl: ioã muchipa quimaca in quallj tlaquallj, ioã in itepixcauh aviani

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<sup>195</sup> Sahagún, *Primeros Memoriales*, Ch. 1 “Rituals and Gods,” ed. and trans. Thelma D. Sullivan, 64.

çiuatl muchipa in tlacuchia, in ixquichcauh cenpoalilhujtl. Auh in iquac miquia  
tlaaltili ÿ çiuatl avianj muchi quicua in ixq'ch itlatqui tlaaltillij;

[Anyone who bathed someone killed him as [the impersonator of]  
ixcozauhqui, and a dance was performed. And one was called a bather of people  
because he constantly bathed his slave in hot water during the entire twenty days,  
and he always served him fine food. His guardian was a pleasure girl who always  
slept with him during the twenty days, and after the bathed one had died the  
pleasure girl took all the bathed one's possessions.]<sup>196</sup>

The *Quecholli* ceremony illustrates the “bathed one’s” ultimate demise atop a temple. The “Izcalli Ends” ceremony, in contrast, highlights the bathing of the captive, an act repeated over 20 days. The feeding of the captive compliments this cleansing. Together they constitute a system of care-taking geared toward sacrifice. Within this system of care, the *auiani* reappears as the guardian of the captive. Her presence reactivates the association between her and slavery, straddling the line between concubine and prostitute. Yet, unlike the descriptions of the *auiani* cited previously, she is depicted here as providing an important service within state ceremony, that service rewarded by appropriation of the “bathed one’s” possessions. What we see in this example, then, is the interlinking value between war and prostitution in the circulation of human tribute. The debt owed to the gods, above all in the form of human sacrifice, created points of profit for those engaged in the preparation and care of slaves. To the state, and by extension the gods for who rulers were stewards, went human tribute. The *auiani*, as intermediary agent, collects the possessions of the captive as subsidiary tribute. Yet, in the end, the circulation of

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 67.

human tribute, as bodies destined for sale and sacrifice, revolved around beauty and beautification.

Beauty for pre-Conquest Nahuas involved a balance between attraction and revulsion. As we see in the previous passages, the preparation and care given to the captive leads to a brutal end, the beauty of the captive matched by the terrible disfiguration of his body. These operations come into full display in the *Tlacaxipehualiztli* ceremony, as described in the *Florentine Codex*:

Auh yn oqujcaoato eoaatl, yn onmaqjtiuja, amo mixamja atica, çan iotextli, tlaoltextli, inic onmixxaxaqualooa, ynic onmjxmamatiloa, mixiotexuja:

Vncã oneoa, in teupan, ynic maltituih, ynin nealtiaia, amo qujnmamatiloaia, çan qujntzotzona, qujntlatlatzinja, iuhqujn tlatlazcatimanj, ic poujia, ic vel jujça in chioaliztli. Auh no yquac, netzonpaco in tlamaj, motzopaca, mamouja:

Impampa inic oquinneçaujlique, yn inmaloa, aic amaltique, omotzoiotique, inic oquiz cempoalilhujtl: cenvetzi yn inchantlaca, yn aic omaltique, qujnmuchiquacmaltia, mamoujia: ic mjtoa netzõpaco, anoço netzopaco, ynjc omotzoiotique:

auh çatepan itoalco, qujquetza in male, qujtlalia quauhtzontapaiolli, ey icsi, tzicujlicxe, ytech qujtlatlalia: yn jamatlatquj, ynjc omochichioaia totec.

Auh vncan conana ce tlatatl talqualittalli, tlauelittalli chicoaac: ie no ceppa ie ic muchichioaia, ipan tetotoca, tececenmana, tlatatl qujcocomonja, motlaloa mochimalcaltituih, qujcacalatztuih ychicaoaz qujcaotztuij, qujtetoca, q'tepachotiuj, qujtecali:

Much tlacatl qujmautia, ipan macauj: qujtoa, Ie uitz tetzompacqj:

Tlacaxipeualiztli

[And they who had come to dispose of the skins, which they had gone about wearing, washed themselves not with water, but with flour—with corn meal, with which they rubbed their faces. They scrubbed their faces with flour.

[57] They departed hence to go the temple to bathe. These who bathed they did not rub, but struck and slapped, [with a noise] like the breaking of ocean waves. Thus came to an end and disappeared the grease. And also this was the time for the washing of heads. The captors washed their heads and washed off the sweat with a soap [called *amolli*].

For while all had fasted for their captives, they had never bathed; they had remained in filth until twenty days had passed. Likewise those of their household had never bathed. Then all bathed and washed their heads with soap. Thus it was said: “The hair was washed,” or, “The filth was washed away.” [For] so were they covered with filth.

And thereafter the owner of the captive set up in the courtyard [of his house] a woven twig ball on three small feet. Upon it he placed the paper adornment with which had been adorned the Totec [when he died].

And from here he brought out one pleasing to look upon, acceptable, and strong. He likewise was adorned [with paper vestments of Xipe]. In them he took after people; he dispersed them; the man vexed them. He ran; he went using his shield as shelter and rattling his rattle-board. They went after him in disorder; they showered him with stones, and pelted him and attacked him with stones.

Everyone feared him, and let him pass. They said: “Now cometh he who hath washed his head.”]<sup>197</sup>

This passage, in the first place, features a multiplication of the Xipe Totec (“Our Lord the Flayed One”). The identity of Xipe Totec is transferred via the donning of a skin. At the beginning, this is the flayed skin of the sacrificed captive. At the end, it is not a human skin but rather the paper vestments of Xipe (“The Flayed One”). In between the burying of the flayed skins of prior captives and the donning of the paper vestments by a new captive is an elaborate process of cleansing. That process activates the dynamic relationship between filth and cleanliness, this relationship manifested via the performances of captive and captor. Abstinence in bathing—and here again, a 20-day period comes into affect, the number 20 having particular importance in the vigesimal system of the Nahuas—accentuates the eventual bathing of the captors and their families, the washing of body and hair. Meanwhile, the presumed feeding of the captives is counterbalanced by the fasting of their captors. The key to the Xipe ceremony, seen at the end of the passage, is the selection of a beautiful young man as the new Xipe impersonator. The paper Xipe costume enhances this beauty, the ideal human form (within Nahua culture) teeming with the divine yet monstrous form of the Xipe figure. Indeed, the captive, as Xipe, inspires admiration while terrifying onlookers. That opposition, that tension, in the end, can only be resolved via the final and definitive disfiguration of the Xipe captive’s body via stoning. The above agricultural ceremonias highlight the bathing and beauty of the male captive. Within these ceremonies, women, through the *auiani*, figure as complimentary agents, stewards of state ceremony.

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<sup>197</sup> Sagahún, *Florentine Codex*, Part 3 (Book 2: “The Ceremonies”), ch. 22, ed. and trans. Anderson and Dibble, 56-57.

Yet, in other instances, young women feature as central figures in agricultural ceremonies, chief among them the celebration of Huey Tozotli. As the centerpiece of this celebration, the young women undergo an elaborate process of adornment verging on the ostentatious regimen of the *auiani* we have seen previously.

Auh in ichpopuchi, tlapaliujtica qujnpotonja, in inmac, ymicxic, yoã qujnxaoaia, ovme qujnpilhuja chapopotli apetztzo, tlaapetzujlli, tlaapetziotilli: necocampa in camatepa.

Niman ie ic qujnujca yn ichpopuchi, qujmamatiuh in cintli, no cinteutl motocaiotiaia: ymixpã hicatiuj, qujntepeuitiuj, qujmololhujiuj, cemixtli invic: aiac in maca qujmjtta, qujnecemjtta, aiac qujncamanalhuja.

Auh intla aca tecamanalhuja, qujoalaoa qujoalilhuja:

No uellatoa in cuexpalle, vel teh titlatoa? Ma ie ic xitlaocua, quen uetziz in mocuxpal, cuexpantone? Cuexpaliac, cuexpalpoto, amo çan tinocioapo? acan motlachinauja mocujtl.

[And they pasted the young girls' arms and legs with red feathers; they painted their faces, fastening [on them] two [circles of] fish paste flecked with iron pyrites on both sides, on their cheeks.

Then, they accompanied the young girls, who carried upon their backs the dried maize, also called Cinteotl. They kept going before them; they went surrounding and encircling them, looking on fascinated. None of those crowded about looked upon them; [none] looked fixedly at them; none joked with them.

And if anyone was merry with one of them, they chid him. They said unto him:

“verily, he with the long [tangled] hair of a youth also speaketh! Dost thou indeed speak? Be thou concerned over how may be removed thy tuft of hair, thou with the long hair! Thou with the evil-smelling, stinking forelock, art thou not only a woman like me? Nowhere hath thy excrement [yet] been burned.”<sup>198</sup>

Like the *auiani* with her rouge and cochineal embellishments, the red feathers pasted onto the young woman convey an image of flamboyance, of gaudiness. The sparking pyrites would have created a noticeable contrast with the red feathers. Unlike the *auiani*, however, the purpose of these adornments would not be to seduce but rather to restrict the gaze of the male spectator. The harsh reprimand directed at the transgressive young man reinforces this restriction. The beauty of the young woman could only be taken in obliquely or indirectly, recognized but not acted upon.

If we can understand the young women in the festival of *Huey Tozoztli* as a transfiguration, even reversal, of the *auiani*, likewise we can see in them an imperfect image of the women given to the Spaniards in Amaquemecan upon Cortés’ arrival. The maize stalks carried by the young women during *Huey Tozoztli* provide a parallel image of the 40 women in Amaquemecan carrying feather devices on their backs. In a similar vein the feather devices themselves enhance the beauty of the 40 women much like the feathers worn during *Huey Tozoztli*. These similarities signal a continuation of Nahua conceptions of beauty within the regime of state ceremony. The meeting with Cortés, after all, was precisely that: a moment of ceremonial pomp, welcoming Cortés while also showcasing the power of indigenous rulers, an ambiguity that finds quintessential expression in the phrase “quimonamictique quintlauhtique.” Along these same lines, the intended betrothal of the 40 women incorporates marriage within this diplomatic meeting.

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., ch. 23, 61.

In this regard, the preparations of young women for marriage entail a process similar to the *Huey Tozoztli* preparations outlined in the *Primeros memoriales*:

And when the sun went hanging low, then they bathed the woman; they washed her hair with soap; they pasted her, arm and leg, with red feathers, and bedizened her face with pyrites. But if one was still somewhat a girl, they bedizened her face with yellow. And when preparations had been completed, then they placed her before the hearth upon a reed mat. Thereupon the [youth's] old men addressed her, greeted her, animated her.

[Auh in ommopiloto tonatiuh: njman ie ic caaltia in cioatl, camovia, qujpotonja tlapalivitica in jmac, in jicxic, ioan qujxaoa apetztica: auh yn oc achi ichpuchtli, tecoçautica in qujxaoaia. Auh in ocôcencauhque: njman ic contlalia tlecujlixquac, petlapan: njman ie ic qujnonotza in vevetque, qujtlapaloo, quellaquaooa:

Again, the importance of ritual, performance: aligning the act of bathing with time: close to sunset: the sun hanging low.]<sup>199</sup>

Here, again, we notice the use of pyrites on the face and the pasting of red feathers on the arms and legs. The color yellow appears to have particular significance in regards to the girl's age. The luster of the pyrites suggests sexual maturity, a more plain yellow suggesting the opposite.

The connotations of yellow in the pre-Conquest marriage ceremony stand in contrast to the racial connotations of yellow in the Conquest encounter. In the former, pyrites and paints are applied to the body of the young woman as enhancements of her beauty. In the latter, yellow skin, or light-skin, itself figures as beautiful, an approximation of ideal Spanish-Christian

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 59.



women. While understanding the Spanish desire for young, beautiful women, indigenous leaders would have drawn on their own conceptions of beauty in satisfying this desire. Thus, in the case of the 40 young *macehual* women of Amaquemecan, we see the same techniques and processes used by the *auiani* and in the preparation of brides and captives. We can say that the 40 women, in their gifting to the Spanish conquistadors, occupy a space where these different contexts overlap: that of marriage, captivity, slavery, and sacrifice. The meeting point of these elements is the act of Conquest gifting between Spanish and Nahua societies

### **Conclusion**

Beyond Chimalpahin's description of the gifting of the 40 women in Amaquemecan, we know nothing about their respective fates. In that sense, the violence of conquest history compounds the violence of conquest itself—their transfer into Spanish hands, and subsequent disappearance. The circulation of women in conquest thus leads us to a sobering reality: the consumption of women's bodies whether as wives or objects of tribute, in the transfer of control over their bodies. Only in select cases, such as that of Malintzin or Doña Luisa, do we witness the continued exercise of indigenous women's power through the conquest. And it may be that Malintzin, like her mother before her, played a part in the transfer of indigenous women into Spanish hands and exercised some control over them thereafter. In the case of Doña Luisa, in turn, we see an instantiation, not just by her but by the Tlaxcalan community, of her ruling privileges when the community honors her marriage to Pedro de Alvarado with a plethora of gifts. In that case, the woman gifted, as noble, herself continues to control the tribute of her community, to receive gifts and manage community wealth, as seen earlier in this chapter. While the case of Tlaxcala is not equivalent to Amaquemecan, it provides us with a sense that

indigenous communities, and women in particular, might hope to continue to exert control over property albeit within the colonial regime.

Nonetheless, it is important to recognize the obverse of that control, the lack of control over people's bodies in the Conquest as a condition for colonial rule and the instantiation of a new racial regime. That regime, in turn, entailed a reconfiguration of codes of beauty between Nahuas and Spaniards, a contrast between adornment of the body and the color of the body itself. The mediating factor between these opposed conceptions is the desire of Nahuas in Tlaxcala and Amaquemecan and Spaniards to find a common ground. Women's bodies would serve as the vehicle for establishing diplomatic relations in first contact.

#### Chapter 4. Feeding Earth, Feeding Empire: Maguey and Women at Imperial Crossroads

Just before arriving to Amaquemecan in November 1519, Hernán Cortés and his men hit an unexpected roadblock: a wall of maguey plants blocking the path to Tenochtitlan and leaving open another road to Tetzaco. This curious detail of the Spanish Conquest, recorded by the *tlacuilos* of the *Florentine Codex*, illustrates Moteuczoma's final effort to impede Cortés' entrance into the Mexica capital. Maguey plants, eminently useful in pre-Conquest times, acquired another use as a line of defense against the foreign invaders, the plant taking the place of stone walls and human bodies while providing the semblance of uncleared land, a road disappeared. Yet if the Mexica expected to redirect the Spaniards toward Tetzaco, part of the Mexica-led Triple Alliance, that plan would prove fruitless. As the *tlacuilos* tell us,

Auh in vncañ quimetepätzacca: niman quimatque, quittaque in çan  
oquitzatzacque, atle ipan conittaque, caanque, veca conxoxopeuhque,  
quioalchichitotzque, veca ica ommamaiahque in metl.

[And where they had closed the road with a wall of maguey, [the Spaniards] immediately recognized it, they saw that they had just blocked it, and they disregarded it. They took the magueys, kicked them far away, sent them flying, hurled them far off to the side.]<sup>200</sup>

The scene unfolds with a tinge of comedy: instead of fighting an army or toppling buildings, the Spanish soldiers thrash the maguey plants, kicking them "far away," making them airborne. This episode gives us with a rare glimpse into the accumulated frustrations of the Spaniards with the

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<sup>200</sup> Lockhart, *We People Here*, 104-106.

many ruses devised for them by indigenous leaders on the path to Tenochtitlan. This time, with no clear enemy in sight, Cortés and his men would take out their frustrations on the oversized agaves that Moteuczoma had ordered to be planted, or laid down, on the road: “Auh in Moteucōma, oc nen tlanaoatica in quitzatzaquazque in vtli, in vchpantli, quimetecaque in oallamelauhticac nicā Mexico” [“And in a vain attempt Moteucōma ordered that the roads and highways be closed off in various places. They planted magueys in the road coming straight to Mexico here”].<sup>201</sup> The effect of laying down indicated via the verb “quimetecaque,” and which Anderson and Dibble translate as “they planted,” would create the illusion not of a vertical wall but, rather, a horizontal wall simulating where the roads end and inhospitable territory begins. The horizontal maguey wall, and closing off of the road, plays on the separation between built and natural environment, a ruse recognized and foiled by the Spaniards.

In conjunction with Chimalpahin’s narrative, this episode prefaces that other ruse awaiting the Spaniards in Amaquemecan—the transformation of *macehual* women into noble wives. In these two instances, women and maguey both serve as a line of defense in the blurry area between capitulation and resistance. Even in the case of Tlaxcala, the most important ally of the Spaniards, cooperation was never a given. The Tlaxcalteca themselves employed their Otomi subjects as a military buffer against the Spaniards, later claiming ignorance when the Otomi attacked Cortés and his men. Tlaxcalan leaders then tested the Spaniards with gifts of slave women before giving their own daughters in marriage, an act that, for better or worse, cemented a Spanish-indigenous alliance. On the other hand, the Spaniards exploited apparent or overt perfidy by indigenous leaders, finding in these acts of betrayal a pretext for razing whole communities or executing indigenous leaders. This is the reason for the massacres in Cholula and

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

Tenochtitlan, and the hanging of Cuauhtemoc during an expedition for gold treasures that the Mexica had purportedly hidden. As discussed in my previous chapter, this obsession with gold mediated the values attached to people and things, women especially.

As with the women given to the Spaniards, the maguey wall laid down by Moteuczoma's agents presents us with a clash of Mesoamerican and Spanish value systems. Before and after the Conquest, maguey plants had numerous practical uses: as a source of medicine and food on one hand, and textile fibers and building material on the other.<sup>202</sup> For populations in the arid northern regions of Mexico, the maguey plant, a succulent that thrives in the desert, provided a critical source of water—either as rainwater collected in the plant's large, curved leaves<sup>203</sup> or as *aguamiel*, the nutrient-rich sap collected from the plant's base, or "heart." Maguey fibers, considered low quality in comparison to cotton and rabbit fibers, were perhaps the principal clothing material for the majority of the pre-Conquest population in central Mexico. The maguey plant also provides a special service in indigenous agriculture, helping to conserve the land when interplanted with seed crops, which makes maguey imminently useful in arid regions where the plant thrives.<sup>204</sup> Maguey's usefulness thus benefits both migratory as well as more sedentary communities.

According to Cynthia Radding, the migratory communities in the desert regions of northern Mexico and present-day US developed a symbiotic relationship with agaves, maguey especially, and this helps explain the sacred value that pre-Conquest Mesoamerican communities

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<sup>202</sup> Jeffrey R. Parsons and Mary H. Parsons, *Maguey Utilization in Highland Central Mexico: An Archaeological Ethnography* (University of Michigan: Museum of Anthropology, 1990), 1-9.

<sup>203</sup> The 16<sup>th</sup> century friar Motolinía wrote that "En las pencas u hojas de ese maguey hallan los caminantes agua, porque como tiene muchas pencas y cada una como he dicho tiene vara y media de largo, cuando llueve, algunas de ellas retienen en sí el agua, lo cual como ya los caminantes lo sepan y tengan experiencia de ella, vanlo a buscar, y muchas veces les es mucha consolación." In Raúl Guerrero Guerrero, *El pulque*, 1980 (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología, 1985); 78.

<sup>204</sup> Parsons and Parsons, 4.

would attach to maguey, deifying it in the form of a goddess named Mayahuel (Powerful Flow).<sup>205</sup> With the growth of imperial Mesoamerican states, the sacred value of the maguey plant shifted disproportionately to its alcoholic product, *pulque*, the fermented form of *aguamiel*. The imbibing of *pulque* would become integral to elite, state ceremony.<sup>206</sup> As provider of *pulque*, Mayahuel joined a constellation of deities representing fertility and fecundity. Yet, Mayahuel never achieved the status of the corn deities. While Mayahuel appears in indigenous illustrated books, she does not appear as a stone figure in the extant archaeological record. Meanwhile, stone figures of Chicomecoatl, goddess of corn, abound in the period of Mexica rule.<sup>207</sup> This discrepancy suggests a differentiation between maguey and corn corresponding to migratory, semi-sedentary societies and agriculture-based states and empires, respectively. While maguey was critical to the entrance of groups into central Mexico from the north, corn sustained Mesoamerica's empires, which date to about 1,500 BCE.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Cynthia Radding, "The Children of Mayahuel: Agaves, Human Cultures, and Desert Landscape in Northern Mexico," *Environmental History* 17 (January 2012), 84-115. There are a number of theories regarding the meaning of Mayahuel. The translation "Powerful Flow" comes from Thelma Sullivan, via Quiñones Keber, "Mayahuel and Maguey: Sustenance and Sacrifice in an Aztec Myth," *Latin American Indian Literatures Journal* 5.2 (Fall 1989), 74.

<sup>206</sup> See Guerrero Guerrero and also Oswaldo Gonçalves de Lima, *El maguey y el pulque en los codices mexicanos* (Mexico City: 1956). While the ritual importance of *pulque* in central Mexico is well known, more recently Lucia Henderson has elucidated its importance among the ancient Maya. See Lucia Henderson, "Blood, Water, Vomit, and Wine," *Mesoamerican Voices* 3 (2008), 53-76.

<sup>207</sup> Quiñones Keber notes this distinction between Mayahuel and corn goddesses. Quiñones Keber, 73, 77. A stone statue currently on display at the Museo del Templo Mayor in Mexico City is labeled as Mayahuel. The sculpture, however, bears no observable traits distinguishing it as Mayahuel. Rather, it resembles a female Tlaltecuctli, Earth Lord, whose likeness appears in other stone sculptures.

<sup>208</sup> Based on updated archeological findings, Douglas J. Kennett, Dean Martorana, and Barbara Voorhies date the initial domestication of corn (maize) to about 9,200 years ago. They identify the Balsas River Valley of southern Mexico as the starting point for corn domestication. Douglas J. Kennett, Dean Martorana, and Barbara Voorhies, "An Ecological Model for the Origins of Maize-based Food Production on the Pacific Coast of Southern Mexico," *Behavioral Ecology and the Transition to Agriculture*, Eds. Douglas J. Kennett and Bruce Winterhalder (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 121. About 1,500 BCE the first major Mesoamerican civilization, the Olmec, emerged out of farming communities in Mexico's Gulf Coast, in present-day Veracruz. Tracking corn iconography among the Olmec, Karl Taube notes that "in both ancient and contemporary Mesoamerica, no other foodstuff has had a more profound role in social and cultural development than corn, or *Zea mays*." Karl Taube, "The Olmec Maize God: The Face of Corn in Formative Mesoamerica," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 29/30: The Pre-Columbian (Spring – Autumn, 1996), 39. Regarding the importance of corn among the Mexica, Mesoamerica's last pre-Conquest empire, see Richard E. Blanton, "The Basin of Mexico Market System and the Growth of Empire," *Aztec Imperial Strategies*, 53-57.

In effect, maguey remained closely rooted to the earth, to the migratory populations on the edges of and away from the imperial centers. Part of this condition of the maguey plant may be attributed to its considerable bulk. Much larger than normal agave, maguey plants range height from six to ten feet and its leaves can extend from three to five feet. As such, they easily exceed the size of an actual person. No wonder, then, that Mayahuel is illustrated in Pre-Conquest painted almanacs as a woman nursing a human child—one can imagine being taken into and carried by the sturdy, albeit sharp, “arms” of the maguey plant. Given its limited transportability and sensitivity to irrigation, maguey simply could not be domesticated to the extent that corn could, particularly as agricultural production intensified within Mesoamerican empire.<sup>209</sup> On the other hand, its size and contribution to arable soil make maguey a useful fence demarcating the limits of one’s planting field. The cultivation of maguey involves not seeding but rather relocating the already sprouted plant, and the new location could not be too far from the original sprouting place of the maguey plant. Finally, unlike corn, the edible parts of the maguey (its juice, its roasted “heart”) are highly perishable, requiring almost immediate consumption. Thus, even as nurturing “mother,” the maguey plant defies large-scale domestication. Its cultivation requires constant attachment to the earth and extensive waiting periods for harvest. Perhaps for this reason the maguey plant could not be transposed to monumental temples the way corn could.

In this chapter, I interpret the maguey plant as active agent mediating between mobility and imperial domestication. Personified as woman, maguey serves as an allegory for the status of

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<sup>209</sup> Richard E. Blanton notes that “while there are only limited ways to intensify maguey production per hectare, maize, and presumably the other main *milpa* crops, are much more amenable to intensification of production per hectare. These intensification techniques involved irrigation, fertilizing, hot-bedding, and multiple cropping (in the *chinampas* and perhaps in other irrigated situations), among other labor-intensive strategies, allowing maize to outproduce maguey by a factor of up to nearly five.” Blanton, 53-56.

indigenous women before and after the Conquest, particularly in their relationship to property ownership and their participation in public markets. Within that allegory, the domestication of maguey mirrors the domestication of women in the enclosure of a commons, in the uprooting and re-settlement of populations. Against this domestication, however, the cultivation and use of the maguey plant represents a renewal of a common space of mutual care, not just between people but between humans and the physical environment.

This argument will advance in three sections centered on human-maguey interactions in pre- and post-Conquest situations in central Mexico. Each section considers a text, or set of texts, that depict this interaction within the ritual and economic dynamics of pre- and post-Conquest Mexico: 1) select pages from the painted Mesoamerican manuscripts collectively known as the *Borgia* Group, with a special focus on the *Codex Borgia*; 2) an indigenous hymn to maguey, recorded in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century; and 3) a number of viceregal *cédulas* (mandates), issued in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, permitting indigenous people to “freely use” and “benefit from” their maguey plants.

These sparsely studied sources provide distinct yet overlapping expressions for the ritual and economic significance of maguey. The hymn, recited by an anonymous field worker, presents us with a spoken exhortation to the deities depicted visually in the *Borgia* manuscripts. The *cédulas*, meanwhile, address the economic pressures faced by maguey cultivators and *aguamiel* venders under Spanish rule. These three texts illustrate the intimate relationship between women and maguey, from maguey personified as a woman to women as stewards of maguey—as mothers, property owners and vendors. The tribute demands mentioned in the *cédulas*, in turn, mark a new imperial appropriation, or enclosure, of maguey production, an act that succeeds and usurps the attempts of Mesoamerican empires to “domesticate” the plant



within their ritual and political economies. As such, the maguey plant stands at an imperial crossroads, both between empires and between mobile and state societies. I propose the idea of imperial crossroads as an addendum to Mary Louise Pratt's theory of the "contact zone," which preoccupies itself with forms of literacy in the Americas, especially the Andes, after the Spanish invasion. My conceptualization of imperial crossroads considers the movement of people and plants across multiple imperial moments, before and after the Conquest, as constitutive of Mexican modernity. The maguey plant stands as a mediating figure across these imperial moments, which include the passage into and out of sedentary, urban societies.

The driving themes for this analysis are metabolism and domestication, concepts that I use to consider a range of bodies (human, plant, animal, earth) in relations of co-dependence, of mutual use and care. In the *Borgia* manuscripts, the earth and the cosmos find expression as women's bodies. On the other hand, we can say that human bodies become vehicles for expressing celestial movements, the observation of which is critical to time keeping and agricultural production. Cultivation and harvesting, meanwhile, serve as critical components of the earth's metabolic process, where production, consumption and reproduction come together in what I will call a "metabolic loop"—the earth feeding from laboring human bodies while also providing sustenance to those same bodies.

At the same time, agricultural production, farming, or what came to be known "husbandry" in the West, constitutes one form of domestication: that of plant life and animal life, nonhuman bodies. Husbandry, at one point, had another meaning: the management of household economy, implicitly by a man.<sup>210</sup> While this definition of husbandry is obsolete, the gender

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<sup>210</sup> Two definitions provided in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: 1) "The administration and management of a household; domestic economy"; 2) "The business or occupation of a husbandman or farmer; tillage or cultivation of the soil (including also the rearing of livestock and poultry, and sometimes extended to that of bees, silkworms, etc.); agriculture, farming." "husbandry, n," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, June 2015), web, 30 July 2015.

hierarchy it describes nonetheless remains functional in the modern conception of the household. It is important to keep in mind that in Late Old English husband (*húsbonda*) comes from *hús*, meaning house, and *bónða* (also *bonda* or *bunda*, originally from Old Norse *búa* or *bóa*) meaning “to dwell, have a household.”<sup>211</sup> The term “husbandry” thus imagines the house as farm and vice versa, both as places of domestication dominated by men. The things domesticated on the farm are plants, animals and the land, the earth itself, while in the home women come under the domesticating power of the husband. As Chris Cuomo puts it,

To *domesticate* means ‘to tame to domestic use or uses,’ or ‘to accustom to household life and affairs,’ and *domestic* means ‘of the home, the household, or the family,’ or ‘devoted to home life’ (Random House Dictionary 1980). Within the ethics of domestication, a ‘good’ woman is a woman well-suited to and contented with life in the home, who obeys the master of the house as a ‘good’ horse obeys the wielder of the whip.<sup>212</sup>

The texts explored in this chapter help us to reimagine human-earth relationships alongside relationships between men and women. The holistic imagining of the relationship among human and non-human bodies, in turn, requires a thinking of the earth as a living body that produces and consumes, a body with its own metabolic processes alongside and in relation to plant and animal bodies. With the increasing impetus for an ecologically-conscious critique of political economy, John Bellamy Foster has advanced Marx’s theory of the “metabolic rift,” introduced in *Capital: Volume 1* and elaborated further in *Capital Volume 3*, though as Bellamy notes, Marx’s concern with environmental degradation, particularly via modern, industrial

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<sup>211</sup> "husband, n." *OED Online*.

<sup>212</sup> Chris J. Cuomo, *Feminism and Ecological Communities: An Ethic of Flourishing* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 103-104.

agriculture, runs throughout his work. This rift occurs between the metabolic needs of humans and those of the earth, in the use of earth's resources without replenishment, under industrialized agriculture and the intensified separation of city from country. Bellamy provides the following quote from Marx's *Capital: Volume 1*, Chapter 7, on "The Labour Process and the Valorization Process":

Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature. He confronts the materials of nature as a force of nature. He sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his own body, his arms, legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs. Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature. . . . It [the labor process] is the universal condition for the metabolic interaction [Stoffwechsel] between man and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence.<sup>213</sup>

Here, nature stands in for the earth-body, the physical environment, which has its own metabolism just as its individual components (plants, animals, including human animals) have theirs.

Work, labor, is the process that inextricably ties human bodies with the earth, social metabolism with the earth's metabolism. And labor, Marx tells us, depends on accumulated products, created by others and whose materials ultimately come from the earth, a common property, simultaneously a gift: "The property therefore which labour-power in action, living

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<sup>213</sup> John Bellamy Foster, "Marx's Theory of Metabolic Rift: Classical Foundations for Environmental Sociology," *American Journal of Sociology* 105.2 (September 1999), 380.

labour, possesses of preserving value, at the same time that it adds it, is a gift of nature which costs the worker nothing, but is very advantageous to the capitalist since it preserves the existing value of his capital.”<sup>214</sup> With a quote from Lucretius, Marx illustrates his conception of labour as the ability to work the earth and its resources, as a gift from the earth: “‘*nil posse creari de nihilo*’, out of nothing, nothing can be created. ‘Creation of value’ is the transposition of labour-power into labour. Labour-power itself is, above all else, the material of nature transposed into a human organism.”<sup>215</sup> Value itself, then, arises as a gift from the earth.

In discussing the earth-body as woman’s body or earth-mother I follow the conceptions provided by the illustrators of the *Borgia* manuscripts and the reciter of the maguey hymn recorded by Ruiz de Alarcón. These texts paint an image of domestic spaces, whether farm or home, as a space of tension between local autonomy (of women, households, or communities) and the dictates of imperial formations manifested as states and cities dominating other communities. As such, the domestic sphere can be pulled toward either pole. As Cuomo argues, “Some measure of domestication is required of all of humans, and men as well as women must adapt to ‘human living conditions’ if they are to count as full moral agents, as citizens, as liverers of good lives. Nonetheless, domestication entails far more stringent ethical requirements for females in most societies, and many species of nonhuman animals are reduced to mere instruments through domestication.”<sup>216</sup> In this vein, Cuomo cautions against uncomplicated dyads such as woman-nature or earth-mother but, more importantly, against the outright dismissal of these constructions, which can still be useful.<sup>217</sup> Indeed, the maguey hymn may very well have been recited by a woman rather than a man, which turns the presumption of

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<sup>214</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*, 1976, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 315.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 323, footnote 2.

<sup>216</sup> Cuomo, 104.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-118.

farmer/laborer-as-man on its head. Meanwhile, the viceregal *cédulas* portray women as managers of households and active participants in public spaces who insist on their right to occupy those spaces. Each text, however, also presents us with the potential enclosure of common spaces, a tendency to be resisted.

### **Feeding the Earth-Mother: Maguey as Mayahuel in the *Borgia* Codices**

In pre-Conquest Mesoamerica, the maguey plant, a quintessential source of sustenance across northern and central Mexico, found divine expression through the goddess Mayahuel. Illustrations of Mayahuel appear in a variety of early colonial and pre-Conquest painted manuscripts, including the *Borgia* Group of divinatory almanacs from the Puebla-Tlaxcala region of central Mexico. Within the corpus of extant Mesoamerican codices, the *Borgia* Group is one of the best examples of pre-Conquest writing in book form. The illustrations in the *Borgia* texts depict the mantic energies of particular days in the ritual 260-day calendar, called the *tonalpohualli* (day-count). The 260-day calendar consists of 20 day-signs—represented by animals, plants, and divine entities—divided into 13-day counts, called *trecenas*. Twenty *trecenas* complete a 260-day cycle. From central Mexico into Central America, diviners used calendrical almanacs like those of the *Borgia* Group to predict the fates of newborns or newly married couples. Contemporary Mayan diviners in Guatemala continue to use a 20-day calendar in their own forecasts, albeit without the help of the richly illustrated books of the pre-Conquest period. Barbara Tedlock's work among the highland Maya shows that the 260-day calendar was created to track human gestation and, thus, pregnancy.<sup>218</sup> Boone adds that the coincidence of the

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<sup>218</sup> See Barbara Tedlock, *Time and the Highland Maya*, 1982 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992), 93, 190; Dennis Tedlock, *Popol Vuh: The Definitive Edition of the Mayan Books of the Dawn of Life and the Glories of Gods and Kings*, 1985 (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 225-226; Elizabeth Hill Boone, *Cycles of Time and Meaning in the Mexican Books of Fate* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 17. Barbara Tedlock links the 260-day calendar to both human gestation and corn vegetation, a connection that surely heightens the ritual importance of corn and explains the Mesoamerican conception of corn as a young child, an idea transmitted in ancient and contemporary folklore as well as in pre-Conquest Mesoamerican manuscripts. In his introduction to the

260-day calendar with the cycles of the moon and Venus increased the importance of the *tonalpohualli*.<sup>219</sup> Yólotl González, cited in Guerrero Guerrero, remarks that in pre-Conquest times, the extraction of *aguamiel* from the womb of the maguey plant occurred in accordance with the phases of the moon and that today the maguey plant is initially opened during the waxing moon, when *aguamiel* production is most abundant.<sup>220</sup>

Through the figure of Mayahuel, the abundance of *aguamiel* mirrors the nourishment that the mother provides to her child. As a system of knowledge, the *tonalpohualli* helps to order these figurations of sustenance and nourishment. This is a knowledge arising from women's bodies, accumulated over generations and deployed by midwives in the care of pregnant women and diviners concerned with forecasting human fates. For this reason, I read the *Borgia* manuscripts as containing practical and ritual knowledge, their contents illustrated through the collective bodies of the heavens, humans, animals and plants. According to Nowotny, the gods represented in the codices are oftentimes humans in god-costumes, or god-impersonators (*ixiptla* in Nahuatl), the illustrated costumes reflecting the paraphernalia donned by priests and sacrificial victims during actual ritual performances.<sup>221</sup> Yet, while there is a notable anthropomorphic element in the almanacs, we can also read Mayahuel as the inverse, as the morphing of the human into plant, and in this manner, a weaving of human and plant life, which ultimately reincorporates humans back into the earth's body. This process functions as an ongoing metabolic loop.

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*Popol Vuh*, Dennis Tedlock provides an explanation of the Venus cycle as it relates to corn planting. Dennis Tedlock, 42-43.

<sup>219</sup> Boone, *Cycles of Time*, 17.

<sup>220</sup> Guerrero Guerrero, 36-37.

<sup>221</sup> Karl Anton Nowotny, *Tlacuilolli*, 1961, trans. George A. Everett, Jr. and Edward B. Sisson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 15.

Mesoamerican empire and its concentration of wealth, represented through human sacrifice and tribute items like jade and quetzal feathers, was shaped around processes of human and earthly gestation, that is, agricultural production and the feeding of populations within the imperial realm. According to Frances Berdan, the Mexica capital and its outer provinces subsisted on locally available food items, while “luxuries acquired in tribute were sent predominately from the most distant and most recently conquered areas.”<sup>222</sup> The accumulation of non-consumable goods (luxuries) occurs alongside, and because of, the feeding of subject populations. At the same time, the collection of luxuries symbolizes the imperial control over nurture, inverting the relationship of provider (working commoners) and recipient (rulers and nobles) so that rulers become the providers and commoners the recipients of empire’s largesse. Calendrical almanacs, charting celestial movements and ritual time, provide the blueprint for this inversion by bringing the earth’s nourishment of humans into an imperial realm.

In representing Mayahuel, two codices in particular, *Fejérváry-Mayer* and *Borgia*, emphasize her qualities as a source of nourishment in parallel scenes of lactation. In the case of *Fejérváry-Mayer*, Mayahuel and two other fertility goddesses, Chalchiuhtlicue and Xochiquetzal, nurse a child (Fig. 9a-b). In each scene, the goddess cradles the child with her left hand. Each goddess wears a unique headdress: Mayahuel’s is the most basic, consisting of flowers resembling those that sprout from the untapped maguey plant; the headdresses of Chalchiuhtlicue and Xochiquetzal are more elaborate, the first characterized by a jade stone (*chalchihuitl* in Nahuatl) and the second by the head of a quetzal bird, attributes that also help to identify them by name. In like manner, Chalchiuhtlicue and Xochiquetzal wear impressively decorated skirts and blouses as they sit on thrones covered with jaguar skins. In contrast to these

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<sup>222</sup> Frances F. Berdan, “The Tributary Provinces,” *Aztec Imperial Strategies*, 125.

goddesses, the attributes of Mayahuel are modest, her only adornments being her blouse and flower garland. She also differs from the other goddesses in that her legs remain unseen, the lower half of her body, from the waist down, blending with the maguey plant on which she rests and grows out of. The characterization of Mayahuel, then, is one of basic sustenance represented by the nursing of the child, and fertility and fecundity represented by the flowers.<sup>223</sup>

Chalchiuhtlicue and Xochiquetzal, in turn, convey a sense of nourishment along with luxury and sacrifice, represented by a bloody heart in the first case and flint knives in the second—an acknowledgment that the riches of empire are acquired through human sacrifice.<sup>224</sup> Yet, it is also possible that the images transfer this sense of sacrifice to the mother, with birth being akin to war.<sup>225</sup>

The three scenes of lactation accompany two other scenes featuring Tlazolteotl (goddess of filth and sexuality) and Mictlancihuatl (goddess of the underworld) (Fig. 9). Together, the five scenes comprise a complete *veintena*, 20-day set, following the *tonalpohualli*. The goddesses represent the energies transferred to the newborn children who appear with them. This *veintena* is the last of a set of four *veintenas* involving childbirth in the upper part of pages 23-29 of *Fejérváry-Mayer*. The number of scenes in this section totals 20 altogether. Each *veintena* is marked at the bottom by one of the 20 day-signs of the *tonalpohualli*. The specific day-signs used in these scenes are five: in order, they are Crocodile (the first of the 20 day-signs), Snake, Water, Reed, and Movement. The scenes, read from right-to-left follow this order exactly. In each scene, three dots represent the three days following the day-sign, thus completing any one

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<sup>223</sup> Ferdinand Anders and Maarten Jansen, *Libro explicativo del llamado Códice Fejérváry-Mayer* (Academische Druckund Verlagsanstalt, 1994), 258.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 259-260

<sup>225</sup> Geoffrey G. McCafferty and Sharisse D. McCafferty, "Powerful Women and the Myth of Male Dominance in Aztec Society," *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 7.1 (1998), 52.



of the 13 *veintenas* of the *tonalpohualli*. (The dots only mark the days after the specific day-sign shown and therefore do not represent a specific day of the *tonalpohualli*). Anders and Jansen note, citing the *Codex Mendoza*, that a midwife would typically bathe a child four days after its birth.<sup>226</sup> Yet, it could also be that the three additional days represented by dots signal their inclusion in the mantic energies of the particular day-sign that they accompany. This explanation would unify the significance of the four-day blocks represented in each of the 20 scenes, and strengthen their parallel divinatory function. The first 15 scenes, for their part, all feature male gods giving shape to the unborn child, and imbuing the child with their energies. The female goddesses, in turn, represent the care given to the child after birth.

The almanacs exhibit a certain creative autonomy from their artists, with each artist representing the gods and goddesses in a unique style. Such is the case of Mayahuel and the four *veintenas* depicting childbirth in the *Codex Borgia*. Here, Mayahuel stands out for her nourishment of a “jade fish” as representative of a newborn child (Fig. 10a).<sup>227</sup> The fish complements the depiction of her skirt as flows of water containing and framed by shells. Mayahuel’s blouse features the same pattern. A necklace of precious stones wrapped around the goddess’ neck accentuates her blouse. Additionally, she wears an elaborate headdress featuring feathers and decorative papers. A thick maguey stalk lined with flowers juts out of the headdress and extends over and in front of Mayahuel’s head. The leaves of the plant appear behind a luxurious red throne dotted with precious stones on which she sits. Unlike in *Fejérváry-Mayer*, here, in the *Codex Borgia*, Mayahuel’s decorative paraphernalia, including the throne, parallel the implements and attributes of the four other goddesses. Yet, the substitution of the fish for a

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<sup>226</sup> Anders and Jansen, *Fejérváry-Mayer*, 249.

<sup>227</sup> Ferdinand Anders and Maarten Jansen, *Libro explicativo del llamado Códice Borgia* (Austria: Akademische Druckund Verlagsanstalt, 1993), 114.

human sets the Mayahuel of the *Codex Borgia* apart from her counterparts, representing a unique decision on the part of the artist to highlight the maguey plant as a source of vital liquid—whether as rainwater collected in the leaves or *aguamiel* produced in the plant’s heart.

Although maguey, as Mayahuel, has been traditionally associated with rabbits, avatars of the *pulque* gods, the *Borgia* manuscripts depict her relationship with a more diverse set of animals. The *Codex Laud* contributes to this iconography in its depiction of Mayahuel resting atop a turtle, which in turn harbors a coral snake resting underneath it (Fig. 12). This scene pairs with another within a larger block of four paired scenes, each related to a *trecena* (13-day set) in the *tonalpohualli*. Each pair represents a cardinal direction, with Mayahuel joining the corn god Cinteotl to represent South.<sup>228</sup> Here in the *Codex Laud*, like the *Codex Borgia*, presents us with another idiosyncratic portrayal of Mayahuel, again blending aquatic and terrestrial realms. The turtle itself represents both while the snake (the milk snake) is more properly terrestrial. In their analyses of the codices of the *Borgia* Group, Anders and Jansen interpret this frequently recurring snake as a symbol of vice, while the turtle underneath Mayahuel represents land rising out of water.<sup>229</sup> The same authors note the connection between the turtle and Mayahuel’s alternate name, Ayopechtli or Ayopechcatl (where Ayopechtli means “Turtle Bed” and Ayopechcatl “The One on the Turtle Bed”) as discussed by Thompson and Nowotny.<sup>230</sup> The name Ayopechtli is given in the ethnographic *Primeros memoriales*, the precursor to Bernardino de Sahagún’s *Florentine Codex*. The *Primeros memoriales* contains a hymn in Nahuatl dedicated to Ayopechtli as well as an illustration and description of her clothing on a god-impersonator (*ixiptla*). The hymn describes Mayahuel as giving birth to a precious child out of her dwelling,

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<sup>228</sup> Ferdinand Anders and Maarten Jansen, *Libro explicativo del llamado Códice Laud* (Austria: Akademische Druckund Verlagsanstalt, 1994), 232.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 244, footnote 11.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

“somewhere, in the house of Ayopechcatl,” that is, “in the house of the turtle bed.”<sup>231</sup> In *Laud*, the turtle becomes a support for Mayahuel as she squats as if ready to give birth, her right leg on the turtle’s head, the left on the tail, while the top portion of the shell slightly covers over her genitalia. Here, Mayahuel, as in *Fejérváry-Mayer*, appears unclothed, breasts bared, her adornments minimal. The turtle, meanwhile, replaces the throne we see in the *Codex Borgia*. In a sense, the turtle represents an analogue to the womb and baby, the shell mimicking both the protruding stomach, a protective chamber for the arriving newborn. The presence of the snake, in its representation of vice, foretells a danger to be guarded against, heightening the need for protection.

The turtle, an often overlooked figure in Mesoamerican cosmology, also appears in the *Codex Borgia*’s series of five attacks by Venus (or the “Morning Star”), represented as variations of the god Tlahuizcalpanteuctli. Each attack scene covers a four-day block, in order, of a *veintena*. Additionally, each scene is bordered on two sides by a band containing the 13 iterations (numbered with dots) of the first day-sign of the four-day block, representing the 13 iterations of each block across the whole 260-day *tonalpohualli*. In the attack scene on the day-sign Crocodile, the very first of the *veintena*, a turtle appears submerged in water along with a snail and a water goddess (functioning as the regent of Crocodile and its four-day block) (Fig. 11). In this scene, Tlahuizcalpanteuctli spears each of these figures (the goddess, the turtle, the snail) from above the water. Anders and Jansen interpret Tlahuizcalpanteuctli as the negative energy of Venus within each four-day block, and they identify the water goddess as Chalchiuhtlicue; they read the attack on the aquatic animals, in turn, as an augur for drought.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Sahagún, *Primeros Memoriales*, Ch. 1 “Rituals and Gods,” 110.

<sup>232</sup> Anders and Jansen, *Borgia*, 289-291.

Parallel scenes involving Venus as attacker appear in four other codices from Central Mexican and Maya codices. They are *Vaticanus B*, the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*, *Cospi*, *Historia de los reynos*, and the *Dresden Codex*.<sup>233</sup> Comparing *Vaticanus B*, the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*, and the *Dresden Codex* with the *Codex Borgia*, Anders and Jansen suggest that the artist of *Codex Borgia* mistakenly inverted Tlahuizcalpanteuctli and Xiuhteuctli (Turquoise Lord, or Fire Lord, a variation of Tlahuizcalpanteuctli) as well as the day-signs pertaining to Chalchiuhtlicue, Cinteotl (or Maize God) and Black Tezcatlipoca.<sup>234</sup> Nowotny's catalogue of five of the six codices, however, evinces a variation in the ordering of the five attack scenes: taking all six into account, we can say that *Vaticanus B*, *Cospi*, and the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* coincide in their ordering of all five attack scenes; meanwhile, *Borgia*, *Dresden*, and the *Historia de los reynos* differ to various degrees from the first three and each other.

In her analysis of the *Dresden Codex*, Susan Milbrath links the five "Venus attacks" scenes to the Maya corn planting seasons. In the scene involving water deities in the *Dresden Codex*, she identifies the attacking god as Xiuhteuctli and explains the scene thus: "Central Mexican Xiuhtecutli [Xiuhteuctli] as Morning Star rising at beginning of dry season; he spears turtle god (Orion) as sign of drought; regent is Moon Goddess pouring seawater from her seashell jar."<sup>235</sup> The aquatic elements in the *Dresden Codex* mirror those in the *Borgia Codex*, with a notable difference being that the turtle in *Dresden* is itself a god. Moreover, Milbrath identifies Tlahuizcalpanteuctli in another of the five scenes in the *Dresden Codex*, where he attacks the Maize God. She explains this scene thus: "Howler monkey as Morning Star,

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<sup>233</sup> Anders and Jansen, *Borgia*, 109; Nowotny, 260. The five codices compared by Nowotny are *Borgia*, *Vaticanus B*, *Cospi*, *Historia de los reynos*, and *Dresden*.

<sup>234</sup> Anders and Jansen, *Borgia*, 289-292.

<sup>235</sup> Susan Milbrath, *Star Gods of the Maya: Astronomy in Art, Folklore, and Calendars* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 164.

associated with name linked with Tlahuizcalpanteuctli [Tlahuizcalpanteuctli], depicts Venus rising at dawn when maize planting season begins.”<sup>236</sup> Like Anders and Jansen, Milbrath identifies Tlahuizcalpanteuctli as the attacker of the Corn God and Xiuhteuctli as the attacker of the water deity. It could be that Anders, Jansen and Reyes García overstate the specific arrangement of deities and day-signs in the Venus-attacking scenes. In fact, unlike *Borgia*, *Dresden* features the Maize God in two of the five scenes, which suggests that deities were not strictly bound to a specific day-sign. On the other hand, we can also understand the different orderings of the Venus cycle as variations, if not pieces, of a shared system for tracking time across Mesoamerica.<sup>237</sup>

What is important to emphasize in the five Venus scenes, and especially those involving water and corn deities, is the influence of Venus/Tlahuizcalpanteuctli as a harbinger of drought, or of the dry season, as opposed to abundant rain and plentiful harvests. Even if the sense is more metaphorical in the Central Mexican (as opposed to Maya) context, the idea of drought has implications beyond strictly agricultural phenomena. That is to say, Mesoamerican communities understood well the political ramifications of a drought, given the importance of agriculture for maintaining empires. So it is that *Laud*'s representation of Mayahuel includes the accoutrements of imperial power and wealth. A club fitted with a sacrificial flint knife, a sacrificial axe, and a smoking foot or footprint (potentially representing scorched earth, conquest) occupy the spaces between Mayahuel's maguey leaves to the right (Fig. 12). To the left, we observe the depiction of *pulque*-filled jug, a bowl of food, and a bowl containing stick bundles and a precious stone or rubber ball. Meanwhile Mayahuel holds up a bowl containing flowers and jewels, a conflation of

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Boone, *Cycles of Time*, 233.

the sustenance of the maguey plant with the wealth of empire: two forms of earthly wealth, the wealth of rulers based on, while displacing, the wealth of commoners.

The turtle represents the rain that later gives rise to corn and maguey as the two most important sources of sustenance in ancient Mesoamerica. The turtle thus bears an intimate relationship with fertility goddesses, be it *Mayahuel*, *Chalchiuhtlicue* or, in the case of the *Codex Fejérváry-Mayer*, *Xochiquetzal* (Flower Quetzal Feather). Returning to the birth scenes in *Fejérváry-Mayer*, the last of the five scenes of lactation features *Xochiquetzal* with a turtle shell, adorned with jewels, on her back (Fig. 9b). The jewels contribute to the sense of nobility and wealth in this scene, as *Xochiquetzal* nurses a newborn child. Frances Berdan identifies *Xochiquetzal*, *Macuilxochitl* (Five Flower) and *Xochipilli* (Flower Prince, or Flower Child) as the principal flower deities in Nahuatl lore, variously associated with young mothers and textile weavers (*Xochiquetzal*), palace folk and gambling (*Macuilxochitl*), and painters and games (*Xochipilli*).<sup>238</sup> These are deities, then, of festivity, reproduction and creativity. The turtle passes among these deities, as with *Mayahuel*, connecting them as overlapping beings.

If the turtle represents safe haven in association with fertility gods and goddesses, another set of deities represent danger and death in a continuum of divinatory possibilities. In *Fejérváry-Mayer*, on the Serpent day-sign, *Tlazolteotl*, goddess of sexuality and filth, holds a milk snake that wraps around the child's neck (Fig. 9a). While her breast is exposed, and her stomach folds indicate that she has given birth, the snake threatens to choke the child, whose flailing arms indicate struggle. Meanwhile, an axe tied with a rope represents captivity, punishment and execution.<sup>239</sup> In turn, the scene involving *Mictlancihuatl*, on the day-sign Water, shows her devouring the child, blood gushing out (Fig. 9a). *Mictlancihuatl* is recognizable by her skull-

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<sup>238</sup> Frances F. Berdan, *Aztec Archaeology and Ethnohistory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 233.

<sup>239</sup> Anders and Jansen, *Fejérváry-Mayer*, 259.

head, which is also a defining feature of her male counterpart Mictlanteuctli (Death Lord), represented in Fig. 9c. The goddess devours the child with her head facing directly upward, mouth agape. The child thus enters the goddess' mouth from above, to be swallowed into the underworld. A heart pierced by a maguey spine floats to the right of the child, signifying sacrifice and affliction.<sup>240</sup>

The birth scenes in the *Codex Borgia* mirror the fates associated with Tlazolteotl and Mictlancihuatl in *Fejérváry-Mayer*, with some notable differences. For example, in contrast to *Fejérváry-Mayer*, the *Codex Borgia* depicts Tlazolteotl nursing, or about to nurse a child, as is the case with the three fertility goddesses (Mayahuel's "child" being the fish) (Fig. 10a-b). In place of a snake, a blood moon, portrayed at the top left corner of the scene, serves as an omen of danger. In these four birth scenes in the *Codex Borgia*, the children and fish float, as if swimming or flying, beside the goddesses. The human children each cup the right breast of the goddess with their left hand. In addition to nursing the child, the Tlazolteotl of the *Codex Borgia* wears spindles wrapped with yarn on her head. Here, then, Tlazolteotl bares an attribute—that of weaving—that can also be associated with Xochiquetzal. Sacrifice, death and vice, in turn, can also cross into the realms of the fertility goddesses, as we have seen, even if the goddesses do not themselves embody these attributes. For example, in Xochiquetzal's scene in *Fejérváry-Mayer* (Fig. 10b), the flint knives in the vase of a flowering tree symbolize sacrifice as the basis of wealth and abundance.<sup>241</sup> Thus death is still present, and necessary, with the attainment of riches within the imperial imaginary of ancient Mesoamerica.

In contrast to the *Codex Fejérváry-Mayer*, the *Codex Borgia* depicts Mictlancihuatl's baby not as a live human but as a skeleton resembling Mictlanteuctli (male Death Lord) (Fig.

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 260.

10a). Here, Mictlancihuatl extracts the child's heart as blood pours out. Three hearts represent this action, one seemingly drawn out by Mictlancihuatl's hand, the other two issuing from the child's mouth into Mictlancihuatl's mouth. In this sense, Mictlancihuatl may represent death at or after birth. Unlike her representation in *Fejérváry-Mayer*, the Mictlancihuatl of the *Codex Borgia* faces the child as she consumes its heart, its vitality.

Tlazolteotl and Mictlancihuatl serve as a counterpoint to Mayahuel and the two other fertility goddesses Xochiquetzal and Chalchiuhtlicue in the birth scenes of the *Codex Fejérváry-Mayer* and the *Codex Borgia*, these goddesses being grouped together in both (Fig. 9b and 10b). Yet, all the goddesses are connected parts of the earth's metabolic processes: whether as avatars of fertility, death or filth, they each contribute to the growth of life out of the earth, and a return to the earth. In this way, the goddesses function as avatars of the earth as a living entity that nourishes human life while also reincorporating human bodies back into its own body. In the *Codex Borgia*, the earth-as-body finds expression in a series of scenes on pages 29-31, where a number of earth and death goddesses frame and mediate the conditions for ritual activities ending on page 46 of the codex. Eduard Seler called this portion (pages 29-46) of the codex "El viaje de Venus a través del Infierno" ("Venus' Journey through Hell").<sup>242</sup> Bruce Byland similarly describes it as a "Long Supernatural Journey and Ritual Sequence," noting that "It is certainly religious in nature, though there does seem to be an element of physical reality that runs through the pages."<sup>243</sup> Anders and Jansen posit that the hypothetical temple, or temples, in pages 29-43

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<sup>242</sup> Eduard Seler, *Comentarios al Códice Borgia* Vol. 2, 1906, trans. Mariana Frenk (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1963), 9.

<sup>243</sup> Bruce E. Byland, "Introduction and Commentary," *The Codex Borgia: A Full-Color Restoration of the Ancient Mexican Manuscript*, Gisele Díaz and Alan Rodgers (New York: Dover Publications, 1993), xxiii.



reflect a generic blue-print used across pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica, in places such as Tilantongo (in the Mixteca Alta, present-day Oaxaca), Teotihuacan, and Tenochtitlan.<sup>244</sup>

Susan Milbrath compellingly argues that pages 29-46 of the *Codex Borgia* represent the conjoining of specific ritual, agricultural and astronomical events. For her, these pages illustrate the movement of Venus across the sky, beginning with its disappearance as Evening Star to its emergence as Morning Star in the first two pages (29 and 30) and ending with its disappearance as it passes through the Milky Way on page 46. Drawing on historically verified astronomical events and ritual feasts in pre-Conquest Mesoamerica, Milbrath concludes that the whole sequence from pages 29 to 46, unique among the extant Mesoamerican manuscripts, refer to events taking place between December 17, 1495 and December 15, 1496 (marking the Winter Solstice) following the Julian calendar.

With Milbrath's intervention, the ritual sequence on pages 29-46 reaches a new level of specificity and significance. Her work allows us to tie the ritual festivals of the 365-day solar calendar (the festivals organized along 18 20-day months followed by five inactive days, the *nemontemi*) to the mantic energies of the 260-day calendar. Milbrath notes that these pages track the shifts from the dry to rainy season and back: the initial dry season is marked by a new moon on December 17, 1495; the new moon on May 13, 1496 inaugurates the beginning of the rainy season; the dry season then returns with a full moon on November 20, 1496. In addition to connecting the *Codex Borgia* to these dates, Milbrath corroborates the evidence showing that the codex came from Tlaxcala, adding that it may have been among the gifts given to Cortés by Tlaxcala's leaders upon first contact.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Anders and Jansen, *Borgia*, 175-190.

<sup>245</sup> Susan Milbrath, *Heaven and Earth in Ancient Mexico: Astronomy and Seasonal Cycles in the Codex Borgia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013). See in particular the Synoptic Plates section for Milbrath's summary of pages 29-46 of the *Codex Borgia*.

Following Milbrath, the codex records time by tracking the movements of Venus and the moon, linking the movements of celestial bodies to cycle of corn cultivation. In this arrangement, the organization of specific months matters less than the periods of rainfall and dryness in Mesoamerica. This continues to be the case, as the seasons kept among rural Nahuas in the Huasteca region of Veracruz, for example, are principally the dry season (*tonalmilli*, literally “hot field,” or “sunny field”) and the rainy season (*xopalmilli*, literally “green field”).<sup>246</sup> It should be noted that pre-Conquest Mesoamerican societies did not include “leap years” within their solar calendar, such that months were never standardized in the way they are in the Western world. This might explain, then, the description by Spaniards of the feasts of the 18-months as “moveable,” because the months themselves would “move” to different periods of the solar year.

Thus, pages 29-46 of the *Codex Borgia* are a multi-layered representation of agricultural cycles, celestial time-keeping, and ritual protocols based around built temples, all animated by supernatural and human beings as well as animal and plant figures. While the purpose and meaning of this content has been debated, little has been written as to the gender dynamics within the codex. Commentators of the codex have sought to identify and describe the various goddesses depicted on pages 29-46 and elsewhere in the *Codex Borgia* and the larger *Borgia* Group. Yet the representational significance of women’s bodies in these pages has received little attention. This issue is particularly relevant in pages 29-31 (Fig. 13-15). These pages feature what Nowotny calls “rectangular goddesses,”<sup>247</sup> the earth goddesses whose bodies frame the

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<sup>246</sup> Writing on indigenous agriculture in Veracruz, Rafael Nava Vite states that “Las fuentes del siglo XVI nos informan de la extraordinaria riqueza que caracterizaba a nuestra región de estudio. Algunos cronistas detallan que los habitantes de aquellos tiempos obtenían hasta tres cosechas de maíz al año. En la actualidad las cosas han cambiado mucho, sin embargo, aun se logran dos cosechas al año, el que se siembra en el xopalmilli “temporal” y el de tonalmilli, “de sol o seca,” obviamente, debido a las carencias de riego, y de tecnología para trabajar el campo [...]” Rafael Nava Vite, “El costumbre”: ofrendas y música a Chikomexochitl en Ixhuatlán de Madero, Veracruz,” *Revista EnreVerAndo* (October 2009), 40.

<sup>247</sup> Nowotny, Plate Section, beginning on page 80.

scenes depicted in these pages. Within the space demarcated by the rectangular goddesses, another set of goddesses resembling Mictlancihuatl and Tlazolteotl mediate the performance. These two deities represent different aspects of the earth Goddess, whose multiple bodies work in tandem to unify humans and earth in the act of creation. The rectangular goddesses themselves blend earthly, celestial and human elements. On page 29, for example, the head of the rectangular goddess is well defined and sumptuously adorned with a paper headdress, while her body is lined by a red band representing blood, two interweaving red-white-yellow strands resembling sinews or tendons, and a dark night-strip (Fig. 13). An anthropomorphic heart, emitting stylized fluid, protrudes from the decorative paraphernalia covering over the goddess' neck. Meanwhile, animal claws, minimally adorned with decorative papers or sticks, make up the four corners of the rectangular body, its outer edge dotted with stars that, according to Milbrath, represent the Milky Way.<sup>248</sup> This rectangular goddess, representing both earth and cosmos—the universe—frames the disappearance of Venus as Evening Star, represented as a black disk overlaid by an anthropomorphic receptacle overflowing with burning copal incense.

A subsidiary goddess occupies a space immediately below the overflowing bowl, her body supine as she faces upward. Her body resembles that of the rectangular goddess in that it too consists of two multi-colored, twisted strands that may represent *malinalli* (grass), following Milbrath,<sup>249</sup> the red-colored spaces in between resembling blood. Her hands and legs, meanwhile, are replaced with animal claws. These two subsidiary goddesses help to frame the scene-within-the-scene: against the black disk, they enclose the bowl of frothy copal at the top and bottom, representing earth and sky, terrestrial and ethereal realms. The rectangular goddess,

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<sup>248</sup> Milbrath, Plates 1-4.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., Plate 3.

meanwhile, governs the passage of twin Ehecatl figures to the next scene through an opening in her body at the bottom of the page.

The passage to subsequent scenes on pages 30-31 presents us with a “fleshing out” of the earth goddesses as the ritual scenes increase in complexity. On page 30, an extended row of rib-bones replaces the two sinewy strands of the rectangular goddess’ body (Fig. 14). Her legs and arms take on a more defined form, the “legs” adorned with decorative papers resembling a skirt. A red and black rayed disk now encompasses, in truncated form, the incense-burning scene from the previous scene. According to Milbrath, this rayed disk represents the emergence of Venus as Morning Star in January 1496.<sup>250</sup> Within this scene, the decorated incense bags indicate a containment of the powerful copal in the hands of the Ehecatl figures as priestly forerunners. The two sinewy strands of the previous rectangular goddess form a circular border enclosing this scene within the disk. Layers of yellow, white and red bands open out to alternating red-black rays in a “splitting open” of the disk. Outside the rayed disk, four Tlaloc-like figures occupy the four corners within the rectangular goddess. These Tlaloc figures, too, carry bags of incense as each uses a blood-letting bone to point to the principal day sign of a five-day block within a *veintena*.

The minimal adornments of these Tlaloc figures parallel the nude, elf-like Ehecatl figures on pages 29 and 30. Like these Tlalocs, the Ehecatl figures represent prototypes of the fully-fledged deities. The minimally adorned gods complement the theme of creation in pages 29-31 within the bodies of the rectangular goddesses. As the sequence of scenes unfolds, and the Earth/Death goddesses acquire a more corporal form, humans begin to take up elaborate god-costumes, replacing the fantastical proto-gods of earlier pages. Along with controlling copal

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid., Plate 2.

incense, moreover, the Tlaloc-priests present us with the *tonalpohualli* itself and, thus, time-keeping coupled with the divinatory arts. It is fitting that this creation of the *tonalpohualli* takes place within the body of a woman (the rectangular Goddess), an acknowledgement of the corporal basis of the *tonalpohualli* as embodied knowledge.

In the double scenes on page 31, in turn, the Venus disk gives way to fully bodied Earth/Death goddesses in splayed birth poses characteristic of Tlazolteotl (Fig. 15). Each of these goddesses is framed by a rectangular goddess, one dark and one red, as sister goddesses. The first Tlazolteotl figure, within the dark rectangular goddess, harbors an anthropomorphic heart overlaid on a ritual black reed bundle. A death-child emerges from the heart, its left foot still embedded within it. A stream of wind (*hecatl*) flows into and out of the death-child's mouth—perhaps a last gasp of breath and final beating of the heart. The second Tlazolteotl figure, within the red rectangular goddess, harbors not a heart but a miniature version of the disk on page 30. The sequencing of scenes on pages 29-31 thus align in alternating fashion, the disks on pages 29-30 giving way to the fleshed-out bodies of the Tlazolteotl figures on page 31. Between the two Tlazolteotl figures, the heart of the first gives way to the disk on the second, from which a deluge of red blood gushes downward toward a twisted Earth goddess who occupies the gap, or space of exit, within the rectangular goddess. Here, another death child emerges from this splash of blood, its foot also still embedded within the disk. This flow of blood complements the red, blood-like, strands lining the red rectangular goddess' body, an inversion, or flowing, out of the red strand enclosed in the dark rectangular goddess' body above.

The bodily effects of the goddesses on page 31 convey a turning inside-out of the earth body, a cultivation of the earth, as the maguery and corn figures on page 31 suggest. Within the dark rectangular goddess, on the left, one Earth/Death goddess bears a maguery plant on her back,

while the goddess below carries a corn plant. Each of the two goddesses presents an unbundled death-child before the central Tlazolteotl figure. Likewise, two additional Earth/Death goddesses on the right of Tlazolteotl each enact a ritual pouring of dark water over a death-child's body, the water issuing from a bald, presumably male, red skull and curving over and into a female red skull, a union of male and female Death God and Goddess. Here, then, we witness a continuum between death and fertility. The pouring of water over the death-child mirrors the cleansing of sacrificial victims—and, among the Nahuas, a sacrificial captive or slave was typically regarded as a “bathed one” (*tlaaltilli*).<sup>251</sup> Within the red rectangular goddess, one pair of Death goddesses perform another sacrificial cleansing on the right, while on the left two more Death goddesses offer up death-children as corn. In these scenes of ritual cleansing and offering, the death-children crouch atop an anthropomorphic sacrificial stone or altar as so much food for the earth.

Human nourishment of the earth thus leads to the earthly nourishment of humans in a reciprocal metabolic process, which in turn serves as the basis for the ritual protocols outlined on pages 29-46 of the *Codex Borgia*, and indeed, the rest of the codex. Pages 29-31 set up the earth body, simultaneously a woman's body, as the material condition for social and ritual life. The subsequent pages portray the appropriation of ritual life in the hands of earthly rulers, represented through the figure of “Stripe Eye” beginning on page 35. It bears mention that even the ritual accoutrements (copal, conch shell, papers) in the first scene, on page 29, make up the material paraphernalia necessary to any Mesoamerican ceremony. These items are then accompanied by human hearts, corn, and maguey on pages 30-31. Throughout the rest of the “Supernatural Journey” through page 46, corn and blood become the dominant tropes, along with

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<sup>251</sup> Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain* Part 11 (Book 10: The People), ch. 16, trans. Charles E. Dibble and Arthur J.O. Anderson (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1961), 59; Sahagún, *Primeros Memoriales*, Ch. 1 “Rituals and Gods,” 64.

the monolithic structures that increasingly shape the ritual action. The overall journey reflects corn as the common denominator of empire, its cultivation requiring human blood—human sacrifice functions as a ritual apotheosis of the human labor needed to cultivate corn and thus maintain empire. This apotheosis finds expression in the metaphorical reference to corn as “*tonacayotl*” (“human sustenance”).<sup>252</sup>

Whereas corn cultivation is coextensive with empire, the maguey plant occupies an area between mobility and sedentariness, between migratory societies and settled states. Its adaptation to the arid conditions on the periphery of empire, especially in the dry region of northern Mexico and into the present-day US southwest, marks its status as a “wild” plant requiring little care. Prior to the European invasion, maguey (and the agave more broadly), as source of food-stuff as well as clothing and building material, formed a close symbiotic relationship with the migratory groups of the North American deserts.

Fittingly, the ritual song recorded by the cleric Ruiz de Alarcón in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century refers to the scraping spoon used by the *aguamiel* harvester as a “Chichimeca,” the umbrella-term for the migratory indigenous communities of northern Mexico. Even as Alarcón composed his work, the Chichimeca continued to resist “pacification” by a new imperial power, namely the Spanish crown. While corn represents the ultimate domestication of a cultivable plant, simultaneous with the pacification of the commoner-indigenous population, maguey figures as sustenance without domestication. And in this sense, the status of maguey corresponds with that of women between their local communities and the imperial state, or between local autonomy and state control. The “undomesticated” indigenous woman, as custodian of maguey and its

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<sup>252</sup> From Molina’s dictionary: “Tonacayotl. mantenimiento humano, o los frutos de la tierra.” Molina, Nahuatl-Spanish section, 149r. At the base of this term is the concept of sunlight and heat (*tonalli*), which, along with rain, nourishes the Earth. “tonacayotl,” *Nahuatl Dictionary* (University of Oregon), web, 17 May 2015.

products, reemerges in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century as a caretaker of family and community against the agents of the colonial state. A cache of viceregal documents from Mexico's General National Archive (AGN) records this conflict as a contest between an indigenous economy and the emerging economy of New Spain.

**Embracing the Eight-Flint-Woman: The Ritual Transplanting of Maguey in a Nahuatl Hymn**

Tlan xihualhuian, nonan, Tlalteuctli. Ca ye momac nocontlalia in nohueltiuh,

Chicuetecpacihuatl. Huel xicnapalo. Huel xicnahuatequi.

[Come, my mother, Tlalteuctli. Indeed it is already in your hands that I place my older sister, Eight-Flint-Woman. Carry her in your arms well. Embrace her well.]"<sup>253</sup>

The cleric Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón recorded these lines, part of a Nahuatl hymn dedicated to maguey, between 1617 and 1629 for the Spanish Inquisition in Mexico. Having gained notoriety for carrying out unauthorized punishments of suspected indigenous idolaters, Ruiz de Alarcón was assigned the task of documenting pagan practices within Mexico's indigenous communities.<sup>254</sup> In his report to the Inquisition, Ruiz de Alarcón paid special attention to the interactions of indigenous farmers and healers with the plants they cultivated in their fields and used in their healing practices. His focus on maguey stemmed especially from the effects of *pulque* consumption on the "souls" and "bodies" of the indigenous population. In his preamble to the hymn cited above, Ruiz de Alarcón writes that "through the sowing and cultivation of maguey the astute Enemy has introduced and set ever so firmly in place among

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<sup>253</sup> Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón, *Treatise on the Heathen Superstitions That Today Live Among the Indians Native to This New Spain, 1629*, trans. J. Richard Andrews and Ross Hassig (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984), 123. I have modified Andrews and Hassig's English translation, removing parenthetical their notes within the text for ease of reading. I do this in each subsequent citation of Andrews and Hassig's English translation of the maguey hymn.

<sup>254</sup> J. Richard Andrews and Ross Hassig, "Editors' Introduction," *Treatise on the Heathen Superstitions That Today Live Among the Indians Native to This New Spain, 1629*, by Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984), 7.



these Indians the vice of drunkenness and, by means of it, ever so much havoc on their bodies and perdition of their souls.”<sup>255</sup> Within this logic, control over indigenous souls coincided with control over their bodies, a confluence of spiritual and economic concerns in the administration of New Spain. The fervor to maintain a productive and spiritually faithful population led Ruiz de Alarcón to the economic heart of the colony: the *milpa*, or planting field, where he would investigate the “superstitions” of indigenous “labradores” (workers).<sup>256</sup> Ever vigilant of the Devil’s “cunning” in the conduct of his “business,” the cleric recorded hymns dedicated not just to maguey but also corn, squash and tobacco—critical elements of indigenous and colonial economies.

Indigenous *campesinos* understood the importance of corn and squash as subsistence crops while tobacco was used for recreation and ritual ceremonies. Whereas Ruiz de Alarcón interpreted the hymns of indigenous farmers as diabolic superstition, for indigenous farmers they helped to retain knowledge of plant cultivation and care. In this regard, the hymns express a symbiotic relationship between humans and earth, and the transience of human ownership over the earth’s products. The maguey plant illustrates this transience—easily found in the wild, it requires only re-planting into the farmer’s field. From there, the use of the plant for *aguamiel* extraction effectively kills it. *Aguamiel* must be immediately consumed before it begins to ferment. Once the *aguamiel* ferments to become *pulque*, its shelf-life is still exceedingly short—a matter of days. The maguey hymn recorded by Ruiz de Alarcón outlines the procedure of transplanting the maguey, from uncultivated land to the planting field, and the subsequent

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<sup>255</sup> Ruiz de Alarcón, *Treatise*, 121. In the original Spanish: “esto es, por la siembra y cultura del maguei, por cuio medio el astuto enemigo ha introducido y puesto tan de asiento entre los indios el vicio de la borrachera, y por ella en ellos y en todo genero de gentes tantas abominaciones con tanto estrago de sus cuerpos y perpetua perdition de sus almas.” Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón, *Tratado de las idolatrías, supersticiones, dioses, ritos, hechicerías y otras costumbres gentílicas de las razas aborígenes de México*, 1629, ed. Francisco del Paso y Troncoso (Mexico City: Ediciones Fuente Cultural, 1953), 99.

<sup>256</sup> Ruiz de Alarcón, *Treatise*, 121.

harvesting of *aguamiel*. The beginning lines of the hymn anticipate the transplanting procedure as the farmer calls forth the digging stick:

Tlan cuel eh! Tlan xihualmohuica, tlamacazqui, Ce-Atl Itonal.

Titectopintehuazqueh,<sup>257</sup> ticquetztehuazqueh in Chicuetecpacihuatzin.

Nictlalituih. Nictlalituih in campa cualcan, yeccan nictlachpanih. Oncan noconnatlaliliz; oncan mehuitihtiyez.

[Let it be soon! Come, priest, His-tonal Is One-Water. We will begin rooting out Eight-Flint-Woman, we will begin to set her upright. I am going in order to set her down. I am going in order to set her down in a place which is good, which is fine, where I have swept for her. There I will set her down; there she will be sitting.]<sup>258</sup>

Here, references to the day-signs used in the Mesoamerican calendar help to animate the digging stick and maguey plant. In pre-Conquest Mesoamerica, day-signs not only recorded time but were also used to predict the fates of people and earthly events. As discussed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, day-signs conferred a mantic energy onto people and objects. So it is with the farmer's digging stick, ruled over by the day-sign ("itonal," literally "its day," but also "its spirit") Ce-Atl (One-Water). While we do not know the farmer's specific reason for ascribing this day-sign to the digging stick, a number of possibilities exist: it could be a simple nick-name,

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<sup>257</sup> The original term used here by Ruiz de Alarcón is "*titectopehuazque*," which Andrews and Hassig have replaced with "*titectopinazque*," ("we will detach her from the rocks"). This orthographical change is not necessary. The base verb of "*titectopehuazque*," *copehua*, is in fact used among present-day Nahuas and means "to detach something," while the noun stem *te* comes from *tetl*, rock(s), with the combined meaning being precisely "to detach from rocks." See "copehua," *Nahuatl Dictionary* (University of Oregon), web, 3 Aug. 2015.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-122.

or a veiled reference to a deity associated with that day, or perhaps a mnemonic device referring to a specific calendrical dates.

As a reference to actual and ritual time-keeping, the day-sign Ce-Atl complements the characterization of the stick itself as a “*tamacazqui*,” translated by Ruiz de Alarcón as “*espiritado*” (“possessed one”). In his 16<sup>th</sup> century Nahuatl dictionary, Molina translated the word’s plural form, *tamacazque*, as “*ministros y servidores de los templos de los ydolos*” (“ministers and servants of the temples of the idols”).<sup>259</sup> Andrews and Hassig’s use of “priest” for *tamacazqui* hews closely to Molina’s definition, imagining the digging stick a temple’s steward taking care of the various idols and providing offerings when necessary. Indeed, the more basic meaning of *tamacazqui* is “one who feeds,” who gives sustenance. The act of feeding (*tamaca*) is thus personified in the *tamacazqui*, who is then sublimated in the form of the priest. The offerings of a priest to the temple idols would typically be actual food, whether as animals, plants or even humans in pre-Conquest times.

In the maguey hymn, however, the “temple” is the cultivated field that the farmer has “swept” for the maguey plant, which he names “*Chicuetecpacihuatzin*” (“Eight-Flint Woman”). As Louise Burkhart shows, sweeping carried a significant supernatural charge within the Mesoamerican mind—whether in the common household or in the temple, the act of sweeping would ward off harmful energies, the broom acting as weapon.<sup>260</sup> Even after the Conquest, the sweeping of churches continued to be an important activity carried out by the indigenous congregation.<sup>261</sup> The same meaning that sweeping had in the household and temple also applied

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<sup>259</sup> Molina, Nahuatl-Spanish section, 125r.

<sup>260</sup> Louise M. Burkhart, “Mexica Women on the Home Front: Housework and Religion in Aztec Mexico,” *Indian Women of Early Mexico*, eds. Robert Stephen Haskett, Susan Schroeder, and Stephanie Wood (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 33-38.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

in the planting field: warding off negative energies, creating a space where the maguey would thrive. And it is important to remember that just as in the sweeping of a temple, a farmer could be a man or a woman. Indeed, in the maguey hymn the farmer's gender remains unspecified. And as we will see in the *cédulas*, both men and women worked in the fields harvesting aguamiel.

The potential reasons for naming the maguey plant “Chicuetecpacihuatzin” are the same as with the digging stick. Ruiz de Alarcón translated “Chicuetecpacihuatzin” as “Woman of Eight-in-a-Row,” interpreting this phrase as the eight rows in which, according to him, maguey plants were commonly placed in the planting field. Andrews and Hassig, however, identify “Chicuetecpacihuatzin” as a calendrical name: “Chicuetecpa(tl),” translates as “Eight-Flint” (a day-sign) and “cihuatzin” as “revered woman,” resulting in a translation of “Chicuetecpacihuatzin” as “Venerable Eight-Flint Woman.” This interpretation finds support in the parallel calendrical naming of the digging-stick by the farmer. In this regard, we would do well to consider the name that the Mexica ascribed to their preeminent corn goddess: Chicomecoatl (Seven-Snake). This latter name has no direct connection to corn but, rather, likely indicates a calendrical date (Seven-Snake) whose relation to corn cultivation remains obscure. Similarly, outside of the farmer's context the date Eight-Flint carries no specific relationship with maguey. Yet, curiously, Eight-Flint does not explicitly appear as a reference to maguey in any other source. The meaning of the name, and its relation to maguey, could therefore be quite specific to the farmer reciting the hymn or, perhaps, the farmer's family or local community. In any case, the use of a calendrical name evinces the cosmic energies of ritual time, thus providing a mechanism for acknowledging the maguey as an animate body. Much like a personified idol, like a Chicomecoatl figure, the maguey plant is to be transferred to a “good place” (“*yeccan*”), its

temple, that is, the cultivated field. The next lines of the hymn repeat this part of the transplanting process, emphasizing the significance of setting the plant down in its new location: “Tlan cuel eh! Xihualmohuica, chicuetecpacihuatzin. Ca nican cualcan yeccan onimitztlachpanih. Nican timehuitihtiyez” [“Let it be soon! Come, Eight-Flint Woman. Indeed here is the good place, the fine place that I have swept for you. Here you will be sitting”].<sup>262</sup>

In the transplanting process, the farmer joins the digging stick as steward of the maguey plant: together, they will care for the plant, removing it, lifting it from the rocks and providing it with sustenance—just as the plant will later provide the farmer with sustenance. The naming of both the digging stick and the maguey plant via calendrical day-signs indicates the preservation, if not of a fully functioning Mesoamerican calendar, then of the memory of this calendar, and ritual time, through agricultural work.

The concept of time is ever-present in the maguey hymn. The next lines of the hymn convey this sense of time, of opportune time, as the farmer returns to the maguey plant and once again calls on the “possessed one,” the *tlamacazqui* as pruning stick, which the farmer will use to break open the maguey plant and begin the process of extracting its aguamiel: “Tlan xihualmohuica, tlamacazqui, Ce-Atl itonal. Ca ye axcan. Ca otihueyiac, Chicuetecpacihuatzin. Zan moyolcaltzinco noconaquiz tlamacazqui, Ce-Atl Itonal” [“Come, priest, the one who’s day is One Water. Indeed already it is now. Indeed you have become big, Eight-flint-woman. I will just insert the priest of One-Water into your heart chamber”].<sup>263</sup> The growth of the maguey plant—“otihueyiac” (“you have become big”)—signals the passage of time from the transplanting to the return of the farmer with pruning stick. The breaking open of the maguey plant’s heart-chamber—“moyolcaltzinco” (“your precious heart chamber”)—continues the

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<sup>262</sup> Ruiz de Alarcón, *Treatise*, 122.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*

analogy between farming and priestly work. Here, the pruning stick, personified as a priest ruled by “One-Water” takes on the likeness of a flint knife, a co-extension of priest and ritual instrument, the energy of the one running through the other. It bears noting the propensity in Mesoamerican religion to anthropomorphize the “active” elements of ritual ceremony. Flint knives, used in ceremonies of human sacrifice, reflect this anthropomorphic drive: in painted books and as three-dimensional objects, flint knives were adorned with teeth and eyes, human elements that express their animate power. The farmer, rhetorically removed from direct action in the breaking open of the maguey heart, takes a secondary role to the pruning stick. And, yet, the stick-as-priest/knife becomes an avatar for the performance carried out by the farmer.

The farmer’s acknowledgement of the maguey’s growth signifies not only time, but the embodiment of the plant. Having been lifted from its wild, rocky location to the cultivated field, the maguey plant has taken “root” and been properly fed. The insertion of the pruning stick, the *tlamacazqui*, into the “heart chamber” creates a metaphorical link with the incision of a sacrificial victim’s rib-cage in the extraction of the heart: a procedure carried out with great precision—not a ‘tearing out’ of the heart as often thought today. The heart, in this analogy, is the *aguamiel*, which will appear over time and be periodically harvested. The maguey plant, then, transforms in likeness from idol (itself a personified object) to sacrificial victim. In pre-Conquest ceremony, the sacrificial victim would typically don the dress and attributes of particular gods to become an *ixiptla*, receiving lavish care and nourishment. Sacrificial captives could be held for as long as a year before their death, in this sense mimicking the cultivation of plants before harvest. This dressing-up of the *ixiptla*, an act often read as an enshrouding of the human body (with the clothing or flayed human skins) in imitation of the gods, also represents the gods’ embodiment as humans—not just a deification of the human body but the embodiment

of the supernatural.<sup>264</sup> The supernatural itself expresses a mutual dependency between humans and physical environment. So is it that the farmer acts upon the maguey as embodied person, as a woman, a process that finds expression through the metaphor of ritual sacrifice.

Having opened the maguey, the farmer then calls on another instrument, the copper spoon, for the initial scraping of the maguey:

Tlan cuel eh! Tlan xihualmohuica, Tlatlahuqui Chichimecatl. Tlan axcan. Tlan xicpopohua Chicuetecpaciuatzin iyollocalco tinemiz, tiquixcuutiliz. Ca ye axcan tiquixayotiz, ticchoctiz, tictlaocoltiz, ticquitonaltiz, tiquixmehmeyallotiz in Chicuetecpaciuhatzin.

[Let it be soon! Come, Red Chichimec. Let it be now. Clean Eight-flint-woman in her heart chamber where you will live, where you will clean off her face. Indeed already it is now that you will make Eight-flint-woman shed tears, you will make her weep, you will make her sad, you will make her sweat, you will make her flow at the eyes.]<sup>265</sup>

Here, the reference to the spoon as “Red Chichimec” recalls not just the act of ritual sacrifice, but also the original breaking open, or discovery, of *aguamiel* (the maguey’s “tears” and “sweat”) as indigenous communities migrated across northern and central Mexico. Building on the work of H.S., Radding has shown the close relationship between agave plants, including maguey, and the migratory communities of North America’s deserts, in the present-day southwest US and northern Mexico.<sup>266</sup> The Nahuatl term “Chichimecatl” refers to a member of

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<sup>264</sup> Molly Bassett provides a thorough summary of scholarly definitions of *ixiptla*, which she characterizes as “god-bodies” and “localized embodiments.” Molly Bassett, *The Fate of Earthly Things: Aztec Gods and God-bodies* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 88.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>266</sup> Radding, 98.

these linguistically and ethnically varied communities, who were noted for their unparalleled acumen with the bow-and-arrow.<sup>267</sup> The Mexica, having arrived in the Valley of Mexico from the north, traced their lineage in part to the Chichimeca. However, once settled and in the full bloom of empire, the Mexica regarded the Chichimeca proper as barbarians, remarkably skilled in medicine, feather-work and jewelry-making but uncivilized nonetheless.<sup>268</sup> In the popular imagination of Mexico today, the term “Chichimeca” is used pejoratively to characterize someone as a wild savage. Appropriately, the Spanish invaders, having toppled Mexco-Tenochtitlan in a matter of a few years, took much longer to “pacify” the Chichimeca, and, as José Rabasa affirms, full subjugation of these groups never really occurred.<sup>269</sup>

In contrast to imperial and colonialist imaginaries (dual modernities centered on the confluence of states, cities and mass agriculture), the words of the farmer paint an image of the “Chichimeca” as harvesters of maguey. While Mesoamerican empire grew out of corn cultivation, a dynamic appropriated by the Spaniards, and the attendant subjugation of human communities, maguey plant occupies a position between mobile communities and imperial states. Easily found in the “wild,” maguey can also be cultivated and in this sense, “domesticated.” The conception of “wildness,” however, must also be bracketed. The dispersal of agave plants across the northern Mexican frontier into the present-day US is attributable to the movement of human groups through these regions. And these migratory groups, in turn, used the plant as a source of vital liquid, while using the other parts of the plant for food, clothing and shelter. The farmer’s reference to the spoon as “Chichimeca” draws on the memory of the

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<sup>267</sup> Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain* Part 11 (Book 10: The People), ch. 29, trans. Arthur J.O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, 170-176.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> “Some scholars have argued that the so-called pacification of the Chichimecas was never completed and that the rebellion of the Coras, Huicholes, Zacatecos, Tepehuanes, and others—i.e., their refusal to subject themselves to Spanish or Mexican rule—has lasted up to the present.” José Rabasa, *Tell Me the Story of How I Conquered You: Elsewheres and Ethnocide in the Colonial Mesoamerican World* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 59.



discovery of the maguey plant and its uses, preserving it as knowledge within the maguey hymn. In ancient Mesoamerican folklore, women and men take turns as protagonists in this discovery, but the original “boring” of the maguey plant is attributed to Mayahuel.<sup>270</sup> Later, one male deity, Camaxtle, would create maguey “wine” while another, Pahtecatl (“Medicine Man”) would add a root called *ocpahkli* (“pulque medicine”) to the maguey’s juice “to intensify its intoxicating effect.”<sup>271</sup>

As in so many mythical stories, the gods here memorialize the achievements of ancient humans, yet the stories also refer to natural phenomena and everyday human activities, the work of the “medicine man” sublimated in the form of Pahtecatl. Today, the term for “medicine man” in Huastecan Nahuatl is *tepahlihquatl*, a variation of the name “Pahtecatl,” both being an agentive form of “*pahkli*,” (“medicinal herb”). In modern Nahua communities, the *tepahlihquatl* typically guides important ceremonies such as those dedicated to corn harvests.<sup>272</sup> The maguey plant itself had and continues to have value as a medicinal plant, its opened leaves, for example being used to treat snake bites. But *aguamiel* is perhaps the quintessential “medicine” of maguey, providing nourishment even in harsh desert conditions, where water might not otherwise be available. The naming of the copper spoon as “Red Chichimecatl” thus memorializes the ingenuity of the migratory maguey cultivators of the past, and acknowledges the farmer’s inheritance of that knowledge. It also suggests that the first “temple” was the cultivated field, the ritual performances in monumental temples constituting a grandiose sublimation of the farmer’s work. The monumental temple creates a physical connection between land and sky, bringing priests and rulers closer to the gods.

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<sup>270</sup> Quiñones Keber, 74.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Personal communication with Eduardo de la Cruz Cruz.

The farmer, however, maintains a terrestrial intimacy with the maguey plant, whose corporal transmutation continues through an overlapping amalgam of bodily parts and fluids. Replacing the pruning stick, the copper spoon as “Red Chichimeca” now serves as a conduit for the farmer’s actions. In a spectacular inversion of the bodily form, the “heart chamber” of the maguey plant contains its “face.” The primacy of heart and face in reference to the maguey brings to mind the often-recited Nahuatl *difrasismo* (double-phrased metaphor) *in ixtli in yollotl* (“face and heart”), a metaphor for a person’s character as a fully animate, conscientious being. The attribution of a “personality” to the maguey plant creates a sense of familiarity, of knowing the plant, which, as its steward, the farmer does. The sense of character and personality ascribed to the plant complements its “crying” and “sweating” as the farmer scrapes its “face” with the copper spoon. The plant’s “tears” and “sweat,” however, are further imagined as milk, which stands in for the *aguamiel* that will form inside the “heart chamber” after the scraping. The farmer refers to the admixture of tears, sweat and milk through the verb “tiquixmehmeyallotiz” (“you [Red Chichimeca] will make the milk flow from her face”). The base of this verb is “memeyallotl” (“milk”).<sup>273</sup> “Mehmeyallotiz,” in turn, means “to make milk flow from many parts.” The idea of “face” is conveyed via the particle “ix,” which can also mean eyes, hence the possibility of both sweat and tears flowing from the face. There is a tantalizing connection here between the Nahuatl word for maguey, “metl,” and milk as “memeyallotl.” Indeed, the term for a cultivated maguey plant is “memetl,”<sup>274</sup> the functional equivalent of the first part of “memeyallotl,” *meme(tl)*. Meanwhile, *yallotl* is an abstraction of water, *atl* + *yotl*, meaning watery substance, liquid. The maguey hymn, in effect, testifies to the analogous relationship

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<sup>273</sup> Molina, Nahuatl-Spanish section, 55v.

<sup>274</sup> Frances Karttunen, *An Analytical Dictionary of Nahuatl*, 1983 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 143.

between *aguamiel* and milk, the *aguamiel* coming flowing from the “face” of the plant from within its “heart chamber”—an overlap, finally, of face and woman’s breast. This reference to the maguey’s milk acknowledges the maturation of the plant, its transformation into a woman.

The final lines of the maguey hymn, cited at the beginning of this section, represent a transfer of the corporal body of the maguey to that of the earth, imagined as mother. Here, the farmer directly calls on the earth-mother to care for the plant:

Tlan xihualhuian, nonan, Tlalteuctli. Ca ye momac nocontlalia in nohueltiuh,  
Chicuetecpacihuatl. Huel xicnapalo. Huel xicnahuatequi. Ahmo quexquich cahuitl  
in nichualittaz. Ca zan macuilaman nichualittaz, iixco, icpactzinco nitlachiaz.  
[Come, my mother, Tlalteuctli. Indeed it is already in your hands that I place my  
older sister, Eight-flint-woman. Carry her in your arms well. Embrace her well. It  
will not be a long time before I come to see her. Indeed it will be only five  
instants before I will come to see her, before I will look upon her face, upon her  
headtop.]<sup>275</sup>

The human embodiment of the maguey reaches a new level of intimacy in these lines as the farmer creates a link of kinship with the plant as “my older sister” (“*nohueltiuh*”). While many kinship terms identify the gender of the speaker, this particular term is gender neutral, leaving open the gender of the maguey cultivator.

In Sahagún, however, the same base term for *nohueltiuh* denotes a great-grandmother. This slippage in terms corresponds to the semblances between the different stages of a woman’s life. Sahagún’s indigenous collaborators noted the similarity between a great-grandmother and young child in describing the *hueltiuh*tl:

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<sup>275</sup> Ruiz de Alarcón, *Treatise*, 123.

Veltiuhtli:

Teueltiuh: yiellelacic ilama, aoc quimati ilama,

Qualli ueltiuhtli iecteneualonj, tlaçocamachoni, itech netlamilo ytech  
netzatzilo, tlacapeualtia, tlatatzintia.

[The Great-Grandmother:

One's great-grandmother [is] decrepit, childish in her old age.

The good great-grandmother [is] worthy of praise, deserving of gratitude.

She is accorded glory, acclaim by her descendants. She is the founder, the  
beginner [of her lineage].]<sup>276</sup>

In her old age and decrepitude, then, the *hueltiuhtli* becomes “childish” following Anderson and Dibble’s translation. The Nahuatl text leads to this sentiment indirectly: “*aoc quimati ilama*” more literally translates as “she no longer knows she is a great-grandmother,” which is to say, she is so elderly she has become child-like again. Like a child, the great-grandmother requires special care. And, as the description of the good great-grandmother implies, she is to be excused (“*itech netlamilo*”) for her offenses, as one would excuse a child.<sup>277</sup> It is fitting, then, that the earth is called upon to embrace, care for, the maguey plant as one would care for a child or, conversely, a very elderly woman. And the earth-mother (“*nonan, Tlalteuctli*”), as woman in perpetual full strength and maturity, occupies a life-stage between the child and great-grandmother. In contrast, the maguey plant, maturing over eight to 12 years, moves quickly

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<sup>276</sup> Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain* Part 11 (Book 10: The People), ch. 1, trans. Arthur J.O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, 5. The passage on the *hueltiuhtli* also includes characteristics of the “bad great-grandmother”: “*Amo qualli ueltiuhtli, tequalani, acaconj, tetlaelti, tetlatultia, tequalania, tetlauelcujtia* [“The bad great-grandmother [is] detestable, unworthy of mention by name; she arouses nausea, loathing, anger, wrath”]. Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> While Anderson and Dibble translate “*itech netlamilo*” as “she is accorded glory,” we can also understand the phrase as saying that “she is excused for her old age and infirmity.”

through its adult stage when cultivated and harvested for its *aguamiel*.<sup>278</sup> With its sap, its life-force, extracted, the leaves of the maguey plant quickly begin to shrink and shrivel up, abruptly transitioning from young to old. In fact, the maguey that is harvested for its *aguamiel* never reaches full maturity. In order to flower, the plant requires its untapped liquid to grow a tall (13-26 ft.), thick stalk (3-6 ft. around).<sup>279</sup>

The maguey hymn thus imagines maguey cultivation as multiple levels of mothering, with the maguey as provider of “milk” and the earth as caretaker of the maguey plant—a loop of care-taking and, at the same time, a metabolic loop between feeding and nurturing bodies. Within this relationship, the “body” of the maguey plant will receive nourishment from the earth, which is what the farmer calls for in asking the latter to “embrace” his “sister.” The maguey plant, in turn, will provide nourishment to the farmer and the wider community in the production of *aguamiel*. There is one more aspect of this metabolic loop not mentioned by the farmer: the enrichment of the earth by the maguey plant, which is another of the benefits, uses, of maguey. That is, as succulent, the maguey’s retention of moisture would contribute to the arability of the land it occupies, contributing to the cultivation of other plants. The metabolic loop among maguey, plant and humans thus constitutes a relationship of mutual dependence and care among these bodies.

In the maguey hymn, the plant serves as the nexus for this mutual dependency. The farmer’s knowledge of this relationship however, also betrays a susceptibility to imperial appropriation and control. The analogy between cultivation and temple ritual may ultimately suggest not a flowing out of temple rituals to the planting field but rather a liminal space between mobile and sedentary lifeways, between transient cultivation and agricultural settlement as the

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<sup>278</sup> Parsons and Parsons, 29.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

enclosure of a common, cultivated space by urban and state-based societies. The *chinampas* of Mexco-Tenochtitlan are perhaps the most notable example of an enclosed agricultural space in the service of an urban center in Mesoamerica at the time of the Conquest. Corn cultivation, meanwhile, marks the full-fledged domestication of a cultivable plant, domestication defined as the ability to grow corn in great quantities, to store it for an extended period of time, and to easily transport it. As textile and building material, the maguey plant also figures as a critical commodity in pre-Conquest Mesoamerica while nonetheless retaining elements of its wild character. This is due to the plant's large size and the great effort involved in transporting it. This transporting can only be a transplanting as the plant must be kept close to the earth to be useful—as such, it comes to mark the landscape it occupies. Yet while the fibers of the maguey plant were regarded as low quality, the fermented *aguamiel* held great value as the primary beverage consumed in ritual ceremony, a homage to the necessity of drinking *aguamiel* and *pulque* in the migration of communities into central Mexico and further south. The enclosure of the drink within state-sanctioned ceremony, limiting who could and could not drink it, presents us with an analogue to the domestication of corn. Of course, those limitations would not have been easily imposed outside of an urban milieu, in the countryside and outskirts of empire—and at the time of Mexica rule, the north proved an intractable, un-conquerable space, with tribute items flowing primarily from southern Mexico and Central America.

In the passage to Spanish rule, maguey once again figures as a transitional body between Mesoamerican to Spanish empires. In this transition, the maguey plant undergoes another process of domestication, of enclosure, alongside its cultivators. Under Spanish rule, the maguey plant provided great use to indigenous communities facing onerous tribute demands, an extra source of income beyond, and in place of, corn cultivation. The shift in cultivation toward

maguey and away from corn caused alarm to the colonial government, including clerics like Ruiz de Alarcón. In his preamble to the maguey hymn, Ruiz de Alarcón cannot help but express his concerns within mercantilist language, characterizing the “Enemy,” the Devil, as a competitor in “business.” Whether or not Alarcón truly failed to see the value of the maguey hymn, as receptacle of knowledge critical to the survival of communities, his spiritual argument would provide the needed pretext for economic intervention, for controlling the work of indigenous commoners under the aegis of European mercantilism and Catholic evangelization. A number of archival documents from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century testify to the incursions of the colonial officials into maguey cultivation, in their attempts to extract value from the extracted juice of the maguey and its sale. I now turn my attention to these documents in the following section.

#### **‘For their use and benefit’: Maguey between Indigenous and Colonial Economies**

In 1597 the viceregal office of New Spain issued a *cédula* granting indigenous villagers from Puebla license to freely sell *aguamiel*. The *cédula* states that a judge and some *alguaciles* (officers) had confiscated the villagers’ *aguamiel* on the roads. The same officials had also forced their way into the homes of the villagers, frightening their children and stealing their money in the process. Responding to these claims, the Viceroy ordered the principal judge of Puebla to halt any further persecution of the villagers in the sale of *aguamiel*. The villagers did not own cultivable land or maguey plants but rather rented the plants from neighboring villages for *aguamiel* harvesting. They would take the harvested *aguamiel* back to their homes and prepare it for sale.<sup>280</sup>

This case brings to the forefront the economic concerns that would accompany the targeting of maguey cultivation by clerical officials such as Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón. The

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<sup>280</sup> Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Indios, Vol. 6, Part 1, Expediente 1186. In the rest of this chapter, transcriptions and translations into English of archival documents from the AGN are mine.

cleric's preamble to the maguey hymn discussed in the previous section of this chapter lays out the dual economic and spiritual mission motivating the surveillance of indigenous "labradores" in the planting fields. For Ruiz de Alarcón, the production of *pulque*, bound up with the ritual process of maguey cultivation, represented the work of the Devil, who in turn constitutes the principal competitor of the Spanish missionaries in a battle over indigenous souls and bodies. In this way, Ruiz de Alarcón presents us with a crossroads, in spiritual terms, between Mesoamerican and Spanish-colonial political economies. But as we see in analyzing the Borgia codices, this imperial crossroads involves not just a movement between empires but between mobile communities and a sedentary state, migration and domestication.

The process of *pulque* regulation under Spanish rule animates this tension, driven by the need to reign in and control this consumable good, one closely linked with pre-Hispanic ritual in memory if not in actual practice. Ruiz de Alarcón's preoccupation with *pulque* brings us back to the base of its production—that of maguey cultivation and the relationship between humans, plant and earth, a relationship that reached notable artistic expression among the Maya and Nahuas. The viceregal *cédula* presented above represents a turning inside-out of the spiritual and economic preoccupations expressed by Ruiz de Alarcón. While the cleric paints economic relationships in spiritual terms, the viceroy prioritizes the economic impetus, giving voice to a mercantilist, liberal ethos of "free" exchange. Of course, the various viceroys in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century and early 17<sup>th</sup> century also concerned themselves with the paternalistic protection of indigenous communities,<sup>281</sup> the other side of "freedom" under Spanish colonialism. Both cleric

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<sup>281</sup> See Woodrow Borah, *Justice by Insurance: The General Indian Court of Colonial Mexico and the Legal Aides of the Half-Real*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) and Brian Owensby, *Empire of Law and Indian Justice in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).



and colonial administrator, however, coincided in the effort to incorporate indigenous communities within Spanish-style governance, or *policía*.<sup>282</sup>

Ruiz de Alarcón's inquisitional fieldwork, his spiritual reconnaissance, with the objective of reorganizing indigenous agriculture in the name of productivity, enacts what Silvia Federici calls a "strategy of enclosure," a strategy developed in Europe that "depending on the context, could be enclosure of land, bodies or social relations."<sup>283</sup> Federici specifically investigates this enclosure through New World witch-hunting as a "deliberate strategy used by colonial authorities to instill terror" and bring indigenous populations under control, turning them into productive subjects of the Spain's colonial empire.<sup>284</sup> As Federici demonstrates in her study, women fought against the enclosure of land and bodies that led to the destitution of commoners—manual laborers and fieldworkers—and thus drawing the ire of the state. So it is with the women involved in the cases addressed in the viceregal *cédulas* concerning maguey cultivation and pulque production and sales.

When the *cédulas* were drafted, *pulque* production remained distinctly indigenous endeavors, sanctioned by the viceregal office of New Spain and tied specifically to women.<sup>285</sup>

Hernández Palomo states that from the beginning of Spanish rule in Mexico, the colonial

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<sup>282</sup> Federico Fernández Christlieb and Marcelo Ramírez Ruiz, "La policía de los indios y la urbanización del altepetl," *Territorialidad y paisaje en el altepetl del siglo xvi*, eds. Federico Fernández Christlieb and Ángel Julián García Zambrano (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006),

<sup>283</sup> Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004), 220.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>285</sup> "En la venta del pulque nunca se hizo alusión a los hombres sino que siempre se habló de vendedoras, de indias. Esta presencia de la mujer ha sido una característica que ha permanecido en gran parte hasta nuestros días. En ninguna ordenanza o bando se prohibió que los indios vendiesen pulque, pero su presencia no la hemos registrado hasta mediados del siglo XVII en un decreto de Alburquerque. Hecho que hemos de señalar como un cambio más con respecto a las Ordenanzas de Velasco, que tan sólo se habían referido a vendedoras indias. En cuanto al número de puestos no hay datos concretos hasta que se creó el asiento. Su localización sin embargo estuvo fijada en las plazas y tianguis." José Jesús Hernández Palomo, *La renta del pulque en Nueva España: 1663-1810* (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1979), 36. The term "*ordenanza*" (ordinance) as Hernández Palomo uses it functions the same way as "*cédula*."

administration tacitly allowed the sale of unadulterated white *pulque*.<sup>286</sup> In 1608, the viceroy Luis de Velasco issued a general ordinance permitting the sale of *pulque* by indigenous communities only.<sup>287</sup> Hernández Palomo notes that prior to 1608 the documentation relating to *pulque* production is limited to the petitions and reports of indigenous communities. This documentation includes the many viceregal *cédulas* responding to disputes over maguey and *magueyales* (maguey fields). While acknowledging this documentation, Hernández Palomo focuses his study on *pulque* rents between 1663 and 1810, that is, from the middle to end of the colonial period. John Kicza's work on *pulque* production in Mexico City focuses more narrowly on the years between 1783 and 1807, during the period of the Bourbon Reforms leading up to independence. Both Hernández Palomo and Kicza study the large-scale commercialization and regulation of *pulque*, that is, the establishment and taxation of *pulquerías* (*pulque* bars) and *pulque*-producing *haciendas*. This process, in turn, created new, male-centered enclaves for the sale and consumption of *pulque* as product of maguey. As Kicza states "by law all pulquería employees were supposed to be women; in fact, however, because of the type of labor required and the general environment in these establishments, few women worked in them."<sup>288</sup> The *pulque* sold in the *pulquerías* was a higher-grade version more palatable to the non-indigenous populations. Some indigenous women, however, would continue to sell *tlachique*, a lower-grade

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<sup>286</sup> "Las Reales Cédulas de 1529, 1545 y 1607 prohibían el pulque, pero tan sólo aquel que no fuera blanco, así como la utilización de ingredientes en su elaboración. Hubo siempre una autorización implícita en todas estas prohibiciones que se dictaron para su fabricación y consumo." Hernández Palomo, 31.

<sup>287</sup> As Hernández Palomo puts it, "En todas estas cuestiones anteriores, la ordenanza del virrey Luis de Velasco de 1608 marcó un paso muy importante, ya que dio las primeras normas precisas que iban a regir la producción y consumo de pulques, lo que nos indica ya la existencia de un comercio y una base económica oficialmente reconocidas. No obstante, el ordenamiento tan sólo se limitaba al sector indígena, y excluía bajo graves penas la intromisión en este comercio y producción de cualquier otro grupo étnico. Esto, en parte, impide hacer un análisis a fondo de este período anterior al asiento, sólo la documentación anexa al tema en concreto y, especialmente, los informes y peticiones de indios al virrey nos ofrecen algunos aspectos interesantes." Hernández Palomo, 33.

<sup>288</sup> John E. Kicza, *Colonial Entrepreneurs: Families and Business in Bourbon Mexico City* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983), 28.

*pulque*, outside the *pulquerías*. According to Kicza, *tlachique* was produced “by individual Indians from wild, uncultivated maguey cacti. It was brought into the city and sold out of large pots by Indian women gathered around the fountain of the central plaza. Because of the poor quality of the product, these women sold three containers for half a real, a larger portion than the same price could purchase in *pulquerías*.”<sup>289</sup> Thus, within the heart of New Spain, and nearing the end of Spanish rule, indigenous women still maintained a close relation with the maguey outside the cultivating fields of the *haciendas*, the wild magueys providing a source of sustenance and income.

Given this trajectory between *pulque* production and consumption, we can understand the importance of maguey cultivation and *aguamiel* harvesting for indigenous households in the early colonial period. Recognizing maguey and *aguamiel* as a source of income for indigenous households, vindictive neighbors and overzealous officials targeted its cultivation and sale. Complaints of such abuse resulted in a series of *cédulas* issued by the viceregal office. Whereas representations of maguey in pre-Hispanic and early post-Conquest Mexico emphasized its ceremonial significance, the *cédulas* highlight its value as a fungible commodity, as a source of income bound up with the plant’s use and consumption. In this way, the *cédulas* bring to the fore the economic value of maguey, a value previously subsumed within Mesoamerican religion.

The *cédulas* I discuss in this section date from 1583 to 1597 and constitute the earliest recorded conflicts over maguey in the *Indios* branch of Mexico’s General National Archive (AGN). There are 23 total *cédulas* between these dates and they comprise a half or full page of written text each. Under the orders of the Viceroy of New Spain, scribes of the Royal Court produced the *cédulas* following a legal formula outlining the provenance of the plaintiffs,

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<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 129

cataloguing abuses, naming the offenders and issuing the Viceroy's orders to local authorities. A high degree of turnover in the viceregal office marks the period of production of these *cédulas*: between 1583 and 1597, five different viceroys governed successively over New Spain. The Viceroy Luis de Velasco II, known as a "protector of Indians," issued the highest number of *cédulas* related to maguey, especially during his first year in office in 1591. Velasco II's father, Luis de Velasco I, had himself served as the second viceroy of New Spain. The preponderance of *cédulas* issued by Luis de Velasco II constitutes an unusual spurt of judicial activity from the viceregal office, an indication that indigenous petitions remained ignored or backlogged in the rapid succession of viceroys. The indigenous plaintiffs in these cases represent a broad swath of central Mexico extending westward to Michoacán and southward to Oaxaca. But the majority come from regions, such as Toluca, in the immediate vicinity of Mexico City. The *cédulas* issued on their behalf pose a challenge to us in that they only summarize a case rather than provide an extensive documentation of it. We do not know the outcome of these *cédulas*, for example whether or how indigenous plaintiffs proved their claims to maguey fields. Nonetheless, the *cédulas* offer a glimpse onto the use and abuse of maguey plants in the daily lives of indigenous people and in their interactions with the broader colonial society.

The vocabulary involving the use of maguey in viceregal orders emphasize the plant's benefit to its cultivators. The words "aprovechamiento," "beneficio" and "gozo" ("use," "benefit," "enjoyment") recur across the various *cédulas*. As in the case brought forth by the villagers of Puebla, the use and benefit of maguey plants would often revolve around the extraction of *aguamiel* in order to sell it in the market. In a *cédula* from 1583, a number of indigenous men from the village of Tianquistlan (The Place of the Market) in present day Oaxaca State) are said to make their living by cultivating maguey plants and using them to create

black *aguamiel* that they then sell in Tianquistlan and other indigenous communities.<sup>290</sup>

According to the *cédula*, the principal mayor of the town impeded the use and benefit of the maguey plants by imposing levies (“penal pecuniaria”) on the villagers for selling *aguamiel*. In contrast to the villagers from Puebla, the villagers from Tianquistlan appear to own maguey plants rather than rent them. Indeed the *cédula* on behalf of the villagers of Tianquistlan emphasizes not just their selling of *aguamiel* but the cultivation of maguey as a source of sustenance (“sustento”). This emphasis on plant’s cultivation, an occupation requiring much time and labor, further bolsters the rights of the villagers to make use of and enjoy their magueys.

Other viceregal *cédulas* deal more concretely with ownership over both maguey plants and the land where they were grown. In these *cédulas*, maguey plants accompany a piece of land inherited by the plaintiffs, who tend to be women. For example, a *cédula* issued by Luis de Velasco II in 1590 states that Ana Marta, a widowed *india* from Chalco (in the present State of Mexico), had inherited from her deceased husband, Martín Vásquez, a plot of land measuring 20 x 5 *brazas* (a *braza* being slightly less than 2 meters) and another plot of land measuring 10 x 10 *brazas* that held a great quantity of magueys.<sup>291</sup> According to the *cédula*, two indigenous men, Esteban de San Pablo Bernardino Arias and Marcos de San Juan, who had worked for Martín, wanted to access the magueys and take them by force. They were accused of “breaking open” 15 magueys and enjoying their “fruits.” From those “fruits,” the men, referred to as “maceguals terrazgueros” (“land-renting commoners”), gained 60 pesos of “oro común,” a sum that Ana Marta hoped to recuperate. After laying out these details, the Viceroy calls for an investigation

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<sup>290</sup> AGN, Indios, Vol. 2, Expediente 949. This black *aguamiel* may refer to the adulterated *pulque* produced by the addition of the *ocpahtli* root, discussed in the previous section as the invention of the god *Pahtecatli*. Daniel Nemser investigates the obsession of colonial authorities with identifying the *ocpahtli* root, attributing the 1692 uprising in Mexico City to the consumption of *pulque*. Daniel J. Nemser, “‘To Avoid This Mixture’: Rethinking *Pulque* in Colonial Mexico City,” *Food and Foodways* 19.1 (2011), 98-121. See particularly pages 101-102 for a discussion of *ocpahtli*, or *ocpatli*.

<sup>291</sup> AGN, Indios, Vol. 3, Expediente 58.

into Ana Marta's ownership of the land and magueys and, in the meantime, protection over her possessions. Following the protocol for such orders, the Viceroy charges the principal mayor of Chalco with carrying out this protection until Ana María is heard and defeated according to the law.

Ana Martí's case illustrates the conflicted relationship between land owners and renters in the use of maguey plants and extraction of *aguamiel*. Having worked for Ana's husband, the *terrazgueros* appear to take advantage of his death by using up the 15 magueys and refusing to recompense Ana Marta. In doing so, the *terrazgueros* may have exacted their own recompense against Ana Marta and Martín, who had also served as principal governor of his town, San Juan Temamatlac. As both a landowner and politician, Martín would have drawn his fair share of ire, including, potentially, that of the *terrazgueros*. On the other hand, the actions of the *terrazgueros* could also represent a refusal to honor Ana Marta's property and status as the wife of a deceased governor. The characterization of the men as "maceguales terrazgueros" highlights the social distinction between them, as land-working commoners, and Ana Marta as a property-owning "india." The *cédula* affirms this hierarchy in upholding Ana Marta's claim and depicting the *terrazgueros* as vandals "breaking open" her magueys. The *cédula* also mentions Ana Marta's children with Martín Vásquez, bringing into focus her responsibility for taking care of them, and therefore, as in the previous examples, the importance of maguey as a source of household income. Ana Marta could very well have been a steward of Martín Vásquez's property until one or a number of her children reached the age of majority, providing a further impetus to protect the inherited land and magueys that inhabited them.

Children are often mentioned in claims brought forth by women, emphasizing the mother's responsibility as caretaker of the children and her status as a conduit for the passing of

property from a deceased man to his children. Such is the case of Magdalena, an “india” from Hueytenango (in the present State of Mexico) who in 1591 received Luis Velasco’s II protection of her land and magueys.<sup>292</sup> Magdalena and her children had inherited a piece of land with magueys from Magdalena’s deceased husband Thomas Quiauh. Despite her having possessed of the land over an extended period of time, an “indio” named Marcos, “out of hatred and enmity,” claimed the land for himself and intended to take it. This emotionally charged language paints the fight over land and maguey as a long-brewing personal conflict. As in the case of Ana Marta, the death of the land-owning husband would provide an opening for someone to make a claim on his coveted land and magueys. The protection issued by Luis Velasco II, to be carried out by the *corregidor* (a governor with judicial and police powers), extends explicitly to Magdalena and her children as inheritors of Thomas Quiauh’s property. Viceregal *Cédulas* could thus provide protections for women and children against men who attempted to seize their possessions, an intervention by the state in the absence of the male head of household. On the other hand, references to children also play into the pathos of these legal documents, creating a sympathetic portrayal of the propertied woman as mother and steward of her children’s inheritance.

The inheritance by children presents yet another opportunity for appropriating and using maguey, and in these cases the offending party could even be a family member as in the case of Ana Lorenzana from the village of San Bartolomé in Tenayuca (in the present State of Mexico). In 1591, Luis de Velasco issued a *cédula* on behalf of Ana, an orphaned child whose aunts and other relatives wanted to take the land, houses and maguey fields that she had inherited from her parents.<sup>293</sup> The viceregal *cédula* describes Ana as “the legitimate daughter and universal heir” of these properties and identifies an “india” named Francisca from Teocalquiyacan as the principal

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<sup>292</sup> AGN, Indios, Vol. 3, Expediente 330.

<sup>293</sup> AGN, Indios, Vol. 5, Expediente 197.

offender for taking a piece of land along with magueys. This case presents an example of opportunism within an extended family network, with Ana's aunts seizing the property of their deceased sibling. In all likelihood Ana did not air her grievance on her own. Rather, someone else likely helped her, and that unnamed person may have stood to benefit from Ana's possessions. Ultimately, Ana could have been a proxy for the transfer of the property to this person. Or it could be that as a child or young woman, Ana did not have the wherewithal or command the manpower to make productive use of the magueys. That her aunts led the effort to appropriate Ana's land and magueys shows that women were not always the aggrieved party—they could also capitalize (legally or not) on transfers of property and wealth derived from maguey plants.

In all these examples, we must keep in mind that claims on land and maguey involved not just the individuals mentioned in a given *cédula* but collectivities and communities, as seen especially in the *cédula* involving the indigenous villagers from Puebla. Another *cédula*, issued by Luis de Velasco II in 1594, ordered protections for an unspecified number of indigenous women from Tacubaya (present State of Mexico) in the transport and sale of “miel blanca” (white *aguamiel*, likely *tlachique*) in Mexico City.<sup>294</sup> The *cédula* states that the women have produced a relation claiming that they had regularly taken *aguamiel* from their maguey plants to Mexico City for their use and benefit until some justices began to harass them. In the *cédula*, Luis de Velasco II grants each of the women license to freely take a quart of white *aguamiel* to Mexico City in a *cantarillo* (small ceramic jug or pitcher). This case stands out as an example of indigenous women claiming a right not just to sell *aguamiel* but to access the urban market of New Spain's capital. No doubt, bringing a case against not just one but a number of justices

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<sup>294</sup> AGN, Indios, Vol. 6, Expediente 908.



carried risks for the women. Yet, as we see in the previous *cédula* cited, *aguamiel* from maguey represented a source of income that indigenous communities, pressed by the tribute requirements of the colonial state, could not easily forego, particularly as colonists and their heirs ate up agricultural land and concentrated indigenous communities around new colonial cities and towns. For their part, local officials, acting with a certain degree of autonomy from the viceregal government, might hope to skim an extra layer of income from the sale of *aguamiel*, pitting themselves against the viceregal office in its dual role as tribute collector and protector of indigenous communities. In this regard, extortion overlaps with tribute collection within the different branches of the colonial state, a double siphoning of wealth from indigenous communities.

In these early colonial *cédulas*, maguey, particularly through the extraction and sale of *aguamiel*, features as a source of wealth for indigenous households and communities as well as the colonial state. After the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the sale of *aguamiel* as *pulque* would come into the full purview of the colonial state of New Spain as colonial authorities sought to rein in a perceived excess of the drink's consumption. These efforts are documented at length in the AGN's Indiferente Virreinal branch, in an extensive set of documents listed with the sub-heading "Pulques" with dates ranging from 1610 to 1821, the year of Mexican Independence from Spain. Aside from Indiferente Virreinal, another branch of the AGN also called "Pulques" deals with the harvesting and sale of fermented *aguamiel* at the end of the colonial period, with dates ranging from 1746 to 1817.<sup>295</sup> While these documents take as their focal point the production, sale and taxing of *pulque*, they also acknowledge the point of production in the harvesting of *aguamiel* from the maguey plant itself. Between the *cédulas* analyzed in this section from the

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<sup>295</sup> These sources are discussed at length by Hernández Palomo and Kicza.

Indios branch and the documents in Indiferente Virreinal and Pulques, we witness a privileging of the commodified and taxable product of the maguey plant, and the occlusion of the plant itself as the source of *aguamiel*. Although a fungible good, the maguey plant is bound to the land, limited in its circulation by both its time to maturation and large size. In the movement from land-bound plant to transportable beverage and liquor, and from less to increasing refinement and processing, *aguamiel* also moves between gendered spheres, from high activity among women to spaces dominated by men. The *pulquerías* that formed during the Bourbon era, for example, primarily employed men even though colonial law dictated that women serve *pulque* in these establishments.<sup>296</sup> The *pulquerías* specialized in more refined versions of *pulque* while indigenous women sold the less refined, less alcoholic and cheaper *tlachique* outside the *pulquerías*. The “refinement” of *pulque*, as discussed by Daniel Nemser, parallels concerns with racial purity in the colony.<sup>297</sup> The emphasis of *pulque* over maguey cultivation, in turn, represents a shift from inclusion to exclusion of women, and thus the occlusion of the association between maguey and women as a source of nourishment and sustenance.

At the same time, the arrival of Old World agriculture, based on the raising of livestock, transfigures a landscape previously dominated by corn and maguey, with maguey in particular serving to keep land fertile even in arid conditions and thus contributing to the sustainability of agricultural land. Drawing on one more *cédula* as an example, in 1591 Luis de Velasco ordered protections for villagers from San Miguel, a tributary of Cuauhtitlan in the Chalco province.<sup>298</sup> The *cédula* responds to complaints that a farmer named Francisco de Salcedo had allowed his cattle to enter the villagers’ land, resulting in the destruction of their maguey fields. According to

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<sup>296</sup> Kicza, 128.

<sup>297</sup> Nemser, 99.

<sup>298</sup> AGN, Indios, Vol. 5, Expediente 963.

the *cédulas*, the local mayor defended Francisco de Salcedo against the villagers. In response to the villagers' complaints, the Viceroy orders Francisco de Salcedo and the mayor to remove the cattle from the villagers' lands and refrain from destroying their magueys. The protection of magueys by indigenous villagers thus constitutes the protection not just of a source of income but of plant cultivation, against cattle grazing. The introduction of cattle into the New World, and its ecological impact, is a colonial legacy that, like other colonial inventions, gets taken for granted in the modern world system at the cost of native lifeways and practices.<sup>299</sup>

Legal disputes over maguey plants exemplify how colonial tribute demands intensified the reliance of indigenous communities on maguey cultivation while also straining the relationship of maguey cultivators to the plant. The appearance of these disputes in viceregal *cedulas* at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, especially under Luis de Velasco, indicate that these disputes had been brewing amid the social upheaval of forced relocation and the shift to an economic model based on monopolized agricultural production in the *haciendas* and, along with that, the imposition of rents. The maguey disputes, then, illustrate a parallel version of the process of enclosure—the expropriation of land from the peasantry, the imposition of rents—taking place in Europe during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a process that, according to Silvia Federici, had especially damaging effects on older women.<sup>300</sup> The viceregal *cédulas* investigated in this section provide evidence of indigenous women's efforts to maintain control over their agricultural products, especially maguey-*pulque*, and manage their household income in the face of the onerous tribute demands of the colonial state.

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<sup>299</sup> Gustavo Verdesio relates this point to the River Plate region of South America in his essay “Sentido de océano: estatus ontológico y epistemológico del Atlántico en el estudio del imperialismo ecológico y económico europeos,” based on a shorter essay, “The Original Sin Behind the Creation of a New Europe: Economic and Ecological Imperialism in the River Plate,” *Mapping Colonial Times*. Eds. Santa Arias and Mariselle Meléndez (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2002), 137-158.

<sup>300</sup> Federici, 72.

## Conclusion

Mexico's looming agricultural crisis, brought on by groundwater depletion<sup>301</sup> among other factors, is illustrative of the processes underway in the Anthropocene, a period in earth history marked by the large-scale impact of humans on the world's geology and climate. The year 1610 marks a definitive shift into this period, catalyzed by the European colonization of the Americas.<sup>302</sup> The maguey plant, so integral to the Mexican landscape for centuries, stands at the crossroads of this geological and climatic shift, just as it stands at an imperial crossroads between Europe and Mesoamerica. Within Mesoamerica empire, corn, cotton and stone displaced maguey's central importance as a source of food, clothing and building material. After the Conquest and within the Anthropocene, maguey once again becomes displaced, devalued, in favor of corn and cotton but also wheat and tequila—the value of all these items dominated by gold in the first instance and then coin money.

And yet maguey cultivation and *aguamiel* harvesting continues to provide sustenance and income to communities such as the Mazahua of Ixtlahuaca in the Toluca Valley and the Zapotec of Matatlán, Oaxaca. After at least nine millennia of mutual care between humans and agave species,<sup>303</sup> maguey cultivation and *aguamiel* harvesting remains a quintessentially local activity, tied to indigenous communities and economies.<sup>304</sup> The coincidence between ethno-diversity and biodiversity, and the rapid reduction of both under the global capitalist economy, is telling: half the world's 7,000 languages face extinction by the year 2,100,<sup>305</sup> and climate change threatens

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<sup>301</sup> Mikael Wolfe, "The Historical Dynamics of Mexico's Groundwater Crisis in La Laguna: Knowledge, Resources, and Profit, 1930s-1960s," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 29.1 (Winter 2013), 3-35.

<sup>302</sup> Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin, "Defining the Anthropocene," *Nature* 519 (12 March 2015), 177.

<sup>303</sup> Radding, 89.

<sup>304</sup> Parsons and Parsons, 17.

<sup>305</sup> "Disappearing Languages," *Enduring Voices—Documenting the Planet's Endangered Languages*. National Geographic. Web. 27 July 2015.

one in six plant and animal species.<sup>306</sup> Meanwhile, Nahuatl and other indigenous languages carry a rich understanding of local biospheres including the curative powers of many plants.

The painted calendrical almanacs explored in this chapter document a portion of Mesoamerica's animal and plant life, attesting to the interdependence among humans, plants and animals within the earth body. The feminine deities in those texts give expression to a metabolic loop in which earth and plant bodies feed humans while also feeding on the laboring human body. In its cycle of death and renewal, the earth too takes the form of a laboring body that gives birth to new life and thus creates the diversity of animal (including human) and plant life that we see in the painted manuscripts. As stated early in this chapter, the goddess Mayahuel takes credit for discovering the maguey plant's nutritious sap. That agricultural innovation, concomitant with the movement of human communities across the North American landscape, exemplifies the cross-renewal of human and plant life, a mutual reinforcement of bio- and ethno-diversity. The identification of women as agricultural innovators, apotheosized in the figure of Mayahuel, overlaps with their contributions as cultural innovators. Recent linguistic studies, for example, document the greater flexibility of women than men in regard to linguistic variance, particularly in bilingual settings.<sup>307</sup> This linguistic flexibility, makes women, and mothers especially, conduits of cultural change as they come into contact with speakers of various languages and cultivate bilingual speakers.

As women perform the work of mediating between languages and cultures, so does maguey as cultigen mediate between mobile/migratory human societies and more sedentary ones, which stand at alternate poles in the accessibility and delimitation of social space. Mobility

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<sup>306</sup> Mark C. Urban, "Accelerating Extinction Risk from Climate Change," *Science* 348.6234 (1 May 2015), 571.

<sup>307</sup> See Naomi Lapidus Shin, "Women as Leaders of Language Change: A Qualification from the Bilingual Perspective," *Selected Proceedings of the 6<sup>th</sup> Workshop on Spanish Sociolinguistics*, ed. Ana M. Carvalho and Sara Beaudrie (Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project, 2013), 135-147.

transgresses the borders set up in sedentary social formations while also creating conditions for renewal as migrating groups come into contact with settled ones. This mobility crosses into, over, and out of the Mexica and then New Spanish Capital of Mexco-Tenochtitlan-Mexico City in a spatial and temporal continuum across multiple settlements and resettlements, conquests and colonizations. Within this continuum, maguey offers nourishment and revitalization in the face of the enclosure of social spaces—enclosure of freely and commonly used land and denial of access to urbanized spaces. In this vein, the *tlachique* vendors that move into and out of Mexico city defy the boundaries set up anew by Spanish authorities, breaking into the New Spanish capital as a breaking into the heart of the maguey plant that spills out its fruits to the cultivator of the land.

## Conclusion

With the advent of Spanish colonial rule, maguey plant figures as a silent actor in the transfer of imperial power, and wealth, from indigenous to Spanish hands. In this regard, I return to Book 12 of the *Florentine Codex*, to an episode following the Spanish takeover of the Mexica capital, the future Mexico City. In this scene, three rulers of the Triple Alliance stand in defeat next to Cortés and Malintzin, the dirty maguey-fiber cloaks of the rulers epitomizing their lowered status:

auh in Quauhtemoctzin itlan ca in Capitan: in quimolpilia Quetzalichpetzli,  
tlatlacuhitectli, vitzitzilin hivio inic ocuiltecaio, omach catzaoac, çan  
quixcavitica: nimã contoquilitica in Coanacutzin, tetcucu tlatoani: in  
quimolpilitica, çan vel ichtilmatli, xoxochiteio, xochimoiaoac, omach no  
catzaoac: nimã cõtoquilitica. Tettlepanquetzatzin, tlacuban tlatoani, çãno iuhqui in  
quimolpilitica in ichtilmatli, o no vel catzactix, o uel catzaoac.

[And Quauhtemoctzin was next to the Captain. He had on a shining maguey-fiber  
cloak, each half different, covered with hummingbird feathers, Ocuillan style. It  
was very dirty; it was all he had. Then Coanacochtzin, the ruler of Tetzco, was  
next. He had tied on only a plain maguey-fiber cloak with a flowered border, with  
a spreading design of flowers; it too was very dirty. Next was Tetlapanquetzatzin,  
the ruler of Tlacopan, who likewise had tied on a maguey cloak; it too was dirtied,  
very dirty.]<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Lockhart, *We People Here*, 250.

Here, the quality of each maguey cloak descends in order from the first to last ruler: Cuauhtemoc's appears as the most elaborate ("covered with hummingbird feathers"), while Coanacochtzin's is described as "plain" with a "flowered border," and Tetlapanquetzatzin's merits no additional detail beyond its being dirty. In this way, the *tlacuilos* of the *Florentine Codex* use the maguey cloaks to reaffirm an implied hierarchy of rulership, with Cuauhtemoc, as Mexica leader, assuming the lead position. Yet, like his colleagues in rule, even Cuauhtemoc's cloak appears sullied, "very dirty" ("omach catzaoac"). That "it was all he had" ("çan quixcavitica") further emphasizes his now destitute status as an orphaned ruler before the paternal figure of Cortés and the motherly figure of Malintzin.

It is telling that this same scene takes place on the rooftop of the Tlacohtcalatl Coyohuehuetzin's home in Atactzinco, with Cortés and Malintzin seated under a "canopy of varicolored cloth" ("tlatlapalquachtli"), as the treasurer Tlazolyaotl guards the newly claimed gold of the conquistadores.<sup>309</sup> "Tlacohtcalatl," a lordly title in Nahuatl literally translating as "person from the house of arrows," refers variously to a general, a warrior who has taken captives in battle, and a high judge; in any case, this figure is subordinate to the Mexica *tlahtoani*.<sup>310</sup> The occupation of the Tlacohtcalatl's home, which the Mexica had been using as a refuge when Cortés arrived, becomes emblematic of imperial dispossession—the capture of the home and its gold reserves. The erection of the multicolored cloth canopy adds symbolic heft to this dispossession, converting Cortés into the putative head administrator of a new household, a new imperial order.

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> "tlacohtcalatl," *Nahuatl Dictionary* (University of Oregon), web, 5 April, 2016. See also Ross Hassig, *Aztec Warfare: Imperial Expansion and Political Control* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 43; and Molina, "tlacohtli," Nahuatl-Spanish section, 149r 118r.



The use of this *tlatlapalquachtli* transmutes the value of the newly acquired gold into Cortés' claim on the ruler's household. In Mexica-era Mexico, this cotton cloth functioned as a form of money, perhaps the closest thing to a universal currency.<sup>311</sup> The value of this cloth stands in contrast to the maguey fibers more readily available and more commonly used among the *macehualtin* commoner population.<sup>312</sup> Cortés' flamboyant cloth canopy thus stands in contrast to the the less valuable, and visibly dirty, maguey cloaks donned by the Mexica leaders. If all the Mexica had were these cloths, what they had was of little worth.

While the cotton cloths signify Cortés' appropriation of Mexica wealth, they also prompt a consideration of the creators of the cloth, namely the women who, as María Rodríguez-Shadow reminds us, would create this currency without receiving recognition for it.<sup>313</sup> Indeed, in the scene atop the home of Atactzinco, women are nowhere to be found, and yet we might suppose the presence of the women in that the Tlacoachcalatl's household, that is, the women who would have worked and lived there. Were they swept up by the conquering Spaniards and harbored like so much gold, as in the case of Tlaxcala and Chalco? Or, did they take to battling the Spaniards and their allies like other Mexica women in the *Florentine Codex* who used their paddles to splash water in the faces of the invaders?<sup>314</sup> The use of the cotton cloths figures as an appropriation, as well, of women's labor in a regime of value centered on gold. In this way, the Spanish imperial state cannibalizes that of the Mexica, a devouring of one ritual economy by another.

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<sup>311</sup> María J. Rodríguez-Shadow, *La mujer azteca* (Mexico: Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México, 1997), 116.

<sup>312</sup> Patricia Rieff Anawalt. *Indian Clothing Before Cortés: Mesoamerican Costumes from the Codices*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 1981), 27, 33.

<sup>313</sup> Rodríguez-Shadow, 116.

<sup>314</sup> Lockhart, *We People Here*, 238-239.

As McAnany and Wells have argued, Mesoamerican archaeologists have developed a “pre-existing awareness of the rich symbolism and profoundly contextualized ritual practice within descendant communities. But in Mesoamerica and elsewhere, awareness has not always led to understanding, and the interpretive difficulties and causal challenges to effecting a rapprochement between ritual practice and economic process have proven to be substantial.”<sup>315</sup> As a corollary point, the authors note the need to study ritual economy “outside the cultural logic of late capitalism.”<sup>316</sup> Such a challenge inheres in the study of Spanish-Mesoamerican contact and the crossing of value systems between the Old and New Worlds. This dissertation has taken up the crossing of ritual economies through the bodies—of women and of feminized magueys—constituting and creating imperial wealth. Within this crossing, the household stands as aggregator of wealth and status.

In a gesture toward explaining the ritual economy of governments, Agamben reminds us of the intimate connection between the house, as house-world, and power: “the house-world is governed by a single principle. Power—every power, both human and divine—must hold these two poles together, that is, it must be, at the same time, kingdom and government, transcendent norm and immanent order.”<sup>317</sup> We can understand “immanent order” as the material structures of social relations, and the “transcendent norm” as sublimation of those relations via ritual protocols, the totality of which constitutes a ritual economy. If Cortés acts as the provisional head of the imperial household, then, Malintzin, sitting beside him, might appear as his acquiescent “good wife.”

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<sup>315</sup> Patricia A. McAnany and E. Christian Wells, “Toward a Theory of Ritual Economy,” *Research in Economic Anthropology 27: Dimensions of Ritual Economy* (Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing, 2008), 3.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>317</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa and Matteo Mandarini (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 82.

And yet, the various representations of the indigenous women at the crossroads of Mesoamerican and Spanish empires— whether rulers, nobles, commoners, slaves or pleasure women—provide us with a picture of women’s experiences that defy domestic servitude. In one instance, as in Chimalpahin’s *relaciones*, women themselves govern as men do, instilling fear in their subjects; in another, as in the *Florentine Codex*, the *ahuiani* (pleasure woman) becomes a powerful, if abject, seducer of men. Meanwhile, the women selling their *tlachique* (low-grade *pulque*), cultivated outside of the *hacienda* estate plantation, press for access Mexico City’s markets. Imperial colonization, in turn, finds in the female body its principal object of conquest, a drive affirmed within imperial textualities (whether they are the painted almanacs known as the *Borgia* Group, Spanish and mestizo accounts of the Conquest, or the viceregal *cédulas*). What these texts tell us, then, is that Conquest and colonization of Mexico flowed through indigenous women’s bodies at the same time that these bodies were written out of history as voiced figures. This dissertation has provided only a starting point for excavating the experiences of women who appear in that history, in the turning point across the Conquest divide and into the world of early colonial Mexico.

Figures

1



a

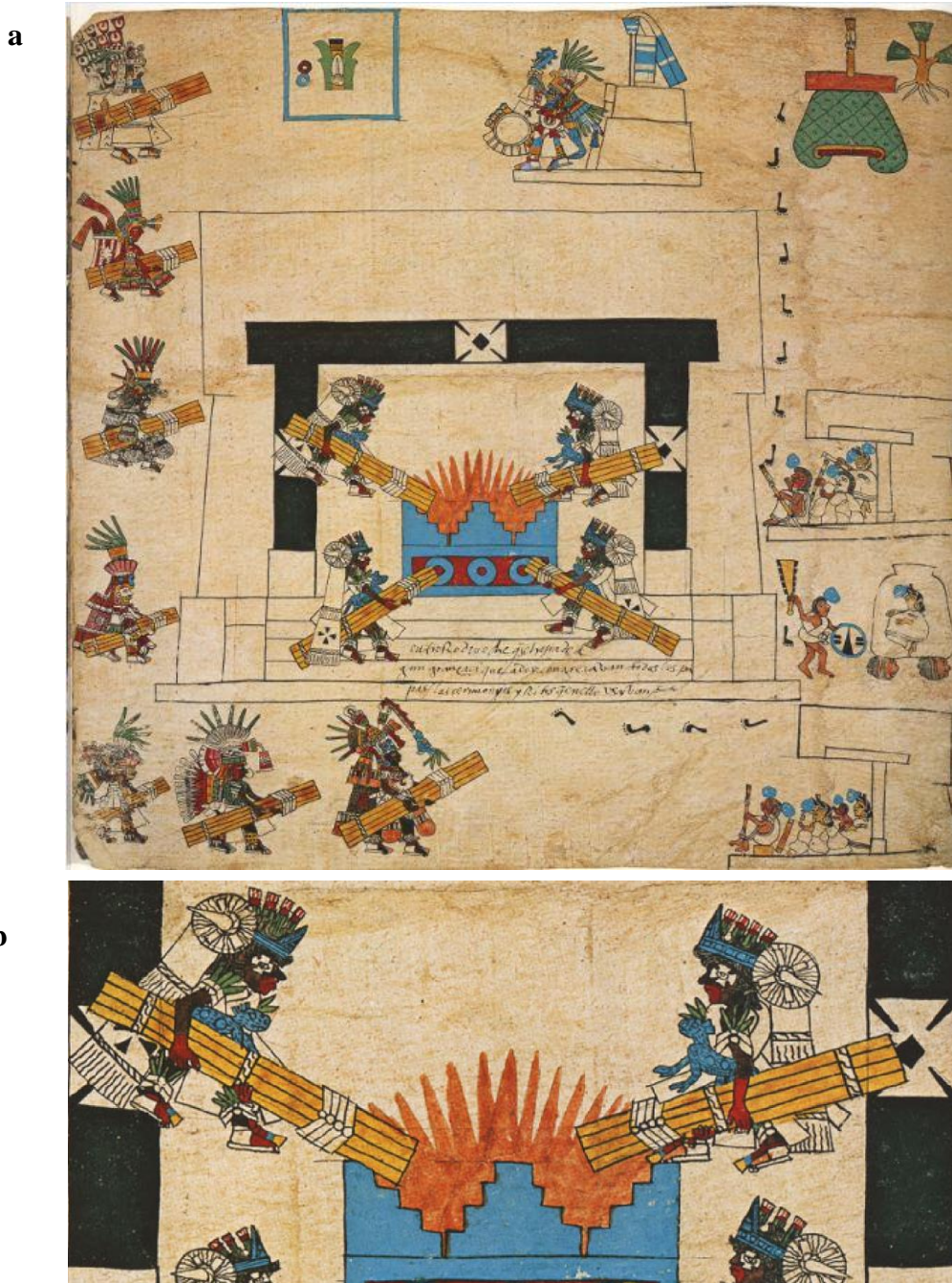
**Fig. 1.** Accoutrements of judges and rulers. **a**, *teuctlahtoque* seated on woven reed thrones, holding maguēy spines; **b**, *teuctlahtoque* seated on woven reed thrones, emitting speech scrolls, turquoise diadems floating above their heads; **c**, Acamapichtli, first *tlahtoani* of Tenochtitlan, seated on throne and wearing turquoise diadem. Both groups of *tlahtoque* and the *tlahtoani* wear fine woven capes. Sources: **1ab**, Sahagún, *General History of the Things of New Spain (Florentine Codex)*, Book 8, Chapter 17, Paragraph 2. **1c**, *Ibid*, Chapter 1. Retrieved from <https://www.wdl.org/en/search/?collection=florentine-codex>.

b



c





**Fig. 2.** New Fire ceremony: **a**, a panoramic view of the ceremony, including deity impersonators on the left, lay persons on the right, and the lighting of the fire in the temple by priests at center; **b**, a close-up view of priests lighting the New Fire, each priest, representing Yoalteuctli (God of the Night), adorned with a turquoise diadem and carrying turquoise-colored dog-necklaces (*xolocozacatl*) made of paper. Source: *Codex Borbonicus*, page 34.



3



**Fig. 3.** A *teuctlahtoani*, seated on a woven reed throne, listens to accusatory testimony while inspecting a painting. Source: Sahagún, *General History of the Things of New Spain (Florentine Codex)*, Book 8, Chapter 17, Paragraph 2.

4



**a**

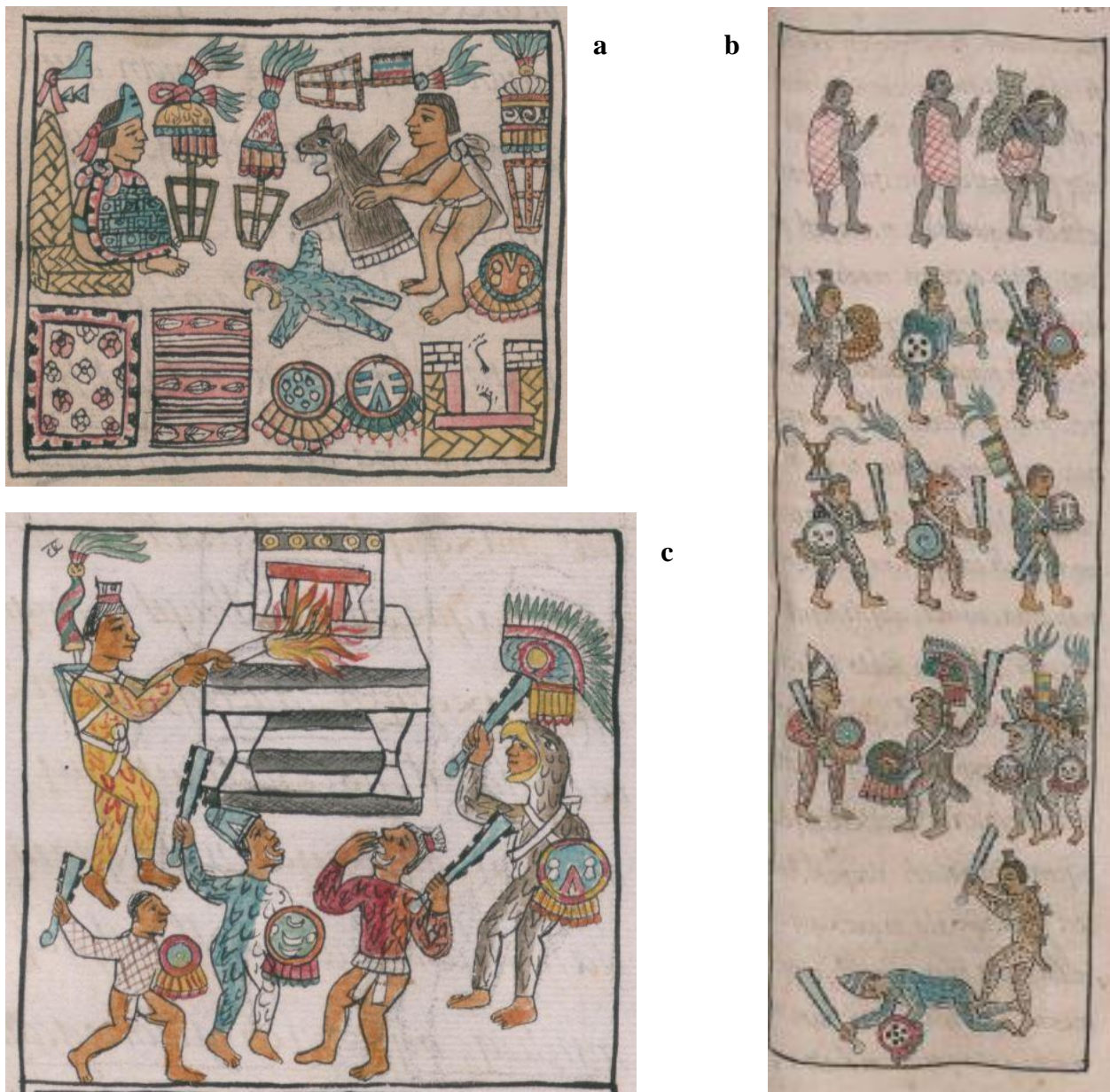


**b**

**Fig. 4.** Scenes of execution. **a**, a *teuctlahtoani* oversees an execution by strangulation; **b**, an imprisoned musician is executed by bludgeoning with a *maquahuitl*. Source: **4a**, Sahagún, *General History of the Things of New Spain (Florentine Codex)*, Book 8, Chapter 17, Paragraph 2; **4b**, *Ibid.*, Paragraph 3.



**Fig. 5.** *Quauhpilli* (“Eagle Warrior”) statue, c. 1480, National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City. Photo by Ximena Gómez.



**Fig. 6. a,** a *tlahtoani* sits amid his stock of war regalia and other tribute items; **b-c,** the *quauhpilli* (“eagle warrior”) is shown, along with the jaguar warrior, leading soldiers in battle and conquest. Source: Sahagún, *General History of the Things of New Spain (Florentine Codex)*, Book 8, Chapter 17, Paragraph 1.





**Fig. 7.** Scenes depicting noblewomen in various forms of counsel: **a**, (top half) a woman (healer) treats another with herbs and (bottom half) two noblewomen converse; **b**, a noblewoman meets with a group of women. Source: Sahagún, *General History*, Book 10, Chapter 13.



**Fig. 8.** “Quitlauhtique” (“They gave him gifts). Source: *Lienzo de Tlaxcalla*, 1552. Retrieved from <https://www.wdl.org/en/search/?collection=florentine-codex>.





a



b



c

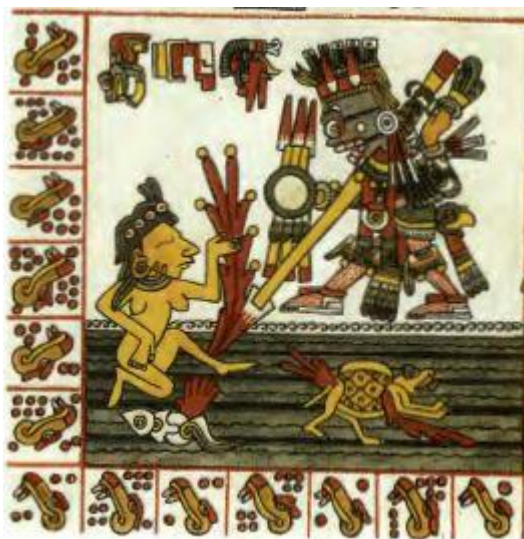
**Fig. 9.** Six of 20 deities of 80 days in the *Codex Fejérváry-Mayer*. **a**, the goddesses (left to right) Mictlancihuatl, Tlazolteotl, and Mayahuel. **b**, (left to right) Xochiquetzal and Chalchiuhtlicue. **c**, Mictlanteuctli. Source: Facsimile from Anders and Jansen, *Fejérváry-Mayer*, Plates 28-29.

10



**Fig. 10.** Five of the 20 deities of 80 days in the *Codex Borgia*, Plates 15-17. Facsimile from Anders and Jansen, *Borgia*. **a**, the goddesses (left to right) Mictlancihuatl, Tlazolteotl, and Mayahuel. **b**, (left to right) Xochiquetzal and Chalchiuhtlicue.

11



**Fig. 11.** Tlahuizcalpanteuctli (representing Venus as “Morning Star”) attacks (brings drought) on the day-sign Crocodile in *Codex Borgia*. Facsimile from Anders and Jansen, *Codex Borgia*, Plates 15-17.





**Fig. 12.** Mayahuel/Ayopechtli sits atop a turtle, surrounded by food items and sacrificial accoutrements, in *Codex Laud*. Facsimile from Anders and Jansen, *Codex Laud*, Plate 16.



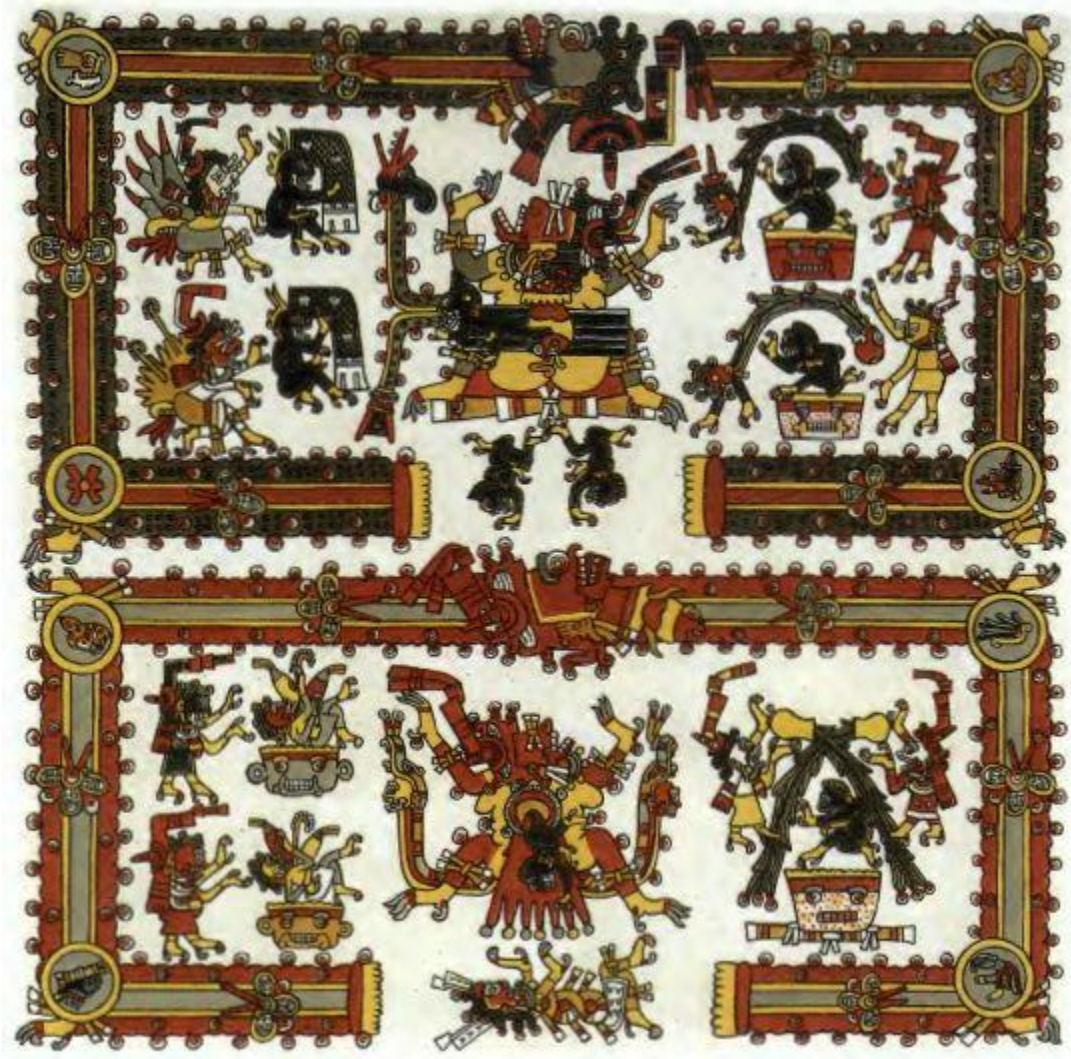
**Fig. 13.** In *Codex Borgia*, first rectangular goddess and the “mystic effects” of burning copal incense (Nowotny, 80). Venus disappears, December 1495 (Milbrath, Synoptic Plates). Source: facsimile from Anders and Jansen, *Codex Borgia*, Plate 29.



14.



Fig. 14. Second rectangular goddess. Re-emergence of Venus as “Morning Star” (Milbrath, Synoptic Plates). *Codex Borgia*, Plate 30. Facsimile from Anders and Jansen, *Borgia*.



**Fig. 15.** Third and fourth rectangular goddesses and two splayed Earth goddesses. Continuing rise of Venus in the East, January and February, 1496 (Milbrath, Synoptic Plates). *Codex Borgia*, Plate 31. Facsimile from Anders and Jansen, *Borgia*.



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