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Moctezuma and the Emergence of Sixteenth-Century New Spain's Historical Dialogue
by
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Honors Thesis

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Abstract

In August 1521, Hernan Cortés entered the city of Tenochtitlan, declared it conquered, and announced the creation of the new colonial territory New Spain. Over the course of the subsequent sixteenth century Spain would rapidly expand its influence across the American continents.

Spanish colonialism in the Americas is historically distinct for a rapid process of globalization which linked previously isolated European and indigenous societies. Analysis of chronicles documenting the Conquest of Mexico written in the later half of the 1500's reveal that colonialism corresponded to new ways of thinking informed by, but also distinct from, Aztec and Spanish world views. In particular, history in New Spain distinguished itself from colonizer and colonized conceptions of interpreting the past through combining both societies' historical legacies into a product distinct from the sum of its parts. The character of Moctezuma is an excellent frame around which to organize this historiographical analysis.

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Moctezuma and the Emergence of Sixteenth-Century New Spain's Historical Dialogue

In English, the word “history” can describe “what happened,” “that which is said to have happened,” or the process of historians constructing new historical accounts to rectify incongruity between narratives and the events they describe.¹ Historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot noted this ambivalent definition of the word “history” in his historiographical analysis *Silencing the Past*. Like *Silencing the Past*, this paper demonstrates that historical production reveals underlying truths about the societies in which historians operate: truths which scholars may not have desired or felt the need to explain in their own time. But, which are of the utmost importance for understanding who in the past held power and how they wielded it. As a historiographical analysis, this paper focuses on the history of historical productions documenting a single event: the Conquest of Mexico, the most salient instance in history of alien societies coming into contact through colonialism.

In 1519 Hernán Cortés and five hundred conquerors, or conquistadors in Spanish, departed from an island known as Cuba and continued the process of American colonization initiated in 1492 upon Mesoamerican civilizations. The arrival of Europeans in the Americas marked an end to centuries of relative isolation between the Old and New Worlds, beginning one of history's most rapid globalization processes.² In the Caribbean, where Spanish colonization first took place, the cultural and biological shock of intercontinental contact wiped out nearly the

¹ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), 2, 3.

² Nicole Boivin, Dorian Q. Fuller, and Alison Crowther, “Old World Globalization and the Columbian Exchange: Comparison and Contrast,” *World Archaeology* 44, no .3 (2012), 452, 453.

entire Native American population.³ This limited the capacity of the indigenous peoples' beliefs, practices and customs to affect the Spanish colonial society which developed on top of them.

On the continental mainland, however, Native American societies would be central to every aspect of the colonial experience. Soon after leaving port, Cortés and the conquistadors traveled throughout the Yucatan and central Mexico, met with the most powerful Mesoamerican leaders, initiated the fall of the Aztec Empire, and managed to establish the new territorial entity New Spain.⁴ At each step in this journey, Native Americans' participation was essential towards transforming Spanish ambitions into socio-political reality. Indigenous people forged alliances with the conquistadors and fought alongside them, providing necessary military aid when outright war broke out between Spain and the Aztecs. Then under the newly established colonial authority, Native Americans resisted and adapted, but also accommodated Spanish rule.⁵ Still, in written records Cortés called this the Conquest of Mexico, which would become the prevailing term to describe the invasion over the next five centuries.

Colonialism in Mesoamerica corresponded to a revolution in historical production which is the focus of this analysis. Because Europeans and Native Americans worked so closely in the colonial context, cultural contact made apparent that both societies held radically different world views. Therefore, the Mexican Conquest stands out as revolutionary for bringing into focus, and competition, alien interpretations of history itself. At the moment of contact Spaniards and Aztecs conceived of different manners to frame history as a structure to navigate time and space.

³ Stuart McCook, "The Neo-Columbian Exchange: The Second Conquest of the Greater Caribbean, 1720-1930." *Latin American Research Review* 46, no. 4 (2011), 12.

⁴ New Spain changed in geography over the centuries. At certain points New Spain encompassed Most of North America, Florida, and the Philippines. However, the territories most closely associated with New Spain's geography are modern day Mexico, the Southwest United States territories ceded in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Central America, and Caribbean Islands such as Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico.

⁵ Stuart B. Schwartz, *Victors and Vanquished: Spanish and Nahua Views of the Conquest of Mexico*, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000), vi.

Historian Lynn Hunt points out that sixteenth century Western societies perceive the past yoked between twin beliefs in simultaneity, that humans traverse a “homogenous, empty,” temporal landscape, and modernity: that approaching modern life constitutes “an ongoing process of social acceleration.”⁶ In this system, societies move through time in a straightforward fashion towards an ideal destination, accelerating their pace as they socially improve. Historians such as Stuart B. Schwartz believe that the Nahuatl-speakers who populated Mexico interpreted time as a cycle in which events reoccurred. The Western historical tradition catalogs past events to aid acceleration towards modernity while the Nahua tradition of history intends to identify contemporary placement in time and predict the future.⁷

The Conquest initiated an overlap between such incongruent Western and Native American historical conceptions. To study how Nahua and Spanish histories managed to intersect, adapt, and emerge as a mutually-comprehensible matrix for explaining the past, Moctezuma serves as an emblematic focal point. In nearly every sixteenth century retelling, Moctezuma, head of the Aztec Empire, is the most powerful Nahua leader and contacts Cortés upon the conquistadors’ arrival in Mexico. He invites them into his personal palace at Tenochtitlan’s center; for a short period the Spaniards reside peacefully alongside the Aztec state’s inner organs. However, wide scale warfare breaks out in the capital once conquistadors massacre high-ranking nobles attending a festival dedicated to the god Huitzilopochtli. This precipitates Moctezuma’s death in Spanish captivity and open warfare throughout Mexico. To analyze how Western and Nahua histories intersected within the context of New Spain, this paper studies Moctezuma’s depiction in three different sixteenth century chronicles: book twelve

⁶ Lynn Hunt, *Measuring Time, Making History*, (Budapest; Central European University Press, 2007), 13, 14, 18.

⁷ Schwartz, *Victors and Vanquished*, 20.

of the *Florentine Codex* titled “The Conquest of Mexico,” *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain* by Bernal Díaz, and *History of the Indies of New Spain* by fray Diego Durán.

“The Conquest of Mexico” is significant for revealing how Nahua historical retelling adapted in response to Western history. The *Florentine Codex*, composed between 1578-90, is an encyclopedic history of Nahua culture. Under the supervision of Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún a number of young, elite Nahuas compiled an account of the Conquest in the Codex’s twelfth book.⁸ This narrative relies on the oral and eyewitness accounts of elders from the city of Tlatelolco and therefore depicts the way in which Native Americans during the 1570s recalled war with Spain.⁹ “The Conquest of Mexico” demonstrates that Nahuas likewise realigned their interpretation of history in response to Spanish contact within the context of New Spain.

Díaz was a conquistador who accompanied Cortés and his chronicle, started in the 1550s and completed in late 1560, is distinct for its attention to detail and firsthand information.¹⁰ It is necessary to investigate *The True History* since among popular and academic historians it is one of the most prevalently cited primary source on the Conquest.¹¹ Essential to analyzing Díaz’s chronicle is understanding his social position while writing, as an *encomendero*. Spain’s primary instrument for extracting wealth from American colonies were *encomenderos*, holders of an *encomienda*, etymologically derived from the Spanish word *encomendar*, to entrust. Based on a system first created to consolidate authority in Moorish Spain, *encomenderos* received grants from the Crown which bound a territory’s residents in service to the holder. *Encomenderos* did not own the property of their holding, but wielded enormous powers for profiting off natural and

⁸ Anja Bröchler, “Revisioning the Conquest of Mexico: Image and Text in the Florentine Codex (1578-80.)” *The Medieval History Journal* 12, no.1 (January 2009): 48.

⁹ Bröchler, “Revisioning the Conquest of Mexico,” 62.

¹⁰ Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain; translated with an Introduction and Notes by Janet Burke and Ted Humphery*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 2012), xxxi.

¹¹ Díaz, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, xii.

human resources. In exchange for overseeing conversions to Catholicism and bringing civilization to the Americas, *encomenderos* maintained the rights to set taxes, profit from land use, and compel residents into forced labor.¹² Since Díaz participated in colonization as a conquistador and *encomendero*, the fact that he cedes to indigenous knowledge in his chronicle showcases that contact compelled even empowered New Spain subjects to reinterpret history alongside Spanish and Nahuatl concepts.

History of the Indies, completed in 1581, is a chronicle which displays the clearest fusion between Nahua and Spanish conceptions of history. Its author, fray Diego Durán was born on the mainland but grew up in New Spain. Just as he developed bilingual fluency in the Spanish and Nahuatl languages he understood American and Western cultural concepts natively. *History of the Indies* seamlessly transitions between ideas from two distinct historical traditions, revealing how sixteenth century chronicles from New Spain are indicative of new perspectives on history which resulted from colonial contact.

These three chronicles depict a historical dialogue emerging within New Spain since previously mutually exclusive Native American and Spanish systems of knowledge take part in forming distinct, new historical structures. Moreover, Moctezuma's actions and roles serve to frame contact between conquistadors and the Aztec Empire in these narratives. Therefore, characterization of the Aztec sovereign in these chronicles demonstrates that in the context of sixteenth century New Spain, European and Native American historical structures blended into a new mode of historical representation.

To prove its thesis this paper contains five separate sections. Each chronicle has an individual section devoted towards relating one text to the thesis and two supplementary parts

¹² Rebecca M. Seaman, *Conflict in the Early Americas: An Encyclopedia of the Spanish Empire's Aztec, Inca, and Mayan Conquests*, (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2013), 133, 134.

communicating the significance of studying New Spain's historiography. The present introduction explains the Conquest's historical background, why Moctezuma is an appropriate object of analysis between three noteworthy chronicles, and introduces the thesis which the remaining essay will argue. The following section analyzes "The Conquest of Mexico" from the *Florentine Codex* while describing different physical and narrative structures through which Native Americans and Europeans conceived of history prior to contact.

What comes next is a study of *The True History*, which illustrates that even the most protected and Spanish-aligned colonists reconceived of history after living in the colonies. Then, a section on *History of the Indies* which articulates clearly the process of learning and differentiating from the histories of the two societies which contacted each other through colonialism. This fourth section also addresses a moment where divisions between colonized and colonists persist in *The True History* and "The Conquest of Mexico"; by addressing and intersecting these contentious, incongruent narratives, *History of the Indies* proves itself the best historiographical hybrid representation of New Spain's historical tradition.

Finally, the conclusion of this thesis doubles as a historiographical review, highlighting how contemporary historians overlook the opportunity to analyze New Spain's chronicles collectively despite possessing the tools to do so.

“The Conquest of Mexico” from the *Florentine Codex*

Of preserved sixteenth century chronicles, the twelfth book in the *Florentine Codex* contains possibly the most indigenously inspired account of Spain’s invasion of America. The “Conquest of Mexico” enlisted Nahua youths trained at a European-style college within the Americas to construct the title. These scholars, Antonio Valeriano, Alonso Vegerano, Pedro San Buenaventura and Martín Jacobita interviewed ten to twelve Nahua elders from the city-state Tlatelolco, some of whom contributed firsthand memories of their experiences within Tenochtitlan at the time of the conquistadors’ arrival.¹³

“The Conquest of Mexico” demonstrates that a new historical tradition emerged during New Spain’s sixteenth century since Native American and European historical institutions intersect within the context of this text’s creation and narrative. Native Americans trained under and learned from European guidance to gain the skills to create this book. But, the history this text tells remains deeply rooted to Nahua story structure. Since Moctezuma plays the literary role of the *tlatoani* and his fall corresponds to a cosmic realigning, “The Conquest of Mexico” recounts a Nahua history within a European record; the story itself is of Nahua style, but the *Florentine Codex* contains it through Spanish record keeping practices. Native American record keeping does affect the physical shape of the *Florentine Codex* and “The Conquest of Mexico” borrows from some European tropes. But, the manner through which Spanish writing binds a Nahua tale most clearly illustrates the creation of a new historical methodology during colonial contact.

¹³ Rebecca Dufendach, “‘As if His Heart Died’: A Reinterpretation of Moteuczoma’s Cowardice in the Conquest History of the Florentine Codex” *Ethnohistory* 66, no.4 (2019): 626.

In 1536, a group of Franciscans including Friar Bernardino de Sahagún established the College of Santa Cruz in Tlatelolco, the first European-style school to exist in the Americas. The College, sponsored by Mexico's first bishop don Juan de Zumárraga and first Viceroy don Antonio de Mendoza, enlisted youths from elite Nahua families.¹⁴ Famously, Sahagún appreciated Nahua culture and compiled the *Florentine Codex* to defend against Spanish cultural genocide. His and the College of Santa Cruz's mission was to expedite the spread of Christianity. Historian Anja Bröchler argues "The friar saw himself as a doctor sent out to cure the disease of idolatry. In order to be able to heal, he needed to know the patient."

While students preserved their knowledge of Nahuatl, their professors' emphasis on literacy reveals that the College's lessons unequivocally positioned Nahua youths toward the discourses of Spain and Europe.¹⁵ Nahuas did not traditionally keep records through a phonetic alphabet system; the expression *in tilli in tlapalli* ("in black and red ink") refers to how the Aztec Empire preserved history with pictographic, syllabic characters. Sahagún once wrote that to investigate sources or the *Florentine Codex*, "Everything that we discussed was given to me by means of pictures... and the grammarians [students] explained them in their language, writing the explanation at the foot of the picture."¹⁶ This event does describe a transcultural process, since Sahagún and his students combined pictographic and alphabetic structures into a new record. Still, the process heavily favors Spanish over Nahua institutions of historical production. Sahagún and associated professors expected Nahuas to learn literacy but did not envision a similar responsibility for themselves to understand pictographs. Instead, Sahagún instructed his student to explain and transmute the sources into a form favorable for European consumption.

¹⁴ Anja Bröchler, "Revisioning the Conquest of Mexico: Image and Text in the Florentine Codex (1578-80.)" *The Medieval History Journal* 12, no.1 (January 2009): 49, 50.

¹⁵ Bröchler, "Revisioning the Conquest of Mexico," 49.

¹⁶ Bröchler, "Revisioning the Conquest of Mexico," 50.

Drawings resembling Aztec records *in tllilli in tlapalli* appear in “The Conquest of Mexico,” but adapt to fit alongside the favored European forms of documentation. On April 22, 1577 the Viceroy of Mexico relayed an imperial order to Sahagún that he deliver the *Florentine Codex* to Spain which rushed the completion of the anthology’s twelfth book “The Conquest of Mexico.”¹⁷ The position of imagery versus text illustrates which method of historical record keeping received prioritization. While the book boasts a complete written account of the conquest in transcribed Nahuatl and Spanish, the accompanying pictographs received less attention. “The Conquest of Mexico” only includes a few colored illustrations out of 158 drawings and a large section of space allotted to imagery in the Spanish section’s final third remains blank.¹⁸ As a result, at the College of Santa Cruz Aztec and Spanish systems of recording collided unevenly. Though Nahua systems managed to considerably impact the students’ curriculum and construction of the *Florentine Codex*, the physical form which preserves “The Conquest of Mexico” ultimately appeals mainly to European institutions.

While Sahagún commonly receives credit for the *Florentine Codex* the nahua scholars who assisted him performed vital roles. Bröchler points out that because the students at College of Santa Cruz “[were] Educated in the western humanist tradition and knowledgeable about their own world... it is difficult to distinguish where their work ends and Sahagún’s begins.”¹⁹ In fact, while the physical document of the *Florentine Codex* appeals decisively to the European historical tradition of preservation and categorization, the narrative of “The Conquest of Mexico” contains story-telling elements unique to Native America.

¹⁷ Bröchler, “Revisioning the Conquest of Mexico,” 53, 54.

¹⁸ Bröchler, “Revisioning the Conquest of Mexico,” 53.

¹⁹ Bröchler, “Revisioning the Conquest of Mexico,” 49, 50.

“The Conquest of Mexico” narrates a redefining of the world’s order between earthly and godly domains.” The first of the forty one chapters describes omens precluding the Spaniards: a comet which appears for a full year, the temple of Huitzilopochtli spontaneously combusting, a crane-like bird which reveals the future in a vision to Moctezuma and the appearance of a two-headed man.²⁰ Through each of these signs aspects of the world’s natural order, the cosmos, the divine, and the human form distort in preparation of a chaotic, destructive power.

The *Florentine Codex* then depicts conquistadors as the inhuman force capable of enacting such catastrophic change. Hernan Cortés and his entourage counter all Nahua efforts to stop them as they march toward Tenochtitlan and their progress corresponds to the death of the Aztec Empire. When ambassadors from Tenochtitlan first meet with Cortés they gift to him priceless treasures and adornments made of gold, gemstones, and animal parts. But, the conquistadors’ captain complains, “Are these all your [gifts of] greeting, your [gifts for] approaching one,” and demands that the Mexica prepare to fight them.²¹ From this point forward, an insatiable desire for killing and treasure characterizes the conquistadors.

Following chapters document the Spaniards’ terrible capacity for violence. When reporting to Moctezuma the ambassadors’ describe “how the gun... resounded as if it thundered... And when it discharged... a tree was pulverized; it was as if it vanished.” In appearance, “All iron was their war array. In iron they clothed themselves. With iron they covered their heads... And those which bore them upon their backs, their deer, were as tall as roof terraces.”²² In battle, the Spaniards “completely annihilated [their enemies]. They

²⁰ Bernardino de Sahagún, *General History of the Things of New Spain; Florentine Codex, Translated from the Aztec into English, with Notes and Illus., by Arthur J.O. Anderson [and] Charles E. Dibble.* (Santa Fe, N.M.: School of American Research, 1975.), 1-3.

²¹ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 15, 16.

²² Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 19.

completely destroyed them. They trampled upon them... They shot them with their guns... Not just a few but great numbers of them were destroyed.”²³

Aside from warfare, gluttony for wealth is a defining characteristic of the conquistadors. The twelfth chapter describes how, when Moctezuma gifts them “golden banners, precious feather streamers, and golden necklaces... they appear to smile... As if they were monkeys they seized upon the gold... For in truth they thirsted mightily for gold; they stuffed themselves with it; they starved for it; they lusted for it like pigs.”²⁴ So, in the “Conquest of Mexico” the Spaniards appear as an inhuman, unnatural force. The destruction they sew permeates so deeply that the natural world mutates and malfunctions in preparation of their arrival; in warfare they wear armor which hides their human features, ride animals larger than nearly any species native to Mesoamerica and use weapons which “vanished” “annihilated [and] destroyed,” their targets; and when they finally show desire for anything other than violence the conquistadors react with a gluttonous, bestial urge for treasure.

Studying how “The Conquest of Mexico” invokes traditional Nahuatl historical dialogues through Moctezuma requires understanding sixteenth century Nahua conceptions of his political title: the *tlatoani*. The historiographical investigation *Historias de la conquista: Aspectos de la historiografía de tradición náhuatl* by historian Miguel Pastrana Flores determines that Mexica histories portray the title of *tlatoani* as a divine gift which tasks the receiver with intense holy, personal, and communal responsibilities. “The Conquest of Mexico” fits neatly within Nahuatl historical traditions because Moctezuma’s reactions and characterization during the Conquest reflect this established, Native American trope.

²³ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 27.

²⁴ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 31.

As a gift from divinity, the position of *tlatoani* is so overwhelmingly valuable that holding the title charges a Nahua leader with an immense duty to honor their gifter. Under the name Tloque Nahuaque, Tezcatlipoca, the central Aztec deity which embodies earthly political power, would “lend ‘the mat and chair ‘“ to an earthly ruler. Even for the *tlatoani*, the most powerful person in existence, this authority is never truly his to command, and “only is a dream.” He becomes “the human, transitory, and earthly manifestation of the divinity’s power,” and “a flute which touches the god,” by receiving this gift.”²⁵ Though he receives the gift of embodying a divinity on earth and having his body, organs, and senses be the ones through which Tezcatlipoca touches the corporeal world, human limits still bind the *tlatoani*.²⁶

This divine status does not grant him the right to wield godly authority or conflate his judgment with that of the divine; it indebts the *tlatoani* to watch over his material form and the empire under him as if entrusted to care for the body and domain of a being whose importance surpasses that of humanity. Since Tezcatlipoca embodies the link between divinity and humanity which allows political power to exist, any neglect, mistreatment, or misbehavior by the *tlatoani* of these valuable trappings gifted to him weakens or ruptures the connection that allows statecraft to exist. Still, the *tlatoani* remains human and therefore has limited control over the fate of the universe. The growth or destruction of the state reflects his diligence in embodying the divine, but he cannot redirect fate, truly surpass the limits of humanity, or know why Tezcatlipoca chose him for such a task.

In Nahuatl literature the conflict which the *tlatoani* faces between reconciling with his divine duty and earthly limits causes him great affliction and anxiety, costing him his human

²⁵ “La manifestación humana, transitoria y terrenal del poder de la divinidad”; “una flauta que toca el dios”

²⁶ Miguel Pastrana Flores, *Historias de la conquista Aspectos de la historiografía de tradición náhuatl*, (México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 2009), 129.

energy and willpower to perform imperfectly as the vessel for a god. Therefore, the *tlatoani* must perform a series of duties to maximize this link and his ability to embody the image of a god. His principal responsibility, in addition to attending to matters of war, requires strengthening the empire's spiritual might through conducting rituals, praying, and contemplating divinity in public displays.²⁷

The metaphysical implications of the *tlatoani* extend to the state of the nation itself, as he is “the center of the emotion and consciousness of the community,” who must raise the community like his child.”²⁸ The status of the state is intertwined with his emotions and actions as a person, and the entire Aztec Empire will reflect his behavior and sentiments. The role of a *tlatoani* is incredibly public and demands he abide by a strict moral code to stay humble and teach those surrounding to properly behave.²⁹ This involves cultivating a mien of great self control, remaining serious and having respect for the dignity of his position, those who preceded him, and humanity as a whole.³⁰

At the start of “The Conquest of Mexico” Moctezuma embodies literary portrayals of the *tlatoani* by residing at an unquestioned position of Mexica authority. When anomalies preceding the conquistadors' arrival appear throughout Mexico, Nahua hunters capture and immediately deliver to Moctezuma the “seventh evil omen:... an ashen bird like a brown crane... [which] On its head was... a mirror... [on] There appeared... the Fire Drill [constellation].” On the bird's forehead Moctezuma sees a vision of what comes next: “people... coming as conquerors... Deer bor[ing] them upon their backs.” But, when soothsayers and advisors inspect the bird “that which they looked at vanished.” Following the “eighth evil omen: thistle-men having two heads [but]

²⁷ Flores, *Historias de la conquista*, 130.

²⁸ “El centro anímico y de conciencia de la comunidad”

²⁹ Flores, *Historias de la conquista*, 131.

³⁰ Flores, *Historias de la conquista*, 132.

only one body,” Nahuas bring these people to Moctezuma and, “When he had beheld them, then they vanished.”³¹

During this period of prosperity Moctezuma sits at the utmost center of the Aztec Empire. Not only do the people he rules over urgently deliver the most important news and creatures to him but in his presence these omens sometimes reveal secret information not available to any other human. The disappearance of visions on the seventh omen’s head and the bodies of the eighth omens signifies that Moctezuma embodies the Aztec’s *tlatoni*. After being seen by him there is no more powerful source to whom they might reveal themselves so as to warn the Nahuas of what is coming.

When messengers meet with an initial, expeditionary crew of Spaniards who appear in “The Conquest of Mexico,” Moctezuma proves himself as *tlatoni* by possessing the authority to counter this unknown threat. Despite this welcome party consisting of high-ranking officials, “Pinotl of Cuetlaxtlan, the high steward... the steward of Mictlanquauhtl- Yaotzin... the steward of Teocinyocan, named Teocinyacatl... Cuitlalpitoc [and Teudilli],” they are overwhelmed and terrified in the face of their counterparts. “The Conquest of Mexico” describes how, “[the Spaniards] said to them: ‘Go!... We shall not tarry in going to reach Mexico’ which motivates these powerful men “[to go] direct to Mexico. Day by day, night by night they traveled in order to come to warn Moctezuma, in order to tell him exactly of its circumstances.”³²

Already those close to the pinnacle of Aztec authority cannot resist even this small fraction of Spanish authority and see their only recourse as turning to their state’s absolute highest figure with as much speed as possible. These stewards reveal that the encounter strained them greatly when they first address Moctezuma by stating, “O our lord,... may thou destroy us.

³¹ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 3.

³² Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 6.

For behold what we have seen.” Moctezuma proves himself as *tlatoani* capable of overshadowing any known authority when he comforts and orders them to keep this news a secret: “You have suffered fatigue you; you have become exhausted. Rest. What I have seen has been in secret. No one shall speak anything [of this].”³³

In the next encounter, the Spaniards prove to possess a more terrifying power which Moctezuma fails to match. The effects of Cortés’ arrival on Moctezuma leads him and the Aztec Empire to suffer in a manner unique to the narrative role of *tlatoani*. For introductions, Moctezuma arranges an even more prestigious group than before: “the *teohua*, whose lordly name, whose princely name was Yoalli ichan... the ruler of Tepoztlan... Tiqua... the ruler of Uuetlan [and] Ueicamecatl.”³⁴ He entrusts to them gifts for the Spaniards in the form of “the gods’ array,” gorgeous outfits with deep political and religious significances; clearly, Moctezuma intends that these emissaries do not panic and meet the conquistadors well prepared.³⁵ But although this party of emissaries includes the cream of the crop of Nahua nobility and despite them possessing priceless national treasures, these conquistadors inspire an even more terrified reaction.

Learning that the conquistadors desire war and violence, this group of ambassadors returns to Moctezuma as quickly as possible. The sixth chapter of “The Conquest of Mexico” describes how, “[once Cortés] left them... Each one rowed as hard as he could; some paddled with their hands. With all their force they fled.”³⁶ But this time, Moctezuma lacks the authority to dispel their fears: “when he had so heard what the messengers reported, he was terrified, he

³³ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 6, 7.

³⁴ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 10.

³⁵ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 11, 12, 13.

³⁶ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 17.

was astounded.”³⁷ Here Moctezuma reflects the *tlatoani* trope by failing to overcome the overwhelming emotions of terror emanating from the Spanish presence. The conquistadors possess a new power to which even the highest Nahua authority succumbs, foreshadowing the imminent end of the Aztec Empire as a political institution.

“As if His Heart Died” by ethnohistorian Rebecca Dufendach determines that one way “The Conquest of Mexico” portrays Moctezuma according to traditional Nahua concepts is by drawing a link between the physical affliction of the *tlatoani* and suffering in the Aztec state. Her research studies a concept which existed among Nahuas during the early colonial times of fright as an illness capable of causing spiritual and physical affliction unless properly treated.³⁸ In the sixth chapter of “The Conquest of Mexico” Moctezuma takes measures to protect himself from the “fright illness” which infected the ambassadors who met with Cortés: “captives were slain... with their blood they sprinkled the messengers. For this reason... that they had gone to very perilous places.”³⁹ Still, the terror which Spaniards inspire overpowers the rituals cleansing abilities since Moctezuma displays symptoms of physical trauma when news of the conquistadors aggravates his “fright illness.” Dufendach points out that the Nahuatl text includes the expression “*iuhqin patzmiquia yiollo* and *iolpatzmiquia*, which can be translated literally ‘as if his heart was killed by crushing or bruising’” and is closely associated with diagnoses of “fright illness.”⁴⁰

The effects of “fright illness” so exhaust Moctezuma that despite being *tlatoani*, traditionally the strongest willed noble among all Nahua nobility, he consigns himself to fate. In the ninth chapter Moctezuma learns of the conquistadors’ interest in meeting him, which he

³⁷ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 19.

³⁸ Dufendach, “As if His Heart Died,” 631, 632.

³⁹ Dufendach, “As if His Heart Died,” 624, 626-7: Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 18.

⁴⁰ Dufendach, “As if His Heart Died,” 627.

correctly interprets as spelling the imminent end of the Aztec Empire. The lines “when Moctezuma had thus heard that [the conquistadors] wished to look upon his face, it was as if his heart was afflicted,” describes his “fright illness” worsening. The *Florentine Codex* narrates “He would hide himself... he wished to take refuge from the gods... But this he could not do... No longer had he strength.” Moctezuma instead “only awaited [the Spaniards]; he made himself resolute; he put forth great effort; he quieted, he controlled his heart; he submitted himself entirely to whatsoever he was to see, at which he was to marvel.”⁴¹

Moctezuma’s “fright illness” spreads throughout the Aztec Empire, illustrating that “The Conquest of Mexico” employs the Nahuatl trope of describing *tlatoani* as the community’s metaphysical center. Following fruitless attempts to curse, bribe, or defeat the conquistadors in battle, the god Tezcatlipoca visits earth to inform soothsayers of the Spaniards’ inevitable destruction of the Aztec state. When Moctezuma learns of this news, “The Conquest of Mexico” describes how “No longer did he speak aloud; he only sat dejected for a long time, as if he had lost hope... He only answered them... ‘we are [at the end]... What is to be done, in vain?’”⁴² In the fourteenth chapter the Aztec Empire as a whole mirrors his bitter acceptance. As the conquistadors approach Tenochtitlan, “here it was as if Mexico lay silent... The common folk said: ‘Let it be thus... What more will it be that you do? For already we are to die... Yea, already we await our death.’”⁴³

When the conquistadors enter into Tenochtitlan the cosmic realigning nears completion and the authority of the Aztec Empire shatters. Whereas Moctezuma initially possessed enough authority to receive immediate notice of omens from across the world, “when he summoned

⁴¹ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 26.

⁴² Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 34, 35.

⁴³ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 38.

forth the noblemen, no longer did they obey him... No longer was he heeded.”⁴⁴ Even after the conquistadors murder him and discard his body he receives little respect at his funeral: “as [his body] burned, only with fury, no longer with much of the people’s good will, some chid him... And still many... groaned, cried out, shook their heads in disapproval.”⁴⁵

Through depicting Moctezuma grappling with “fright illness,” casting these symptoms as indicative of a power greater than the Aztec Empire emerging, but still portraying the sovereign as facing fate resolutely “The Conquest of Mexico” describes a uniquely Nahua narrative. Moctezuma represents the *tlatoani* according to depictions of such characters in traditional Nahua histories: a figure who embodies the utmost political authority and struggles fallibly to confront a cosmic realigning. The manner through which he suffers while embodying *tlatoani* tropes further asserts that “The Conquest of Mexico” speaks in the style of Nahua histories because Moctezuma’s suffering harkens to Nahua beliefs about illness and society. While “The Conquest of Mexico” records the Conquest through Spanish institutions, the narrative contained therein speaks in a uniquely Nahuatl voice.

Some Spanish influence does affect the shape of the story in “The Conquest of Mexico,” but overall this book contains a narrative dominated by the Nahua worldview. Spanish narratives of the Conquest, particularly the one popularized by Cortés’ biographer Francisco Lopez de Gómara, depict the people of Mexico mistaking the conquistadors for gods upon their arrival. “The Conquest of Mexico” includes this trope in which Moctezuma believes the conquistadors correspond to the prophecy of Huitzilopochtli returning from the east, but only according to strict Native American conceptions of godliness.

⁴⁴ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 47.

⁴⁵ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 66.

In the third chapter, as messengers relay to Moctezuma news of their meeting with the first Spanish expedition, “When [Moctezuma] heard of it... he thought... that this was Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl who had come to land... to find his mat, his seat. For he had traveled there [eastward] when he departed.”⁴⁶ This influences his decision to gift to Cortés the “gods’ array” upon the conquistadors’ arrival which consists of clothing crafted specifically for Huitzilopochtli.⁴⁷ “The Conquest of Mexico” asserts that Moctezuma continues to mistake the conquistadors for divine beings after their arrival on the mainland, describing how “Moctezuma had acted thus because he thought them gods, he took them to be gods, he worshipped them as gods.”⁴⁸ His reaction is based on the terror of conquistadors as an unknown, unpredictable force which composes itself almost inhumanly. This distinguishes the depiction of Spaniards as gods in “The Conquest of Mexico” from representations of this myth in Western histories where Native Americans immediately respond to colonists with adulation and deference.

In her article “Burying the White Gods,” historian Camilla Townsend addresses the origins of this Spanish myth that reappears in “The Conquest of Mexico” and discusses how Nahua people interpreted Spaniards as different beings. She distinguishes the “story of the white gods” as anti historical, not for claiming that the Native American side of first contact framed their vision of Europeans in cultural concepts of divinity, but for enabling “relatively powerful conquistadors and their cultural heirs... to dwell on the Indians’ adulation for them, rather than on their pain, rage, or attempted military defense.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 9.

⁴⁷ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 11-13.

⁴⁸ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 21.

⁴⁹ Camilla Townsend “Burying the White Gods: New Perspectives on the Conquest of Mexico” *The American Historical Review*, vol. 108 (2003): 4.

Townsend argues to distinguish the “story of the white gods” from actual academic discussion of colonial New Spain by drawing an analogy to pornography. In pornography, “What most males say they find so enticing... is not violent imagery... but rather the idea that the female is not concerned about any potential for violence or indeed any problematic social inequalities [and] unquestioningly adores... the male.” Just as pornography validates the patriarchal system while ignoring all socioeconomic implications of inequality or the way in which non-males actually react to sexual scenarios, a similarly imbalanced system of power governs the “story of the white gods.” In the “story of the white gods” Native Americans are excessively deferential and expressive of adulation so that colonists and their descendents can avoid confronting the violence committed during the Conquest. This contradicts the diverse, confusing, and conflicting ways in which colonists actually appear as godly in “The Conquest of Mexico.”

In the European tradition the trope that Nahuas believed Spaniards to be gods accompanies political infantilization of the Aztec Empire in which Native American harbor adoration for their oppressors and possess character traits of inherent inferiority.⁵⁰ However, in “The Conquest of Mexico” Moctezuma’s belief in the conquistadors’ divinity inflicts him not with adoration but with “fright illness”; the Spaniards’ undefeatable military might and weapons do not inspire admiration but “went causing great astonishment... great fear... hence they were dreaded.”⁵¹

Representations of the conquistadors as gods correspond to their terrifying strangeness, rather than laudable qualities. In the seventh chapter of “The Conquest of Mexico” messengers depict the Spanish with inhuman, negative imagery. Particularly, they describe how when the

⁵⁰ Townsend “Burying the White Gods,” 3.

⁵¹ Sahagún, *The Florentine Codex*, 30.

Spanish guns fired, “its smoke smelled very foul; it had a fetid odor which verily wounded the head.” The imagery that “All iron was their war array... With iron they covered their heads” represents the Spaniards without facial features and thereby emotionally removed from their surroundings.⁵² Notably, “The Conquest of Mexico” reports that “their dogs were very large... They had fiery eyes- blazing eyes... They had gaunt stomachs... They were nervous; they went about panting, with tongues hanging.”⁵³ As Moctezuma decides that the Spaniards are gods in the subsequent chapter it must be this imagery that influences his decision: of strange outsiders covered in metal, wielding weapons which make ordinary people sick to look at and possessing ferocious beasts at their disposal.⁵⁴

While European histories in which the conquistadors appear as gods rearrange authority so power structures appear as unbalanced as those appearing in pornography, in “The Conquest of Mexico” the association of Spaniards with divinity frames them as a foreign, powerful force to which Moctezuma must respond. The Spanish presence while training Nahua scholars to compose the *Florentine Codex* and compiling their records into book format likely influenced “The Conquest of Mexico” to adopt the European trope of Spaniards as gods. But, the narrative of this text remains deeply and mainly invested in the Nahua historical tradition.

“The Conquest of Mexico” in the *Florentine Codex* demonstrates new institutions to retell the past emerging between the metropole and the colonies. European and Native American influences largely dominate this history’s physical structure and narrative respectively. The Spanish and Nahua structures in this source confronted each other with unequal levels of power

⁵² Sahagún, *The Florentine Codex*, 19.

⁵³ Sahagún, *The Florentine Codex*, 20.

⁵⁴ Sahagún, *The Florentine Codex*, 21.

during the process of historical production. But, that “The Conquest of Mexico” does not completely submit speaks to the new historical dialogue emerging within New Spain.

The True History of the Conquest of Mexico by Bernal Díaz del Castillo

Chronicler Bernal Díaz del Castillo occupies a unique position in the historiography of New Spain. As a former conquistador who accompanied Hernan Cortés and profited from an *encomienda*, Díaz's historical writings aim to preserve his legacy by affirming he contributed to Spanish colonization. Still, he asserts that his residency in the colonies grants him access to a presumably more "truthful" account of the history of the Conquest. By challenging the validity of mainland narratives, legitimizing *The True History* based on his experience in America, and engaging in local academic discussions with Native sources Díaz distinguishes his chronicle from Spain.

The influence of Native American in conjunction with Díaz's native Spanish historical practices, characteristic of sixteenth century New Spain's history, is less visible in *The True History*. Although Díaz's chronicle differentiates itself from Spanish voices, his social, economic, and historical identity is rooted to colonization. Therefore, he lacks direct knowledge of how to apply the methodology of Native American historical traditions into his analyses and argument. But, historical production involves utilizing an expansive network of knowledge matrices. Expanding slightly our understanding of what constitutes history enables a clearer view of how *The True History* incorporates American and European historical structures. This illustrates that Díaz participated in New Spain's emerging, independent historical dialogue by drawing from Nahua and Spanish elements for narrating history.

Díaz's status as an *encomendero* served as his primary source of attachment and conflict with Spain when writing *The True History*. Following decades of widespread abuse by *encomenderos*, information of violence flowed back to the mainland. Advocates such as friar

Bartolomé de las Casas called for the *encomienda* system's abolition, helping to inspire the New Laws by Charles V in 1542. These rulings, which provided abused subjects limited legal representation and rights, inadvertently helped fortify the practice of slavery in New Spain and motivated colonists to bind subjects through more creative, abstract practices. But to Díaz, the metropole's interference with *encomienda* management inspired his historiographical breach from the mainland.

From 1550 to 1551, Díaz left the colonies and visited Spain for the second and last time in his life. His mission was to argue before the Royal Council of Indies a proposal to ratify *encomienda* holdings in perpetuity, assuring his heirs benefited from the same royal grant as himself. Instead, he faced a court including las Casas that struck down his request. In her essay "Bernal Díaz del Castillo: Soldier, Eyewitness, Polemicist" humanities scholar Rolena Adorno argues that this moment "either awakened or confirmed his worst forebodings about the future prospects of the encomendero class."⁵⁵ Despite having killed, plundered and enslaved in the name of Spain, the Crown which Díaz had served for so long now turned on him.

In Spain, Díaz likely heard repetitions of the claims from Cortés's letters to the emperor, which served as the most popular primary source for Conquest literature at the time. Soon after he read Francisco López de Gómara's 1552 chronicle, which the biographer wrote on the directive of Cortés and his heirs.⁵⁶ These accounts attribute all the glory of the Conquest to Cortés while overlooking the contributions of common conquistadors. As a result, Díaz's recent trip and the aftermath caused him to fear for his material and historical legacy.

⁵⁵ Rolena Adorno, "Bernal Díaz del Castillo: Soldier, Eyewitness, Polemicist," in *The History of the Conquest of New Spain by Bernal Díaz del Castillo* ed. David Carrasco, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 390.

⁵⁶ Díaz, *The True History of the Conques*

Adorno illuminates that in this moment, Díaz “understood that, regarding the conquest of Mexico, there was a second [battle] to be fought and won: it would take place at the court, and... it had to be engaged on the battlefield of the documentary record and especially in historical accounts of those events.”⁵⁷ In reaction to these legal and historical attacks against his identity, Díaz prepared to chronicle a more truthful version of the Conquest which would reaffirm his prestigious position. Through titling his narrative *The True History* and emphasizing the presumed accuracy of his narrative, Díaz launched his grievances against the mainland by “[disguising] polemic argumentation as neutral historical narration.”⁵⁸

The opening announcements of *The True History* highlight the historical and legal struggles orienting Díaz into conflict with the Spanish Empire. By stating, “I am an old man... [and] have no other wealth to leave to my children and descendants save this... account,” he explains the personal damage done by Spain’s *encomienda* policies. He contends “To extol our heroic feats... in the company of the valiant and courageous captain don Hernando Cortés... would require an eloquence... greater than mine.” This statement links Díaz to legal and historical entitlement by emphasizing his participation and heroism in the events of the Conquest. Together, these two announcements establish the stakes of his narrative and indicate that *The True History* speaks to greater power deserved by Díaz as an *encomendero* and former conquistador.

Then, Díaz legitimizes his account over contemporary historical narration by determining these two factors grant his history greater truthfulness. He announces “I will write very plainly what I saw and experienced fighting in [the Conquest], without twisting it one way or another,” and “I will do nothing more than tell and inform about my country, where I was born... and

⁵⁷ Adorno, “Bernal Díaz del Castillo,” 392-393.

⁵⁸ Adorno, “Bernal Díaz del Castillo,” 393-394.

where I am now established [in New Spain] and have my dwelling.”⁵⁹ By backing up his assertions of deserved legal and historical recognition with firsthand information, Díaz contends that his personal experiences have transmitted to him a more valid voice. Linking this claim to his dwelling within the Americas also intersects *The True History*’s argument of truthfulness to Díaz’s geographical context. Therefore, the context and language of *The True History* reveal contentions which separated a loyal colonist from his mainland identity, causing him to portray history from his geographical and political identity located in New Spain.

Adorno’s analysis of Díaz introduces information which solidifies this chronicler’s placement within a field of historical discussion rooted in American geography and thereby distinguished from New Spain’s colonial origins. For instance, Adorno notes that historians such as Alonso de Zorita and Diego Muñoz Camargo reacted to Díaz’s history with their own writings before *The True History*’s 1632 publication in Spain.⁶⁰ Likewise, she observes that, “Bernal Díaz also appreciated the Mexican pictorial record [because] he observed that native paintings provided warfare intelligence... gave historical accounts of significant battles... and preserved native history and culture in ancient books and paintings.”⁶¹ Therefore, *The True History* is a historical text deeply rooted to the geography and historical context of New Spain. Díaz shaped his argument in contention with mainland Spain from his position in America. Within the colonies he pursued an independent historical discussion with historian peers and invoked resources which further distinguished *The True History* from Europe. Still, it is necessary to identify a distinction between what pictographic sources indicate for *The True History* in relation to Spain, and Díaz’s shortcomings in incorporating them into historical production.

⁵⁹ Díaz, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 1.

⁶⁰ Adorno, “Bernal Díaz del Castillo,” 393.

⁶¹ Adorno, “Bernal Díaz del Castillo,” 390.

While reading pictorial records reveals that Díaz tied *The True History* closely to the location of New Spain, he possessed limited capacity to associate Native American material culture with a distinct system of knowledge. In *Sweeping the Way: Divine Transformation in the Aztec Festival of Ochpaniztli* art historian Catherine DiCesare notes that pre-Columbian pictographs describing landscapes combined physical and human geographical representations; “Maps and cartographic histories depicted territorial distribution, the nature of its occupation, and ethnic migrations... [emphasizing] the conceptual intersection of time and space.”⁶² She explains that “the graphic conventions of pre-Columbian pictorial manuscripts... were linked... with the oral, performative contexts within which the manuscripts’ contents were elucidated.”⁶³ Similar to how alphabets correspond to a learned skill of knowledge reproduction, pictographs necessitate oral, performative expression of the visual elements.

In comparison, when Díaz recalls encountering a pictograph detailing Pánfilo de Narváez’s armada sailing to the Yucatan to capture Cortés in the fourteenth chapter of *The True History* he simply states, “They brought a picture of the whole fleet painted on some cloths, very lifelike.”⁶⁴ What he does and does not remember at this moment illuminates Díaz’s lack of understanding about Nahua historical production. By noting that the painting was “very lifelike” Díaz focuses solely on the literal representation. At the time of remembering this event, he did not understand that pictographs blend realistic representations with equally important underlying, symbolic significances. By not mentioning a Nahuatl speaker who complimented the painting with an oral performance or questioning why such a performer was absent, Díaz reveals he lacks understanding of the interpretive skills accompanying these Nahua sources.

⁶² Catherine DiCesare, *Sweeping the Way: Divine Transformation in the Aztec Festival of Ochpaniztli*, (Boulder; University Press of Colorado, 2009), 6.

⁶³ DiCesare, *Sweeping the Way*, 7.

⁶⁴ Díaz, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 262.

This paper does not argue that Díaz's conception of history took direct inspiration from Aztec historical methodologies. But, precise knowledge of historical production is not the only manner through which colonial societies combine formerly incongruent tools into a new structure for historical discussion. In his text *Silencing the Past* historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot proposes four "conceptual tools, second-level abstractions" to help navigate the process of historical production: "the moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance)."⁶⁵ These moments of historical production are inexhaustive, and only meant to provide generalized guidelines for researching the creation of a history: Trouillot admits "they are not meant to provide a realistic description of the making of any individual narrative."⁶⁶

It therefore makes sense to propose that Díaz's history intersected with Native American systems of knowledge at a fifth moment: the moment of narrative characterization. Throughout its narrative, *The True History* links truth and history immutably to the process of Conquest. Since Díaz's characterization of American colonialism is a tool for *The True History*'s historical production, the Nahua systems of knowledge he identifies as central to conquering are historiographical forces which contribute to his unique, New Spain historical dialogue. These systems of power and communication are not typical systems for constructing history; the Nahua knowledge matrix of Nahuatl which Díaz notes as contributing to narrative characterization has wide ranging applications that extend beyond structural record keeping.

But, Nahuatl language takes on historiographic weight during historical production because Díaz reports that this was the system which enabled the Conquest of Moctezuma. In the

⁶⁵ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 26.

⁶⁶ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 26, 27.

Florentine Codex the use of language appears tangential to Nahua structures' application in the actual creation of histories. Use of the Latin alphabet to write in Nahuatl demonstrates that language intersected with conceptions of historiography, but only in the way historians translated this system into historical record keeping. However, because Díaz associates conquering with the construction of colonial histories, in the context of *The True History* the Native American languages and political ideologies which define his concept of the Conquest adopt historiographical significance.

The title of Díaz's account emphasizes that he perceives conquering as a characteristic of historical production, and his first chapter expands upon the historiographical relevance of the Conquest. Naming his chronicle *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain* envisions the truthfulness of this narrative as Díaz's historical contention. Díaz's claim that his actions conquered American civilizations is distinct from his argument that he will give a more truthful account. He determines that representing colonization as conquest is a necessary element for constructing a legitimate history, whereas truthfulness is what gives his chronicle greater importance among an already established field of historical discussion.

Díaz's silences when articulating the historiographical necessity of *The True History* and his definition of conquering illuminate how narrative characterization functions as a force of historical production. In his introduction he cedes to the training and methodology of contemporary chroniclers. He states "When I read the words [of Gómara, Illescas, and Jovio] and considered how polished they were... stopped writing... because such good histories were available."⁶⁷ Therefore, Díaz admires and finds no fault in the abilities of these authors to write history.

⁶⁷ Díaz, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 8.

But, he claims these same chronicles are thoroughly, factually inaccurate. *The True History* writes “neither in the beginning nor the middle nor the end do they talk about what really happened,” and “[anyone] who [knows] what really happened will say... if everything they write... resembles what they wrote about New Spain, it will all be wrong.”⁶⁸

However, this claim that “it will all be wrong” only extends to details about numbers, statements, and events: “they were as likely to say eighty thousand [people] as eight thousand,” “they say that some who were not among the conquistadors were there,” and “they say...that Cortés secretly ordered the ships destroyed [when] he ordered them to be wrecked openly.”⁶⁹ Díaz does not fault their characterization of colonialism as the Conquest, which he defines as “[having] pacified the lands and settled them with Spaniards... and [delivering] those lands with much respect to our king.” Even though Díaz calls “what they wrote regarding what happened in New Spain... a total mockery,” the characteristic of conquest in these narratives is not faulty.

Apparently, *The True History* associates the subject of conquering with these chroniclers’ tools for historical production. While he faults their representation of events and facts, he does not dispute the underlying truth that conquistadors “pacified... settled... and sent to give and deliver those lands,” to the Spanish Crown in these narratives.⁷⁰ Díaz’s silences demonstrates that the character of his account, as a history detailing successful conquest, is interlinked with his conception of the process to craft a history. In *The True History* the tools through which Díaz describes conquering Native American civilizations therefore reveal forces of his narrative’s historical production.

⁶⁸ Díaz, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 8, 9.

⁶⁹ Díaz, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 8, 9, 10.

⁷⁰ Díaz, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 3

The centrality of Nahuatl to the depiction of conquering Moctezuma in *The True History* shows that in the context of Díaz's narrative, this system of knowledge became a tool for historical production. The manner through which Spanish and Nahuatl combine to characterize *The True History* as the Conquest reflects Díaz's overall historiographical distinction from the mainland. This intersection articulates a historical dialogue informed by history methods on both sides of contact and rooted to New Spain.

The process through which the conquistadors conquer, or acquire dominion over, Nahuatl involves them controlling and making Spanish the female slave Malintzin who in turn provides with them information that aids the eventual conquest of Moctezuma. *The True History* describes how, in her life before contact with the conquistadors, Malintzin was a fallen noblewoman whose mother and step-father had sold into slavery and pronounced dead to the community.⁷¹ But, her contact with Spaniards causes them to conquer her person, which leads her to enabling the perpetuation of conquering activities. *The True History* writes "it seems to me [Malintzin resembles] what happened to Joseph with his brother in Egypt" because, having eventually confronted her family, "She said that God had done her a great favor in getting her to give up idol worship and become Christian, to have a son by her master and lord Cortés, and to be married to a gentleman like her husband Juan Jaramillo."⁷² As a result, the conquistadors conquer Malintzin by taking ownership of her, forcing her to adopt identical values, and teaching her to respect their inherent, superior authority. Díaz expresses Malintzin as a truly conquered figure because her past and future orient around European tropes following contact with conquistadors. Then, this process grants her "a great presence [to command] absolutely among

⁷¹ Díaz, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 54.

⁷² Díaz, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 55.

all the Indians of New Spain.”⁷³ This means that the sum of her conquering and prior Native American knowledge leads to a system through which to articulate the Conquest.

By conquering her person and turning Malintzin herself into an agent of the conquistadors, *The True History* portrays new systems emerging in which Spanish authority and Nahua knowledge combine into a new conception of power. Given that Díaz considers the character of the Conquest a necessary tool for telling history, the source of authority which Malintzin personifies demonstrates that her knowledge of Nahuatl and reorientation towards Spain are forces of *The True History*'s historical production. Therefore, through Malintzin Nahua and Spanish forces of historical production meet together to express historical language unique to New Spain.

The manner through which Malintzin embodies Nahuatl and European historical systems intersecting to articulate Conquest is most clear when examining the Conquest of Moctezuma. Prior to narrating their arrival in Tenochtitlan, Díaz makes a careful distinction between the character of Cortés and the historiographical power which the conquistadors represent when communicating through Malintzin: “all the towns through which we passed and in others where they knew about us... [they] called Cortés ‘Malinche,’ and from here on, I will call him this, Malinche, in all the conversations we might have with any Indians in the province as well as the city of Mexico, and I will not call him Cortés except where appropriate.”⁷⁴ This notes a difference between Cortés himself, and the combined Nahua and Spanish systems which enable the Conquest and characterize *The True History*.

The difference between Cortés and Malinche becomes quite apparent when the conquistadors embark on the Conquest of Moctezuma. Upon their arrival in Tenochtitlan, Díaz

⁷³ Díaz, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 55.

⁷⁴ Díaz, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 57, 58.

portrays Cortés as a powerless, insignificant figure incapable of subduing the leader or forcing him to respect Spanish sovereignty. In this scene Moctezuma arrives draped in the finest luxuries, wearing sandals with golden soles, and surrounded by the most powerful members of Aztec nobility. He commands such authority that “Not one of these Chieftains dared even to think of looking him in the face, but kept their eyes lowered with great reverence.”⁷⁵ When Cortés attempts to assert control over Moctezuma by placing a necklace of Margaritas on his neck, “those great lords who were with [him] held [Cortés’s] arm to keep [him] from doing it, because they consider that contempt.”⁷⁶

But, the Conquest of Moctezuma becomes attainable when Cortés speaks through Malintzin as Malinche. Díaz recalls that after Moctezuma leads the conquistadors into one of his palaces, Cortés and Moctezuma communicate through Malintzin and “Montezuma himself put [a gold necklace] around the neck of our captain Cortés, and the great honor he did Cortés gave his captains much to be amazed at.” Moctezuma’s response, “Malinche, you are in you home, you and your brothers; rest,” indicates that the conquistadors have finally begun the process of conquering Moctezuma.⁷⁷ So, the narrative characterization of *The True History* successfully advances through Malinche, signifying that both Nahua and Spanish systems converge to inform the driving theme of Díaz’s narrative.

The authority of this new voice even entitles Cortés to question Moctezuma’s Aztec religious beliefs and sway him towards Christian concepts. After spending time in Tenochtitlan’s inner palace Cortés as Malinche explains to Moctezuma that “what [Aztecs] consider gods are

⁷⁵ *The History of the Conquest of New Spain by Bernal Díaz del Castillo* ed. David Carrasco, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 158.

⁷⁶ Díaz, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 192.

⁷⁷ Díaz, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 194.

not gods, but devils, which are very evil things.”⁷⁸ In response Moctezuma lifts his shirt and replies to “Lord Malinche” that he is not “like a god or teule,” but that his “body [is] of flesh and bone like yours.”⁷⁹ So, through “Malinche,” the conquistadors, who were previously not fit to touch Moctezuma’s body, are capable of swaying him away from his native practices and delivering some of his authority to Spaniards.

Díaz’s introduction makes clear that *The True History* is a chronicle situated within New Spain and oriented against mainland historiography. Still, he lacks the substantive knowledge of Native American historical practices necessary to articulate his account through Spanish and Nahuatl structures. However, an examination of the importance of the Conquest to his narrative reveals that systems of knowledge which perpetuate conquering in *The True History* are structural elements of his chronicle. Since the Conquest holds such guiding, narrative significance to *The True History*, bodies of knowledge which characterize conquering are agents of Díaz’s historical production. Therefore, in *The True History* the manner through which Malinche’s translation abilities enables the Conquest of Moctezuma demonstrates that in Díaz’s text Nahuatl and Spanish systems of history making intersected and expressed a voice for historical narration emerging in New Spain.

⁷⁸ Díaz, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 196, 197.

⁷⁹ Díaz, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 199.

History of the Indies of New Spain by Fray Diego Durán

“The Conquest of Mexico” and *The True History* learn from concepts on either side of colonial contact when crafting their chronicles, despite their accounts firmly reflecting either Nahua or Spanish historical narration. In *History of the Indies of New Spain* Fray Diego Durán’s characterization of Moctezuma does not depict as clear a continuity of the dominance of either Native American or European historical voices. In fact, Durán fluidly transitions between historical language, themes, and descriptions which would have been mutually incomprehensible to Nahua and Spanish historians prior to the Conquest. Therefore, the character of Moctezuma in *History of the Indies* best illustrates how disparate historical traditions combined into sixteenth century New Spain’s distinct historical voice.

The scholars who composed “The Conquest of Mexico” came from elite Nahua families and Bernal Díaz fought as a conquistador before becoming an *encomendero*. But, Durán’s origins as a historian are no less dramatic. Though born in Seville, his family traveled to the American continents when he was a young boy. Scholar Doris Heyden speculates that Durán was four or five years old upon reaching America since Fernández del Castillo describes how he was “almost in the arms of his father,” upon arrival. The friar himself wrote, “although I did not acquire my milk teeth in [Tezcoco], I got my second ones there.”⁸⁰

While it is not clear if Durán achieved native fluency in his life, though this timeframe of his move to New Spain would make it a linguistic possibility, as a chronicler he valued Nahuatl deeply and demonstrated a much higher proficiency than contemporaries. In his writings he complained about conquistadors’ inability to speak Native American languages, stating “they

⁸⁰ Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, xvi.

should know the language well and understand [the people] if they have any pretense of obtaining fruit.” He also expressed frustration at clerics’ lack of carefulness when choosing Nahuatl words and noted that the “crude and rough” pronunciation by Spanish soldiers invited Nahua scorn.⁸¹ These statements illustrate that Durán understood Nahuatl with enough proficiency to wield it in advanced analytical and religious scenarios.

Durán’s Nahuatl ability reflects the cultural hybridity which allows *The History of the Indies* to best illustrate the Native American and European historiographical intersectionality which characterizes sixteenth century New Spain’s historical voice. *The History of the Indies* famously incorporated information from the Nahuatl text *Crónica X* and personal meetings with Nahuatl-speaking native informants.⁸² At the same time, Durán read Spanish reports and interviewed Spanish speakers such as Fray Francisco de Aguilar who had accompanied Cortés on the Conquest.⁸³ Certain scenes from *The History of the Indies* fluidly move between and compare the testimonies from these disparate records. Likewise, Durán demonstrates a remarkable ability to narrate the history of the Conquest while invoking terminology, ideologies, and tropes from both Nahua and Spanish historical traditions. Similar to how the friar switched between Native American and Spanish languages, his voice characterizing Moctezuma draws from American and European historical legacies.

The fifty-second chapter of *History of the Indies* depicts the coronation of Moctezuma as the Aztec Empire’s supreme ruler. In this scene, Durán’s characterization of Moctezuma employs language reflecting his historical objectives as a Dominican friar while simultaneously depicting Moctezuma as a literary *tlatoani*. The Dominican Order, which instructed Durán to

⁸¹ Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, xxi.

⁸² Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, xx, xxiii.

⁸³ Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, xx

compose *History of the Indies*, had in mind the goal of creating a history which would guide missionaries, the “workers in this divine task of the conversion of the natives.”⁸⁴ Because Durán invokes Christian language while describing uniquely Nahua historical events, his chronicle articulates New Spain’s history between European and Native American historical conceptions.

When Nezahualpilli of Tezcoco initiates the process of choosing Moctezuma, he explains that “all the Aztec nobles, who are like rich feathers fallen from the wings and tails of those magnificent turkeys, the past kings,” are assembled for consideration.⁸⁵ In the original Spanish Durán uses the word “Reyes” where Heyden translates “kings.”⁸⁶ Since this Spanish word describes Christian rulers in Spain during the sixteenth century, *History of the Indies* employs language reflective of Durán’s Christianizing mission when describing Mexica royal lineage. Meanwhile, in Nahua cultural heritage “turkeys” embody an aspect of Tezcatlipoca, the god which touches earthly existence and embodies political authority through the *tlatoani* vessel.⁸⁷ Blending historical concepts indicative of his religious, historiographical mission alongside uniquely Nahua tropes corresponding to the *tlatoani* illustrates *History of the Indies* learning from both historical traditions when depicting Moctezuma.

Since Durán continues to apply Spanish titles to Nahua conceptions of power when narrating Moctezuma’s coronation, his historical voice blends Native American and European historical concepts when telling this New Spain history. The original Spanish of *History of the Indies* describes how the “principe Çiuacuatl,” speaks next. Immediately, by combining the title “principe” or prince with the Nahuatl title “Çiuacuatl” or “Cihuacoatl,” *History of the Indies*

⁸⁴ Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, xxi

⁸⁵ Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, 387.

⁸⁶ Diego Durán, “Historia De Las Indias De Nueva España y Islas De Tierra Firme. : Tomo I / Por Diego Durán; La Publica Con UN Atlas De Estampas, Notas e Ilustraciones José F. Ramirez.” (Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes. Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes), 410.

⁸⁷ Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, 387.

navigates between Nahua and Spanish histories by employing language invoking the historical placement of two types of leaders simultaneously; “principe” historically refers to Christian leaders set to inherit a kingdom from a king, while Heyden describes Cihuacoatl as “the title of the second in command, a kind of viceroy.”⁸⁸

The Cihuacoatl continues, “I beg all those present not to elect children or very raw youths... Nor do we want a ruler who is so old that tomorrow it would be necessary to elect another... choose the one who seems best qualified.”⁸⁹ This inspires “The members of the council [to examine] the abilities of this one and that one,” after which “they all turned their eyes to the great prince Motecuhzoma... [who] was at the proper age, he was mature, virtuous, generous, of invincible spirit, and possessed all the virtues that could be found in a good ruler.”⁹⁰ When he “had been chosen unanimously to be the king of Mexico-Tenochtitlan [Moctezuma] could not be found [because having] realized that everyone was inclined in his favor, he withdrew from the meeting... to the temple... in the Eagle Shrine.”⁹¹

This exchange in which Nahua elites find Moctezuma worthy of representing the next sovereign illustrates *History of the Indies* capacity to invoke certain Spanish and Nahua historical concepts. Though Durán calls the position “king of Mexico-Tenochtitlan,” thereby harkening to his Spanish origins and religious goals as a Dominican chronicler, he describes tropes characteristic of *tlatoani* candidates. As Pastrana Flores points out, Nahua histories portrayed the *tlatoani* as the figure who, “Despite being only a person, who having agreed to be elected to be *tlatoani*... transforms into the living image of power of the god Tezcatlipoca.”⁹² Here, *History of*

⁸⁸ Durán, *History of the Indies of New Spain*, 388.

⁸⁹ Durán, “Historia De Las Indias,” 411; Durán, *History of the Indies of New Spain*, 388.

⁹⁰ Durán, *History of the Indies of New Spain*, 388, 389.

⁹¹ Durán, *History of the Indies of New Spain*, 389.

⁹² “Y a pesar de sólo ser un hombre, quien era elegido para ser *tlatoani* accedía... se transformaba en la imagen viva del poder del dios Tezcatlipoca.”

the Indies acknowledges the *tlatoani* trope of human, fallible embodiment of a divine duty; the nobles surrounding Moctezuma pick him unanimously because he has achieved the most within his corporeal limits.

Likewise, an essential characteristic of the *tlatoani* in historical depictions is that the Mexica elect “a religious man of good customs who is humble, devout, and penitent,” because he must master self discipline when gifted this powerful position.⁹³ By depicting Moctezuma leaving the election room to pray in solitude upon realizing he will win, *History of the Indies* includes Nahua historical characteristics alongside European titles.

Subsequently, when depicting Moctezuma’s transitions into the *tlatoani*, Durán’s choice of language reflects his Dominican historiographical origins; but, the religious duties he names are indicative of *tlatoani* in literature. After the moment of Moctezuma’s coronation, the Nezahualpilli, “king of Tezcoco,” states “The high and powerful Lord has delivered his kingdom to you and he has assigned the royal seat to you. Therefore, my son, you will now begin to labor in the fields of the gods like a farmer who works his land. Cast out weakness from your manly heart, do not faint, do not be careless in your duties. Remember that all of this has not been given you to sleep away in idleness and pleasure.”⁹⁴

Historical methodology of Spanish origin occurs in his language, through the capitalized “Lord,” and the phrase “my son”; these particular wordings appear frequently in Christian texts, thereby linking Durán’s style of writing to his training and enlistment by the Dominican Order. Meanwhile, the description which Nezahualpilli gives of Moctezuma’s leaderly duties encompass responsibilities closely associated with the *tlatoani*.

Flores, *Historias de la conquista*, 130.

⁹³ “Un hombre religioso de buenas costumbres que sea humilde, devoto y penitente.”

Flores, *Historias de la conquista*, 134.

⁹⁴ Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, 391.

Historias de la conquista explains that the principle duties of the *tlatoni* are to maximize his connection with Tezcatlipoca through consistently and carefully performing rituals. As “the head of the city and the town,” his actions and focus must always extend to the farthest reaches of the Aztec Empire.⁹⁵ It is necessary that “at all times he should guard the seriousness and dignity of the position.”⁹⁶

Since Nezahualpilli informs Moctezuma that his new position will encompass a “labor,” and commands him to stay stern in his demeanor, *History of the Indies* portrays the position of Aztec sovereign with similar characteristics as Flores-Fontanilla points out as associating closely with the *tlatoni* in Nahua histories. Moreover, by noting the importance of keeping his heart healthy and pure, Durán reflects a similar focus on the physical body of a *tlatoni* which Nahuas portrayed as corresponding to the health of his surrounding nation. So, in this scene from *History of the Indies*, tropes which characterize the *tlatoni* in Nahua histories appear alongside the religious, historical language of Durán’s Dominican Order training. As a result, *History of the Indies* reveals how a dialogue emerged in New Spain which borrowed characteristics of Spanish and Nahua historical production, demonstrating a new voice for history that corresponded to colonial contact.

Like “The Conquest of Mexico” and *The True History*, *History of the Indies* reveals that a new historical dialogue emerged in New Spain as a result of colonialism. Still, the voices of these two previous chronicles align with one side of contact over the other due to the origins of their authors: the Nahua scholars who composed “The Conquest of Mexico” received their testimonies from elders raised in elite positions during the Aztec Empire, while Díaz took

⁹⁵ “La cabeza de la ciudad y del pueblo.”
Flores, *Historias de la conquista*, 131.

⁹⁶ “En todo momento debía guardar la seriedad y dignidad propias del cargo.”
Flores, *Historias de la conquista*, 131, 132.

personal part in initiating the Conquest. Conceptions of history changed upon the establishment of New Spain on August 18, 1521. In reaction, both Spanish and Nahua historians adopted methodology to accommodate their new context. Depictions of Moctezuma's death in "The Conquest of Mexico" and *The True History* illuminate how these chroniclers still tightly held onto distinctly Nahua and Spanish narratives, rather than embrace New Spain as a historical vision.

Durán, in contrast, was a child of the colonial order which emerged from the aftermath of Spanish colonization of Aztec society. Not only does his historical production employ knowledge of European and Native American origin, but binds Nahua and Spanish arguments into a single narrative. He portrays colonialism not as an abhorrent possibility or goal to strive for, but a social reality. Comparing three versions of Moctezuma's death reveals Durán to best encapsulate how New Spain's history invoked and departed from the historical legacies of Native America and Spain.

"The Conquest of Mexico," does not depict the moment of Moctezuma's passing, but historical silences attribute the death to the conquistadors. The Twenty-second Chapter narrates the Spaniards killing waves of "brave warriors" before retreating and locking themselves in Moctezuma's palace.⁹⁷ Next, this account describes how "four days [later, the Spaniards] came to cast away [the body of] Moctezuma... at the water's edge."⁹⁸ Responsibility for the Aztec leader's death goes unsaid, but fits neatly into a wider context of abuse by Spanish invaders.

Moctezuma's end characterizes the conquistadors as greedy, violent, and ignorant, thereby justifying resistance against their imposition of colonialism. In the final chapter of "The Conquest of Mexico," the remnants of Aztec leadership reflect on Moctezuma's significance

⁹⁷ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 62, 63.

⁹⁸ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 65.

when confronted with Cortés's demand to supply him with gold. A noble named Auelitoczin explains that, "When there was yet Moctezuma, when there was a conquest, the Mexicans, the Tlatilulcans, the Tepanecans, the Acolhuans moved together... They brought their tribute... They gave it to Moctezuma... All the tribute, the gold was together there in Tenochtitlan."⁹⁹

What Auelitoczin describes is how Moctezuma's livelihood as *tlatoani* corresponded to the political and social organization which produced wealth for the Aztec Empire. His murder not only illustrates Spanish brutality, but demonstrates the conquistadors' inability to satiate their desire for gold because of their bloodlust and ignorance of Native American society.

Moctezuma's death informs an argument that Imperial Spain lacks the basic knowledge and discipline necessary to govern in America, and that therefore warfare against them is legitimate. While the *Florentine Codex* takes on European features as a source, Moctezuma's death also aligns "The Conquest of Mexico" with the message of Nahua who fought a war with Cortés against colonial subjugation.

The True History uses this event as an opportunity to argue in favor of colonialism, thereby linking Díaz to his Spanish, historical beliefs from the immediate aftermath of Moctezuma's death. In *The True History*, Moctezuma dies following an injury he sustains while imploring the city of Tenochtitlan to spare the lives of the Spaniards. His own people hurl stones at him, which damage him so greatly he passes away.¹⁰⁰ Since Díaz notes "we felt [sad] when we saw that Montezuma had died, and we thought badly of the Mercedarian friar who was always with him for not being able to convince Montezuma to become Christian," his account advocates for the religious necessity of Spanish presence in America. Because even Moctezuma "the best

⁹⁹ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 126.

¹⁰⁰ Díaz, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 313, 314.

king there had ever been in Mexico,” could not be successfully saved, the Spaniards have an increased obligation to protect Native American souls through conversion.¹⁰¹

Representing Moctezuma’s death as an act of betrayal also nullifies the right for Mexica autonomy. Díaz narrates how the conquistadors demanded that Tenochtitlan recognize one of Moctezuma’s sons as leader rather than his cousin Tlacotzin who had been elected *tlatoani* earlier. *The True History* remembers that “the one they had raised up as lord did not come by it rightfully,” and how the conquistadors threatened to “come out to attack them, burn all their houses, and do them much harm,” if they refused to remove him from power.¹⁰² So, Díaz depicts Moctezuma’s death as justification to violently subjugate Native Americans because they practice heresy and follow non-legitimate leaders. This scene reveals continued adherence to the conquistadors’ historiography following Moctezuma’s passing and before their successful Conquest of the Aztec Empire. In this moment, Díaz frames colonization as a future necessity, thereby recalling a narrative he formed as a Spanish conquistador, prior to the establishment of New Spain.

History of the Indies reveals itself as the chronicle most representative of New Spain’s historiographical uniqueness because Durán presents conflicting Nahua and Spanish memories of Moctezuma’s death in cooperation. He finds the inhabitants of Tenochtitlan guilty of violating their responsibilities as citizens and Spaniards responsible for Moctezuma’s actual killing. But, by calling Moctezuma a tyrant then rewarding more compassionate actions by Cortés, Durán blends these conflicting accounts into a distinct message which justifies the contemporary colonial order.

¹⁰¹ Díaz, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 314.

¹⁰² Díaz, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 315.

He narrates a scene in which, like *The True History*, the Nahua people attack their own leader and perpetuate warfare. *History of the Indies* explains that “the Spaniards became weary of so much sorrow and affliction [so] Cortés decided to make Motecuhzoma appear in public and with his own lips command his people to be calm and cease their attacks.” When Moctezuma begins to speak, “The Aztec captains... closest to him, began to insult him with ugly words, telling him that he was a mistress of the Spaniards, and, as such, that he had helped them plan the massacre of the great warriors and brave lords.” Then “The Aztecs... no longer recognized Motecuhzoma as king [and] one of the Aztecs threw a stone that struck Motecuhzoma high on the forehead.” Even though in this version “it was only a glancing blow,” the people of Tenochtitlan are still responsible for the end of the Aztec Empire because they betray and reject their leader.¹⁰³

History of the Indies contends that the Spaniards likewise possess culpability for the fracturing, as Moctezuma inspires this response “because the people were possessed by a raging fury against the Spaniards.”¹⁰⁴ So, in the events leading to Moctezuma’s death, Durán invokes the Nahua argument of “The Conquest of Mexico” and Spanish reasoning of *The True History*. He holds Nahua people accountable for attacking their own ruler, thereby rejecting and ending the Aztec Empire. But, the brutality of conquistadors’ actions exacerbates tensions and inspire this reaction.

Describing Moctezuma’s actual death, Durán explains that the Nahuatl *Crónica X* “tells us that... the Aztecs entered the chambers of King Motecuhzoma in order to treat him with the same cruelty that had been inflicted upon the Spaniards [but] they found him dead with a chain about his feet and five dagger wounds in his chest.” Again, the Aztec people’s actions depict a

¹⁰³ Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, 540.

¹⁰⁴ Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, 541.

rupture in their statecraft; since they decide to cruelly kill their own leader, they have abandoned their own political order.

Still, through a process which requires him to harness learning of Nahua and Spanish histories, Durán concedes that the conquistadors were ultimately responsible for his death. He admits “If it were not that the *Historia* states all these things and a certain painted document verifies them, I would find it difficult to believe.” By acknowledging “I am obliged to record what the authors tell, write, or paint,” Durán cedes to the account he hears in the *Crónica X*; to transition information from this account into *History of the Indies* Durán employed his knowledge of Nahuatl and familiarity with Nahua narration styles and pictographic representations. He mentions “In order to clear up this point to my satisfaction, I again asked my informant... But I was told that the wound from the stone had been nothing... and that in truth he had been found knifed.” Since his “informant” was likely former conquistador Francisco de Aguilar, Durán’s historiographical process to record Moctezuma’s death involves verifying his research of Indigenous sources against interviews with former Spaniards. So, *History of the Indies*’s investigation transitions between Native American and European methods of historical production to determine culpability for Moctezuma’s death. By ultimately attributing culpability to the conquistadors while faulting the Aztec people for revoking their political order, Durán blends Nahua and Spanish historiographies and narratives into a single message.

This death criticizes the Aztec and Spanish sides of the Conquest and *History of the Indies*, ultimately reaffirming the society of New Spain which ensues in the aftermath. Durán’s text claims that “It seems that [God] wished to inflict a rigorous punishment on Motecuhzoma for his intolerable tyranny, cruelty, and abominable and unspeakable vices in which he lived,

more than any man in the history of the world.”¹⁰⁵ Portraying Moctezuma as the most corrupt, tyrannical leader of all time justifies the initiation of a new social and political order. Likewise, Durán explains that “Cortés, after he had gained the goodwill of most of the people in the land and more men had joined his ranks, returned to Tenochtitlan and captured that city.”¹⁰⁶ *History of the Indies* does not show the conquistadors as inherently worthy of Native American submission. Instead, New Spain traces its origins to more virtuous, moral behavior by Cortés which inspired the surrounding Nahua people to join him.

History of the Indies best illustrates the new form of historical thought emerging in New Spain by borrowing from Nahua and Spanish versions of history while navigating the contentious issue of Moctezuma’s death. By recognizing conquistadors’ violence while agreeing that Aztec people abandoned their right to self determination, Durán borrows elements from incongruent narratives which continue to divide “The Conquest of Mexico” and Díaz along the sides of the Conquest. Asserting that Moctezuma was an egregious tyrant and that Cortés needed to change to earn native peoples’ trust articulates that New Spain originated from Native American and Spanish cooperation. So, *History of the Indies* best encapsulates how intersecting versions of history characterize sixteenth century New Spain’s chronicles as historiographical products of colonial contact.

¹⁰⁵ Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, 545.

¹⁰⁶ Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, 548.

Historiography and Conclusion

Sixteenth century chroniclers concerned themselves with the Spanish and Aztec Empires, but their narratives speak most truly to life within the colonies. In New Spain, the colonial context informed scholars to modify how they conceived of history to accommodate their intersecting, incongruent social surroundings. However, contemporary academics often obstruct the process of observing New Spain's chronicles through the framework of a shared historiographical experience by separating Spanish and Native American source work. Despite this, close reading of historian Matthew Restall's book *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* and Miguel Pastrana Flores *Historias de la conquista* reveals that modern researchers possess the capacity to recognize an overarching New Spain historiography. Still, modern literature has not given New Spain the historiographical analysis it deserves as the location in which centuries old, distinct ideologies collided.

Latin American Intellectual History professors Janet Burke and Ted Humphrey illustrate that historians classify Díaz within a continuous European tradition of history in the introduction to their translation of *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*. They identify as Díaz's contemporaries a number of chroniclers with different levels of proximity to the colonies: Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, Bartolomé de las Casas, Hernando Cortés, and Francisco López de Gómara.¹⁰⁷ Since this list contains chroniclers who spent their entire lives in Europe alongside those with different levels of experience in the Americas, Burke and Humphrey see little need to specifically distinguish Díaz among his New Spain peers. Also, they exclude mention of de

¹⁰⁷ Díaz, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, xi.

Sahagún and Durán who focused intently on indigenous records, indicating that modern historians separate Díaz's account from sources with heavy Native American influence.

When classifying “The Conquest of Mexico” and *History of the Indies*, academics perpetuate the separation of Native American and Western histories by categorizing these chronicles as ethnographies. Regarding the *Florentine Codex*, Anthropologist H.B. Nicholson claims that “the principle task remaining in the field of Sahaguntine scholarship is one of more penetrating interpretations... of the invaluable materials that... earned him the title of the ‘Father of Modern Ethnography.’”¹⁰⁸ This statement separates “The Conquest of Mexico” from *The True History* by depicting the *Florentine Codex* as primarily important for ethnographic purposes and not crucial to historical analysis.

Likewise, scholar Doris Heyden reveals that academia divides between sixteenth century chronicles with extensive Nahua influence and less immersed New Spain texts when she calls Diego Durán “one of the earliest and most knowledgeable of ethnographers.”¹⁰⁹ The field of ethnography performs a vital purpose but also serves to separate Nahua and Spanish histories. But, by classifying *History of the Indies* and the *Florentine Codex* as ethnographic and *The True History* as history, modern categorization prevents an overarching investigation into the historiography of the region.

Historians are capable of historiographically examining Native alongside Western histories by focusing on the context of New Spain's cultural contact. Matthew Restall illustrates this in his text *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*. He explains “the accounts by Díaz, Cortés, and other Spaniards of what they saw and did in the Americas were inescapably framed by the

¹⁰⁸ H.B. Nicholson, *Representing Aztec Ritual: Performance, Text, and Image in the Work of Sahagun*, edited by Eloise Quiñones Keber, (University Press of Colorado, 2002), 34.

¹⁰⁹ Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, xvii

concepts and language of their own culture,” but “a set of interrelated perspectives soon developed into a fairly coherent vision and interpretation of the Conquest.”¹¹⁰ Restall understands that Spanish colonists held perspectives of what constituted society and history which were incompatible with corresponding Nahua beliefs. But, he recognizes that upon contact these views changed to accommodate previously unimaginable concepts.

He also acknowledges that Native American methods of history are worthy of historiographical analysis and valuable beyond their ethnographic contributions:

“Mesoamericans viewed the past in a way we would characterize as combining elements of myth and history... [blending] mythic and historical components into one epic narrative.” Then, he determines that through “this ambiguous relationship between myth and history... We can compare the truths of the conquistadors to our truths about them, and as a result achieve a better understanding of the Conquest.”¹¹¹ As a result, Restall demonstrates that historians have the knowledge and understanding capabilities to examine New Spain as the place where systems of thought converged into new, shared modes of thinking distinct from previous models.

But rather than intently examine this location of historiographical overlap, Restall shifts his focus to uncovering “truths” about the conquistadors contained within the myths of their history. *Seven Myths* describes its mission as “[to juxtapose] false and accurate descriptions of the Conquest,” and thereby glean a better understanding of how and where mythical elements of the Conquest grew out of true events.¹¹² Restall seeks to place different historical traditions into conflict and through that process trace the paths of the Conquest’s “myths” and “truths.” This

¹¹⁰ Matthew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹¹¹ Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, xvii

¹¹² Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, xvi.

contrasts this paper's mission to investigate how forms of historical production intersected during colonialism to differentiate New Spain's historiography from what came before.¹¹³

Pastrana Flores recognizes Indigenous-influenced sources often associated with ethnography as definitively historical. His introduction cites historiography as "the concept... expressed by Charles Olivier Carbonel for whom it is 'the history of discourse- a written discourse and one that says to be correct what people have done about the past; about their past.'" ¹¹⁴ He argues that "the current debate about the 'mythic' or 'historic' content of works from the indigenous tradition is irrelevant, because what one looks for is to understand forms of conceiving, representing, and understanding the past."¹¹⁵

However, *Historias de la conquista* also stops short of an overarching examination of New Spain's historiography because Pastrana Flores marks a clear distinction between the Spanish and Nahuatl historical legacies. He recognizes that colonialism influenced the intersection of Nahuatl and Spanish historical production, especially regarding religion. For instance, he notes that in Nahuatl chronicles "indigenous omens assimilated to the mentality of the conquistador or evangelizer. If they were a divine work, it would help to prove the intervention of the Creator's favor and the Castellians' mission of providence."¹¹⁶ But, the title of Pastrana Flores' book states "Histories of the Conquest: Aspects of the Historiography of the Nahuatl Tradition." The bounds

¹¹³ Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, xvi, xvii.

¹¹⁴ "el concepto... expresado por Charles Olivier Carbonel para quien es 'la historia del discurso- un discurso escrito y que dice ser cierto- que los hombres han hecho sobre el pasado; sobre su pasado.'"

¹¹⁵ "el debate actual sobre el contenido 'mítico' o 'histórico' de las obras de tradición es irrelevante, porque lo que se busca es entenderlas como formas de concebir, representar y comprender el pasado." Flores, *Historias de la conquista*, 8.

¹¹⁶ "los presagios indígenas se asimilan a la mentalidad del conquistador o evangelizador. Si son obra divina, ayudarían a probar la intervención del Creador a su favor y la misión providencial de los castellanos."

Flores, *Historias de la conquista*, 17.

of the Nahuatl language thereby prevent him from incorporating Díaz's *The True History* into historiographical analysis.

This paper tackles a significant historical issue by addressing a gap in current academic historical works. While historians seem capable of recognizing the historical merit of New Spain's context and sources including Native American influence, the legacy of distinction between Nahua and Spanish history persists into today. It is important to recognize that following colonization, cultural contact informed a change to the manner through which New Spain's residents conceived of history. Before the Conquest, American and European models, tools, and narratives for producing history included ideas too distinct to comfortably overlap. But by the mid and late sixteenth century historians of different backgrounds had learned to employ various structures emanating from both historical legacies. Examining where these interpretations intersect reveals historiographical conflict and cooperation which challenges even contemporary perspectives of the Conquest.

In *Silencing the Past*, Trouillot points to a paradox in how history is produced versus consumed. While professional historians devote their lives to constructing narratives, the lessons of amateur historians ranging from authors, journalists, teachers, or interested citizens often reach a wider, more impactful audience.¹¹⁷ Because guild members so closely regulate their discourse to conform to specific standards, academics' voices come off as "bland or irrelevant" compared to the politically charged, passionate, and invigorated tones through which those not bound to professional conformity discuss the past.

Even though professional historians style themselves at the center of historical discourse, "those to whom history [matters] most [look] for historical interpretations on the fringes of

¹¹⁷ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 19, 20.

academia when not altogether outside it.”¹¹⁸ The 2006 movie *Apocalypto*, which ends with a fictional Mayan warrior observing the arrival of conquistadors in the Yucatan, grossed over 120 millions dollars at the world box office. A movie co-written, produced, and directed by Mel Gibson has likely informed more living human beings about pre-Conquest Mesoamerica than the combined lifetime efforts of Restall and Pastrana Flores.

But when dealing with primary sources, such as *The True History*, the *Florentine Codex*, or *History of the Indies*, academics take their turn occupying the “the fringes.” In classwork and course curriculums, students are far more likely to read *Seven Myths* than *The True History*, much less *History of the Indies*. Even when professors incorporate primary source work, they will assign far fewer pages and require less detailed comprehension of the texts. Often, university teachers still have power over their students’ ability to interpret while encountering the text for the first time; professors tend to guide their class towards the conclusions they deem most in a primary source immediately after passing out the documents.

Modern academic discussion of *The True History*, “The Conquest of Mexico,” and *History of the Indies* does not reflect the vast power discrepancies which informed the original documents’ constructions. Nor does secondary literature on these chronicles pertain to the most relevant questions regarding the ancestors of Aztecs, Spanish colonists, and their history. But even today, analysis of these primary sources unduly separates those with Native American and Spanish backgrounds, when a common thread of New Spain’s origin should invite discussion of the new history that emerged upon contact.

¹¹⁸ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 21.

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