

**Invented Indians:
White Delusion, Make-Believe, and Native Mobilization of the Colonial Imaginary in
Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Mexico**

by

Kayla Aletha Welch

Bachelor of Arts in Spanish, Washington and Lee University, 2013

Master of Arts in Hispanic Languages and Literatures, University of Pittsburgh, 2015

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DIETRICH SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

This dissertation was presented

by

Kayla Aletha Welch

It was defended on

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and approved by

Dr. Gonzalo Lamana, Associate Professor, University of Pittsburgh, Department of Hispanic Languages and Literatures

Dr. Juan Duchesne-Winter, Professor, University of Pittsburgh, Department of Hispanic Languages and Literatures

Dr. Elizabeth Monasterios, Professor, University of Pittsburgh, Department of Hispanic Languages and Literatures

Dr. Paige Raibmon, Professor, The University of British Columbia, Department of History

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Studies of European colonialism and its legacies often center on power as the relentlessly pervasive, even inescapable, subordination of an Indigenous population through totalizing control of life. In Latin American critical thought, this tendency has led many academics to reduce colonial dynamics to a framework of an invincible Spanish colonizer working against an Indigenous population who either becomes assimilated into the colonizer's ways of being or maintains a covert, and usually ineffective, adherence to the pre-Columbian past. My research seeks to complicate these binaries by examining chronicles, letters, and legal texts from sixteenth and seventeenth-century Mexico through a lens of critical race theory. I aim to understand how Natives mobilized what I call invented Indians, or cultural and political representations of Native peoples fabricated by colonizers as a base for the foundational, and often overlooked, logic of Spanish colonialism: White supremacy. Through microhistories, I explore how Nahua, Maya, and Zapotec individuals leveraged invented Indians to shore up the colonial imaginary and, in the very same act, disarticulate it.

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Preface

I am very grateful to those who have allowed me to bring this project to fruition. My advisor, Dr. Gonzalo Lamana, has generously offered years of intellectual collaboration, fresh ideas, and unending support through many hours of conversation. I appreciate the clarity of his insights and, above all, the insightfulness of his questions. Members of my thesis committee both past and present—Dr. Juan Duchesne-Winter, Dr. Junyoung Verónica Kim, Dr. Elizabeth Monasterios, and Dr. Paige Raibmon, and Dr. Junyoung Verónica Kim—have worked as essential catalysts to my creativity by providing expert knowledges from their specific fields. I thank all of my academic partners for their time, care, and flexibility throughout this strange pandemic era. My partner, Jovanny Segoviano, has helped keep both me and our family afloat while I pursued this project, and has done it with panache. My daughter, Dalia, arrived while I was writing, providing me with the perspective and light I needed to complete my work.

A note: In what follows, I often use masculine pronouns to refer to generalities. This is to reflect the colonial context in which the studied materials were produced. As a woman who is propelled on the shoulders of greater women and who is now raising a daughter, they do not reflect my own approach to the world.

0.0

Introduction

It was intended that you should perish by never being allowed to go behind the white man's definitions, by never being allowed to spell your proper name. You have, and many of us have, defeated this intention; and, by a terrible law, a terrible paradox, those innocents who believed that your imprisonment made them safe are losing their grasp of reality.

—James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

0.1

An Encounter of Inventions

As he told it, the seventeenth-century chronicler Fernando de Alva Cortés Ixtlilxóchitl once asked an old man from Texcoco about the lineage of the city-state's kings. He wanted to know the names of the parents and grandparents of Ixtlilxóchitl, the father of the warrior-scholar-poet-king Nezahualcóyotl. The old man explained that “Ixtlilxóchitl did not have a father or a mother, but a very large eagle came and made a nest in a very large tree that was in the city [of Tepetlaóztoc], and laid a very large egg, and after a certain time it broke and produced a child, and [the eagle] brought him down from the nest, putting him in the middle of the city plaza; and seeing this the Aculhuas raised him, and since they didn't have a king, they raised him to be king, and they gave him the name Ixtlilxóchitl” (288). Alva Ixtlilxóchitl was, as his name suggests, a direct descendent

of both Ixtlilxóchitl and Nezahualcóyotl, and he found this tale absurd. Laughing, he said that the man's "origin story" was pure foolishness. The old man, who hadn't recognized Alva Ixtlilxóchitl as Native, agreed. He explained that he always gave this response to people who asked, but "especially to Spaniards" (288). "And that's why, as I have said," Alva Ixtlilxóchitl concluded for his readers, "[Spanish] historians are not to fault for having given false chronicles" (288).

This strange encounter bursts at the seams with layers of complexity: the old man performed a simulation for Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, who was also performing a simulation for the old man. The root of this shared simulation, according to the old man, was to supply a particular answer to Spanish questions. Once the two actors recognized themselves as fellow citizens of Texcoco, they openly stated and laughed over this fact, which caused Alva Ixtlilxóchitl to remark—with something akin to pity or maybe even benevolence—that Spanish historians' erroneous work couldn't be held against them, since their supposedly authentic Native sources kept them working in the dark.

This project will analyze what I term to be invented Indians, or representations of Native people fashioned by colonists in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Mexico in an attempt to veil the gaps between colonial supremacist discourse and lived experience. In an essential turn, it will also examine how Native individuals appropriated and enacted these images as means to navigate supremacist fantasy, thereby dismantling, reauthoring, and reworking the same hegemonic imaginary that aimed to supplant their subjecthood. I will devote each of the following three chapters to mapping out the development and utilization of particular invented Indians: the Indian as potential subject, the Indian as idolater, and the Indian as barbarian. Using literary, historical, and legal texts, I will trace these Indians' construction, characteristics, and function within the supremacist structure of colonial Mexico. I will then explore microhistories to understand the

nuanced and specific ways in which Native individuals leveraged and embodied invented Indians to claim possibility and exceed the limitations of a restrictive, obsessively categorical colonial order. My hope is to elucidate a more complex understanding of colonial hegemony, one that refutes its exclusive claim to knowledge production and instead proposes its fragility as rooted in an inability to know itself, a contradiction then utilized by Native actors to assert presence and fashion creative openings for overwriting a colonial discourse defined vis-à-vis Native absence.

0.2

The State of the Question: Colonial Representation in Academic Literature

In Latin American scholarship, particularly around the areas of representation, an *a priori* understanding of European power underlies much existing literature by taking European knowledge and situational mastery as a foundation of the American colonial condition. This is best demonstrated in the two poles around which studies of Native meaning-making in the wake of the Spanish conquest of Mexico have coalesced: acculturation and resistance.

Those whose work bends toward the first pole often understand Natives in colonial Mexico as casualties of a prolonged process of acculturation in which the Indigenous became increasingly subsumed by Spanish structural counterparts. Gibson's seminal text *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule* (1964) is perhaps the most representative of these studies. Gibson focuses on acculturation at a local institutional level over the roughly three-hundred-year period between the conquest of Tenochtitlan and the independence of Mexico. Describing the shift in government from *cabecera*, Native-ruled provinces, to *pueblos*, or Spanish-established town systems, Gibson writes, "The abandonment of a system basic to Indian history, occurring gradually . . . was part of the

progressive yielding of Indian to Spanish institutions. After the early period, as we shall see, the Indian nobility lost its authority, and Spaniards reorganized the procedures for tribute collection and labor recruitment” (57). In another moment, he states, “The Spanish institutions of greatest consequence for Indian civilization during the first fifty years of colonial Mexican history may be classified as private, political, or religious” (58). Within this understanding of early colonial Mexico, Spanish institutions were of consequence for Indian civilization, and not the other way around. Action and influence flowed in a single unilateral direction, making it appear that Native communities, their practices, and their social, civil, and cosmological lives were dissolvable against the advance of Spanish colonial machinery.

Susan Kellogg adds nuance in her understanding of this institutional dominance and erasure as reflected in property law and the practice of writing wills. She turns to the archives of the Real Audiencia to show that “[t]he colonial legal system became . . . a powerful tool of acculturation, profoundly altering Mexica and Nahuatl conceptions of family, property, and gender. And it played a critical role in establishing and maintaining Spanish cultural hegemony” (xxix). While she claims that her book “emphasizes a process of cultural transformation in which Indians drew on both pre-Hispanic traditions and practices and Spanish values and practices to create a new cultural synthesis” (xxii), I argue that the terms of this synthesis as described in Kellogg’s work are limited. Spanish institutions, rather than Native counterparts, functioned as tools of acculturation, here meant to imply cultural breaking and molding. Native institutions served as the things upon which these tools were applied—not tools to affect processes of acculturation in their own right. That is, throughout Kellogg’s description of this phenomenon, little is said about the effects of acculturation upon the identity of Spaniards; it appears that they worked only as catalysts of acculturation, not recipients of it. The European Self remained intact as it applied its means of

hegemony upon the Native Other, who then had to “synthesize” a new version of identity from its own ruins: a one-way syncretism. Kellogg takes as an example the evolution of wills as legal documents: “The new custom of writing wills exerted a strong influence on changing concepts of property. . . Will writing . . . played a significant role in introducing and reinforcing Spanish religious beliefs and notions of property” (121). After reviewing the development of wills throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth, and into the eighteenth centuries, she concludes that “the adoption of this practice proved to be an important vehicle of cultural conversion and Spanish cultural hegemony” (158). Whose culture was converted, and to what? Ultimately, Native culture found itself shaped by Spanish hegemony, resulting in a new Native synthesis sparing the colonizing culture similar courses of change.

I understand Gibson and Kellogg’s approach, then, to ultimately portray the Native—and mainly, if not only, the Native—as an entity transformed by the colonial apparatus, a process to which Serge Gruzinski adds the term “absorption” (1993). Absorption, in Gruzinski’s thought, describes the forced assimilation of Natives into Spanish culture through their initiation into writing. It differs from acculturation because its primary effects focus beyond the institutional, as described by Gibson and Kellogg, and enter the very foundation of Native self and meaning-making—Gruzinski states that absorption through the introduction of the practice of writing interrupted Native memory and reality, a fundamental shift that reworked not just post-conquest Native identity, but also pre-conquest Native history and reality. Walter Mignolo (1995) describes the materiality of writing as a colonizing tool of Native languages and memory. He emphasizes the colonizers’ discursive marriage of history with the book and their occupation of Native pasts by inscribing these pasts into letters via, for example, the work of Bernardino de Sahagún, as well as the specific suppression of Native ways of organizing knowledge. The author clarifies that

“[c]olonization does not imply a devouring march, by which everything in Amerindian cultures was suppressed by Spanish pedagogical, religious, and administrative institutions” (4). Despite this disclaimer, however, his analysis of “the dominance of one of the coexisting elements to occupy a position of power over the others as if it were the only truth” (4) is only deconstructive to a point. The decentering of the knowing subject, to which Mignolo dedicates himself through what he terms pluritopic hermeneutic practice, or the opening toward heterogeneity and multiple foci of enunciation, does not push to consider the Native work that universalizing paradigms around knowledge required, how—and why—the performance of dominance required Native participation, and what the results of this participation could have been. Mignolo’s study of colonization through writing and Gruzinski’s use of absorption through literacy ponder Indigenous actors who were made to craft new identities—past, present, and future—via materials bestowed upon them by Spanish structures of domination as the ultimate determining variable for this new meaning-making. These analyses leave us asking: Beyond the Native act of forging new knowledges and identities through the colonizing paradigm, what lacks and gaps did the *colonizer* need to account for? How, and with what or whom, did the colonizer attempt to do so? Who do we collapse into the categories of the “West” and the “subaltern” by emphasizing them as two opposing camps in a determined and dualized dialogue with each other (i.e. the dominant and the dominated)?

As opposed to accenting the creation of *new* ways of being in the world following a period of cultural collapse, acculturation, and absorption, the second pole of literature examining Native identity in the wake of the conquest of Mexico consists of secretive resistance in the forms of masked Native cultural *survivals*. James Lockhart may be viewed as its standard-bearer. In his *The Nahuas After the Conquest* (1992), he writes that “[a]bsolutely unaltered survival and total

displacement are . . . rare in the history of cultural contact in central Mexico,” but “what one typically finds is the preliminary identification of intrusive and indigenous elements, allowing an indigenous concept or practice to operate in a familiar manner under a Spanish-Christian overlay. . . . By the late eighteenth century, almost nothing in the entire indigenous cultural ensemble was left untouched, yet at the same time almost everything went back . . . to a preconquest antecedent” (5). While Lockhart’s argument doesn’t claim that Native cultures survived the Spanish conquest completely intact, it does hold that Natives turn back to the past, or that the essential characteristic of a Native cultural element is its opposition to the colonial by looping back to a pre-Conquest antecedent. His book describes this looping across eight sociocultural elements of Nahua life. In his chapter devoted to religion, for example, he writes that “the Nahuas took the Christian church as the analogue of the preconquest temple. They enthusiastically participated in its construction and decoration in the same spirit as with its predecessor, looking to magnify the central tangible symbol of the *altepetl*’s sovereignty and identity” (206). Here, the church gained significance exactly because it was rooted in a pre-conquest predecessor, the temple, and their contexts were continuous, which frames itself as a near reversal of Gibson’s and Kellogg’s argument.

Louise Burkhart’s *The Slippery Earth: Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* probes deeper into the identification of Native agency as an act of turning back to a pre-conquest antecedent. The author proposes that early efforts to appropriate Nahua terminology and cosmology with the goal of fitting and propagating Christian purposes only reinforced pre-conquest Nahua beliefs—that is to say, Christian doctrine took on power among Native peoples from its synchronies with an Indigenous past that missionaries misunderstood and poorly wielded. Lockhart and Burkhart, in short, understand the Native to be defined by orientation to pre-conquest ways of being in the world. While exploring connections between

pre-conquest Native systems of belief and living and their pre-conquest Christian counterparts is an essential component of understanding Native orientation to and navigation of the post-conquest context, it is insufficient, both as an explanation of Native interaction with the colonizer and the formation Native and colonizing identities as such. This approach risks reduction to an interpretation that immobilizes Native agents by limiting their possibilities for creative intervention in time, and instead affixing them to a constant search for and reenactment of that ever-irretrievable: the past.

Between these two poles of acculturation and resistance, a third school of thought presents the colonial Indigenous as brokers caught at the middle of two worlds, one of Native pre-contact and another of European modernization. Yannakakis's *The Art of Being In-Between: Native Intermediaries, Indian Identity, and Local Rule in Colonial Oaxaca* (2008) is part of this set. When discussing local Indigenous leaders and other "native intermediaries" in colonial Oaxaca, she writes, "Native intermediaries present a more ambivalent moral, political, and cultural landscape than their European counterparts" (4). For Yannakaki, Indigenous nobles existed "with a foot in either world" (18)—they "parlayed the Spanish colonial state's lack of a monopoly and violence and the unevenness of its territorial hegemony into considerable political and cultural power for themselves" (18). Yannakaki borrows from Daniel Richter's network theory, in which individuals' "position in multiple networks and coalitions [means] that they [are] both varyingly situated and not situated at all: they [occupy] an 'intermediate position'" (10) that allows for a flexibility of "tactics," or "the subtle, everyday actions undertaken by individuals to navigate, resist, and subvert authority" (10). She uses *cofradías* as an example, "Catholic brotherhoods that oversaw the care of a particular saint . . . [and] were often double-edged institutions. On the face of it, their purpose was in keeping with Catholic parish life. Beneath the surface, their purpose was often multifold,

including the care of a native deity, ancestor cult, or the perpetuation of native rituals” (105). That is, Native elites were obliged by their circumstances to navigate their way into a space of cultural ambiguity that allowed them to bridge a gap between Indigenous and Christian authority and practice, while Spanish elites were not compelled to do the same. The nature of this navigation is double-sided, one “on the face of it” and another “beneath the surface,” or one visible and another hidden from view. As we will see in our second chapter, associating the Native and Native continuities with concealment has a long and troubling history rooted in the chaotic evangelization project, the threatened White self, and the resultant mutable definition of idolatry during the early colonial period. Scholarly interpretations of a clandestine Native “other side” composed of secretive or hidden rituals repeat the colonizer’s own mythologized constructions of the Native.

Nonetheless, Yannakakis’ recognition of the instability of the colonial real and the elasticity of Native approaches to the colonial situation allows for a broad multiplicity of actions. For her approach to function as she describes it, however, she must accept as a presupposition that there were, in fact, two different worlds inhabited in different forms by different bodies. In this way, I argue that the implications of her approach do not vary substantively from those of earlier interpretations. Over the span of decades and across different nexuses of focus, these readings all hold the Native body as a one-way recipient of colonial action forced to accommodate the colonizer’s situational mastery, or determination of the colonial situation as such. That is, the colonizer defined the terms of Native accommodation by causing—but not engaging in or elaborating alongside Native individuals—these processes, and instead serving as the stable reference point from which Native action was and continues to be defined: acculturation, resistance, or negotiation of an “intermediate position” (Yannakakis 10). Within a realm that

continues to be defined by two oppositional signifiers of identity, the colonizer remains our orienting key to Native action.

My examination of Native texts in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Mexico demonstrates that Indigenous response to and interaction with the Spanish conquest was far more complex than these lines of thought allow. Current academic literature often fails to identify how Native actors dialogued not only with the new Spanish empire as a lived experience, but also with the limitations of a colonizer who recognized Native humanity only within certain demarcated boundaries—not just because of the colonizer’s desire to do so, but more centrally, due to an intrinsic incapacity to do anything else that was built into the very definition of supremacist colonization. I identify these boundaries as invented Indians, or fabricated representations of identity that served the purpose of naturalizing and substantiating a false narrative of the colonizer’s inherent superiority. Indeed, the development of supremacist imagery and the concurrent formation of colonial Mexican society existed as a duality animated by multiple currents of action. These currents did not exist as a one-way flow from the colonizer to the colonized; rather, they were comprised of constant and ever-changing negotiations between Native and colonizing individuals, both in discourse and in practice.

The nature of these negotiations saw itself further complicated by the uniqueness of the early colonial situation in Mexico. Enduring conquest was nothing new to the Native populations of the region; after all, as documented by Tezozómoc, Chimalpahin, the contributors to the *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España*, and other Indigenous writers, at the beginning of the sixteenth century the Mexica themselves were still conquering neighboring city-states and consolidating a massive empire after their arrival from their homelands to the north nearly three centuries prior. While political overthrow, then, was a well-practiced dynamic in the Valley of

Mexico with a millennia-long history, what I call the White condition that accompanied the Spaniards and its key characteristic of self-deception added distinctive characteristics to this particular space of interactions between colonizer and colonized. It is the recognition and analysis of these unique characteristics, and the subsequent dislocation of the White colonizer as stable referent of the colonial situation, that are missing from the current academic literature.

0.3

“The Terrible Paradox”: Our Conceptual Base for the Analysis of Invented Indians

When speaking of the invented Native and colonizer representations that inhabit colonial texts, it is important to note that I use the terms “Indian” and “White.” *Indio*, perhaps the most famous misnomer in world history, is a fabricated designation for a fabricated people. O’Gorman interrogated the ontological notion of a New World and its inhabiting *indios* in his seminal work *La invención de América* (1958), arguing that in order to “discover” the New World and its *indios*, colonizers first had to invent them in a Heideggerian sense. He described the very idea of a shared people, *indios*, with a shared history in the Americas as a “geographic hallucination” (O’Gorman 1941, “Do the Americas Have a Common History?”). Indeed, the term “Indian” stems from the tangible and well-documented geographic hallucination of Christopher Columbus, who remained convinced that he had discovered a pathway to the Indian subcontinent until his death. I use “Indian” and “*indio*” as clear echoes of this hallucination, gesturing to the invented nature of both the terms themselves and, inevitably, the people they claim(ed) to describe.

Similarly, I have adopted the term “White” to discuss the colonial Self because “Spanish” and “Christian” do not entirely fit, since colonial Mexico’s powerful were neither all Spanish nor

all Christian. Taking into account the complicated history of conquest, migration, and movement within Europe in general and the Iberian Peninsula in particular, especially as a result of the Umayyad conquest of the region from the eighth to the fifteenth century, the term “European” limits us with its strict geographic and cultural sense. Most importantly, none of these words gesture to the idea of *fantastical delusion* that I want to convey throughout my work. In settling on the term “White,” I take my lead from James Baldwin, who—in his essay “On Being ‘White’ ... and Other Lies” (1984)—calls Whiteness “absolutely, a moral choice (for there *are* no white people)” (180) and adds that “[i]t is a terrible paradox, but those who believed that they control and define Black people divested themselves of the power to control and define themselves” (180). In the same essay, Baldwin emphasizes that White people truly do believe they are White, and in fact delude themselves into being so: “[They] have brought humanity to the edge of oblivion: because they think they are white. Because they think they are white, they do not dare confront the ravage and the lie of their history” (180).

This paradoxical concept of make-believe is what I hope to transmit, a self-perpetuated illusion that establishes itself as real when it is, in fact, a choice, and therefore relies fundamentally on its own ignorance of its creation and election of a fabricated claim to supremacy. Self-reflection is, for Whiteness, the ultimate danger: it threatens understandings of both the White Self and the world that has been built and falsely naturalized to sustain it. Guided by this interpretation of inherent, inescapable, and tragicomic—in the words of DuBois (*Darkwater* 1920)¹— self-

¹ “Everything considered, the title to the universe claimed by White Folk is faulty. It ought, at least, to look plausible. How easy, then, by emphasis and omission to make children believe that every great soul the world ever saw was a white man's soul; that every great thought the world ever knew was a white man's thought; that every great deed the world ever did was a white man's deed; that every great dream the world ever sang was a white man's dream. In fine, that if from the world were dropped everything that could not fairly be attributed to White Folk, the world would, if anything, be even greater, truer, better than now. And if all this be a lie, is it not a lie in a great cause?”

delusion, I aim to examine the colonizer's aversion to and incapacity for self-sight within early colonial Mexico. Just as fundamentally, the word "White" also directly points to the inherent racialized structures at the base of colonial hegemony, or the navigation of a racialized world by racialized beings. This means that this particular word allows me to interrogate the fragility of these structures, which a lack of contemporary terminology or theorization during the colonial era did not make any less real. As a result, "White" opens the greatest number of doors for considering the complex negotiation of identity on behalf of colonial power, a phenomenon that both determined its need, not mere desire, for invented Indians and informed Native mobilization of its invented imaginary.

In his *Tractatus de legibus ac Deo legislatore* (1612), the Spanish philosopher and theologian Francisco Suárez² described a certain "pact" as existing between the Spanish king and his Native subjects: "Since the regime of such a republic or region is monarchical is originated by a human institution. . . then the monarchy itself comes from human beings. A sign of this is that, according to the pact or agreement that the kingdom and the king make, the latter's power is greater or less" (III, 3, 6).³ Owensby (2011) explores this pact, arguing that although the Spanish monarchy never explicitly set out to form a deal with conquered Native populations, its relationship with Indigenous peoples developed into a precarious arrangement over time through the mediation of

Here it is that the comedy verges to tragedy. The first minor note is struck, all unconsciously, by those worthy souls in whom consciousness of high descent brings burning desire to spread the gift abroad,—the obligation of nobility to the ignoble. Such sense of duty assumes two things: a real possession of the heritage and its frank appreciation by the humble-born" (*Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil*, "The Souls of White Folk," p. 20).

² Like Francisco de Vitoria, whose work I draw on substantially in forthcoming chapters, Francisco Suárez was a member of the famed School of Salamanca. Information about the relationship between Suárez and Vitoria and their interpretations of law between peoples can be found in Endy's "Francisco de Vitoria and Francisco Suárez on Religious Authority and Cause for Justified War" (2018).

³ "Que el régimen de tal república o región sea monárquico es originada por una institución humana . . . , luego la monarquía misma proviene de los seres humanos. Señal de ello es que, según el pacto o convenio que hace el reino y el rey, el poder de éste es mayor o menor."

the legal and justice systems, an arrangement brought about by the simultaneous necessities of protecting Native communities from extermination at the hands of *encomenderos* and reducing the power of the Americas' nascent landed nobility. Owensby's emphasis on the double bonds of obligation between rulers and the ruled illuminates how Native work also went into maintaining the concept of empire that allowed the Spanish to govern vast territories with relatively little manpower.

But what, exactly, was the nature of this pact? Owensby suggests that it developed gradually as the Spanish monarchy awoke, little by little, to the necessity of theorizing Natives as a part of its governing mandate. As we will see, however, representations of Indigenous peoples played an inescapably fundamental role in Spain's American Empire from its earliest beginnings—both conceptually and practically. In fact, philosophers, evangelizers, and *conquistadores* alike often made no distinction between Native bodies and the spatial land in which they resided; like mirrors, they reflected each other along a spectrum that ranged from a Biblical paradise to a zone of duplicity built on the deception of the Devil. Colonizers relied upon a constellation of invented Indians and their various functions to manufacture a universal supremacy grounding their claim to the Americas against what they came to know as a messy and ever-changing reality. When confronted with gaps between this reality and the constructions they had made to contain it, White supremacists turned away, unable to critically interrogate their own illusions due to the dangerous effects such interrogations could have on their understandings of themselves and the very world in which they lived. I argue that a key feature of Spanish colonialism in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Mexico was Native interaction with this White imaginary, which included both shoring up its illusions—playing them out in real time to reinforce the façades of invented Indians at their most vulnerable points—and, in the very same act, negating them.

My reading relies on elucidations about the paradoxical nature of White supremacist hegemony as elaborated by W.E.B. DuBois (1903), who described the constructed White Self and the racialized Other not as separate realms of experience, but instead as an irrevocable unit split by what he termed the Veil. Shawn Michelle Smith writes that “the Veil is that which dims perception. The Veil functions as a kind of cultural screen on which the collective weight of white misconceptions is fortified and made manifest. The Veil is the site at which white fantasies of a negative blackness, as well as fantasies of an idealized whiteness, are projected and maintained” (40). Here, the White (that is to say, invented) elite incredibly and inescapably limits itself; if its members strain too close to the Veil, the artifice ruptures and the farce is made apparent. The Veil thus uses the projection of “white fantasies” to separate individuals that are otherwise in intimate contact with each other—and, as James Baldwin notes, the difference then becomes the double-bind of knowing or not knowing of the veil’s existence, meaning that power finds itself limited by what it has created. “I am writing this letter to you,” Baldwin tells his nephew, “to try and tell you something about how to handle *them*, for most of them do not yet really know that you exist” (*The Fire Next Time* 6). The Veil is that which both naturalizes and sustains the ruse, allowing the supremacist to *really believe* that he does not know that the imagined Other doesn’t exist and—as a true believer, a fundamentalist, a radical—to thereby project an image of hierarchical and intrinsically separate worlds that he will fanatically defend .

To dismantle these fantasies and identify the Veil that sustains them, we must first deconstruct the particular representation from which all others spring as “rags . . . to hide their nakedness”: the White subject. DuBois’ “singular clairvoyance” about the root and function of racialized representations, his criticism of the “comedy [that] verges to tragedy” (*Darkwater* 20) that is colonialism and its specific delusion of divine election to shadow a fundamental core of

violent appropriation, is what illuminates the shrouded topography of racialization and colonialization upon which White fantasies operate. His assessment uncovers the “embarrassment” and the “fury” (*Darkwater* 20) that White people display when they are confronted with their own nakedness, and how essential it is to the White identity that each and every person making up the colonized imaginary do whatever is necessary to never acknowledge such nakedness.

It is important to indicate, however, that while critical theorists such as W.E.B. DuBois and James Baldwin are essential for understanding the fantastical nature of White supremacy and racist Otherization, the content of the arbitrary signifiers they describe and that I focus on here, i.e. Black and Indian, respectively, are not the same; they negotiate distinct historical and sociopolitical—even economic—strains upon the supremacist identity. Iyko Day aids us in navigating these different materialities and histories by discussing various logics of settler colonialism beneath the regime of White supremacy described by DuBois and Baldwin. According to Day, settler colonialism is mapped onto a “triangulation of Native, alien, and settler positions” (19). Jodi Byrd adds degrees of nuance to these designations by employing the term “arrivant,” which is meant to account for involuntary migration by signifying “those people forced into the Americas through the violence of European and Anglo-American colonialism and imperialism around the globe” (xix). Elaborated within different contexts and with vastly different historical and material implications, these racialized signifiers are united in the invented triangulation, which the colonial project solidified by working to delineate, name, codify, and dominate Otherized bodies whose rational, actual existence threatened the White supremacist identity, a process described in detail by Edward Said in his seminal text *Orientalism* (1973).

According to Said, the Orientalist condition is “. . . the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (3). His argument centers on the history and tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that has fashioned the Other as object, thus giving reality and presence to the Western Self as subject. This process leads to the invention and use of racialized signifiers, and it is this insidious foundational process that I understand DuBois and Baldwin to critique: one that speaks to the profoundly delusional base of the White subject. It is this criticism with which I seek to dialogue in my attempts to understand such delusion’s particular effects in colonial Mexico. This is because a major component of the thorny and high-stakes terrain that DuBois, Baldwin, and Said expose is the constant positioning of supremacist representation against real experience, which incessantly threatens to undermine its performed naturalization. Unlike DuBois and Baldwin, however, Said does not probe the ways in which the resultant breach demands Otherized participation, what this participation might consist of, and what Otherized participation means for the supremacist fantasy itself.

Within the realm of Native experience, Gerald Vizenor—scholar and member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, White Earth Reservation—developed the term “postindian” to approach these questions. “Postindian” describes the simulations of simulations, or the simulations of Indians, that Native individuals mobilize in the White imaginary to achieve what he calls “survance,” or “the active presence of Native people in public discourse” (Miles 40). The very fact of active Native presence is a negation of colonizing discourse, which is defined by a lack of the Native: “The indian is a simulation, the absence of natives; the indian transposes the real, and the simulation of the real has no referent, memories, or native stories” (Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*

15). I argue that to function as discourse and practice, invented Indians necessitated the very Native presence they precluded from the realm of the possible; Native behavior had to map onto the invented Indian and vice-versa in order for the latter to be canonically established as a natural element, which supremacist thinking requires. This created an unsolvable absurdity that resulted in Native agents “shoring up” the images of the colonial imaginary, or buttressing the constructions of invented Indians so that the supremacist colonial map of being-in-the-world remained intact. The necessity of this act allowed Native bodies to move through this map in ways that concurrently dismantled it entirely.

By deploying critical race theories within the context of colonial Mexico, we can study the colonizer, the supremacist subject that often continues to be elaborated as the only reference to the real. This allows us to elucidate the nature of a particular subjectivity that required convincing oneself to believe in and ardently defend one’s own game of make-believe. In this way, my deconstructions of the colonial White subject—who is far too often assumed, even and especially by academics, to (have) exist(ed) as such—permit an examination of that subject’s game of self-delusion and self-avoidance, a game in which its own inventions are held to be the only fixed, true constants that define its place in the world. These deconstructions reveal that such delusion is not passively suffered by those fashioned as racialized Others, but rather that the delusion is *all too clear* to those categorized as Other. This clarity provides ample grounds upon which to consider the mobilization of these representations by those who make up the “constitutive outside”—a group that, in the words of Stuart Hall, “is absolutely destined to return from its expelled and objected position outside the signifying field to trouble the dreams of those who are comfortable inside” (Hall 8).

0.4

A Constellation of Invented Indians: Our Roadmap

In Alva Ixtlilxóchitl's account, the old man told him the story that he, aware of the colonial condition and shrewd about its operational structure, thought that a Spaniard might want to hear. He didn't know that he was talking to a descendent of the very man he attempted to mythologize, leading to an event in which a Native misidentified as a Spaniard spoke to another Native simulating a Native simulation. José de Acosta—the Jesuit missionary who spent nearly fifteen years in Peru and an additional year in Mexico—once commented about Native origin stories, “Mas ¿de qué sirve añadir más, pues todo va lleno de mentira y ajeno de razón?” (119). The answer to his rhetorical question, Alva Ixtlilxóchitl implied, might have been more complex than Acosta would have been able to accept. The old man demonstrated how Natives gave colonists what they sought without these colonists being able to identify the *actual* make-believe, which was why, Alva Ixtlilxóchitl explained to his readers, “[Spanish] historians are not to fault for having given false chronicles” (288). Who was truly bamboozled by supposedly absurd mythology? According to the old man and Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, it wasn't *Native* historians.

I will devote each of the subsequent three chapters to dissecting different invented Indians that were created as representations in the Spanish discourse of colonial Mexico, as well as to presenting microhistories that detail Native use of these inventions. I aim to reveal the particularly paradoxical nature of supremacist colonial power, the two-way flow necessary for sustaining it, the violence at the borders of its disarticulation, and above all, the supremacist's inherent inability to identify these phenomena, a blindness around which Native creativity and shaping of discourses of dominance flourished. I aim to challenge the often-prevalent practice of telling conquest and its consequences as the history of Natives, and only Natives, by highlighting the above-mentioned

two-way flow; I interrogate the conquest's effect on the colonizer and its implications for the very categorizations of Indian and White—identity-based representations—as methodological tools.

The constellation of three Indians that I map out in these chapters work to trace the development and changing needs of the colonial project in Mexico. In the first chapter, I investigate the Indian as a subject *en potencia*, or potential subject, a representation that grounded the First Evangelization of Mexico from the arrival of Cortés in 1519 to the establishment of the First Mexican Provincial Council of the Church in 1555. As drawn by jurist Francisco de Vitoria and priest Bartolomé de las Casas, Natives classified beneath this category were “not voluntary and current subjects of Christ, but rather potential ones” (Las Casas, *Apología* 49). It was their access to and use of what these theologians identified as natural reason which created this potential. As a concept, natural reason stemmed from the Aristotelian model of nature's predisposition to order and man's capacity to elucidate that order, which led Aristotele to theorize the existence of a god separate from matter. In the thirteenth century, this idea of natural order was then further extrapolated by Thomas Aquinas. For Aquinas, natural reason—or the natural light of reason—was the capacity for intelligent thought that human beings possessed by virtue of being created in God's image. Aquinas argued that while some truths remained beyond the reach of humankind, many were accessible to human beings through the judicious exercise of their divinely given intelligence, allowing them to discover, verify, and organize truths. According to Aquinas, “The light of reason is placed by nature, and thus by God, in every man to guide him in his acts” (“On Kingship, to the King of Cyprus”). Vitoria, the dominant voice of the Scholastic-inclined School of Salamanca, emphasized the ability of Natives within the Americas to exercise this natural reason and worked to establish evidence that they had done so. Their civilizations and religions demonstrated order and a pursuit of truth as mandated by natural law, meaning that their utilization

of the natural light of reason had advanced them down the path of salvation to prepare for the arrival of the Spaniards. Once the catalyst of the arrival took place and they were taught the Gospel, they would convert and evolve into complete subjects of Christ, since Christian teachings would culminate their already-proven use of natural reason by building onto their natural knowledge and revealing the existence of Christ to be a self-evident apogee of their search for the divine.

Through the construction of the Indian as potential subject, Spaniards served as instruments in the fulfillment God's will by carrying the Word of God into a new continent primed for their appearance. Such an image closely followed God's declaration in Isaiah 51:5—"My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust" (KJV). Indians as almost-but-not-quite-Christians allowed the conquest and the colonizer to serve as a vehicle of God toward the full realization of his kingdom and its subjects, who functioned as children reared in the colonizers' image. In sum, they worked to ground a supremacist Self potentially threatened by the discovery of previously unknown lands and peoples not mentioned in the omnipotent God's Bible.

I aim to emphasize the essential relationship between the racialization of the Indian and space of empire by tracing how this construction guided the Spanish Empire's political and social development through the first decades of the colonization of Mexico, including the creation of the *encomienda*, the system of *repartimiento*, and the establishment of *escuelas de naturales*, or schools built to congregate the sons of Native nobles and subject them to a Western Christian education. The shifting boundaries of these institutions as evidenced by changing regulations and unstable official statements mark the insistent difficulties faced by troubled colonial representatives as they attempted to imprint the Indian as potential subject onto the real lived experience of the colony.

I then pivot to Nahua historian and chronicler Chimalpahin to deconstruct his own mobilization of the Indian as potential subject as a tool to insert a Native voice into the ecosystem of supremacist colonial discourse characterized by the erasure of the Native. Chimalpahin, descended from the nobility of the Chalca and born more than fifty years after the conquest, rewrote the history of the Chalca and the conquest itself in his Nahua-language *Las relaciones*, authored between roughly 1606 and 1631. By accessing the discourse adopted by Las Casas and Vitoria around natural law and reason, the author extended their logic to revolutionary (and unavoidable?) conclusions: Natives were not proto-Christians, but through their superior application of the light of natural reason, fully so. Due to their purity and adherence to natural law, they were more laudable than their European counterparts: “And those that we have mentioned, all idolaters, Gentiles, had a presentiment of the only *téutl*, God” (9).⁴ Shoring up the universality of the evolutionary supremacist historical narrative, or the collapsing of all global history into one plot, allowed Chimalpahin to use the Indian as potential subject to redirect that narrative. If history were truly universal, it had to encompass Native history as well, meaning that the White subject could be decentered. The author also intervened in Gómara’s text with extensive edits. These edits reflected Ixtlilxóchitl’s concerns over Spanish fallacies, skewered the supremacist claim to unique access to knowledge, and continued to unseat the colonizer as historical protagonist. These acts of survivance were so effective that seventeenth-century historians attributed Gómara’s text to Chimalpahin himself as original author.

The second invented Indian that I explore in this work is the Indian as idolater. This representation marked the Second Evangelization in Mexico, which emerged as predominant by

⁴ “Y aquellos que hemos mencionado, todos idólatras, gentiles, presintieron al único *téutl*, a Dios.”

the 1550s. Decades after the initial conquest, the perceived continuity and intensification of the practice of idolatry necessitated a new categorical approach to avoid examining the colonial project's possible failure. This Indian was no longer preserved in an idyllic state of Eden-like innocence, but rather a devious and secretive fraudster. Theologians like Acosta, Bernardino de Sahagún, Diego Durán, and Juan Torquemada created and acted out this shift, elaborating a newly empowered Devil as the source of ongoing and deepening deception. Now, Indians required not paternal educators to coach them up the road to salvation, but judicious and incisive decoders of their manipulated and manipulating natures. The element of secrecy became inextricable to the Indian as idolater, with García Soormally (2019) noting that the accusation of idolatry was connected not to a specific set of practices, but rather to the act of deceit itself.

I move to analyze the subsequent changes to religious and civil policy brought by the shift to the invented Indian as idolater in the colonial imaginary, including the massive institutional transition to a *república de españoles* and a *república de los indios*, with the latter designed for the morally fragile and weak. In addition, I review the changes undertaken at the First Provincial Council of Mexico, which barred Natives from entering the priesthood and regulated all doctrinal works in Native languages by ordering that translations be approved by an ecclesiastical language expert. The cascade of attempts to further legislate and police Indian deception continued: in 1571, an order by the Vatican held that new Inquisitional offices set up in Mexico City claimed jurisdiction over non-Native subjects, while the punishment and prosecution of Natives was left to the local ecclesiastical courts, a move theoretically keeping Natives under a close and constant eye to guard against their trickery.

The chapter then advances to the Yucatán Peninsula and Franciscan friar Diego de Landa's inquisition that he carried out there throughout the summer of 1562. I detail how the Maya in the

town of Maní adopted the Indian as idolater as what James Baldwin calls a “gimmick” in order to escape bodily disarticulation at the boundaries of the colonizing imagination. By simulating the invention, Maya individuals created the idolatry that Diego Landa and his followers were determined to uproot, and even guided them in their hunt. Through producing false idols and false confessions, they deceived the Spaniards into proclaiming that they had finally unmasked the deceptive Indian, despite a truth that the colonizer left largely unexamined due to its unsolvable contradiction: Spaniards knew that some, if not many, of the testimonies were fabricated. The Maya of Maní nonetheless leveraged this paradox to survive a border of violence, and then attempted to prosecute Diego de Landa five years later in a letter addressed to Carlos V which unmasked the gimmick: Natives stepped from behind their simulations of simulations to continue manipulating supremacist imagery and lobby for the punishment of their tormentor.

Third, I identify the invented Indian as barbarian, which exceeded the chronological limitations set by the First and Second Evangelizations in a move to encompass all Natives who remained in physical resistance against the Spanish Crown. The trope of the barbarian is often conflated with illiteracy or regional peripherality, but in the case of colonial Mexico, it was—as grounded in the thought of Juan Gines de Sepúlveda—pointedly and repeatedly affixed to the limitations of the Spanish Empire’s power and influence among Native groups that resisted its expansion over time. I examine the use of the term “pacification” as a tool in the act of conquest and the absurdity of the *requerimiento*, a legalistic text developed to be read before Spanish attacks that informed resistant Native parties of their failure to submit to the Spanish Crown and the reasoning behind the subsequent onslaught they would suffer. I also describe how, for *conquistadores* such as Cortés, the label of barbarianism implied a failure to marvel before Spaniards as divine representatives, and how this barbarianism became a rhetorical tool that

inflected policy by permitting the rounding up of Native individuals into *reducciones* and the continued enslavement of Native peoples long after such treatment was officially abolished in 1542.

In particular, I examine the discourse around Native enslavement that developed throughout the Mixtón and Chichimeca Wars from 1542 to 1590 as Spanish officials asked two closely connected questions: first, what should they do with the Mixtón and Chichimeca, two Native groups that lived in the arid north of the Valley of Mexico and continued to resist Spanish expansion following the discovery of silver in the area? Second, and simultaneously, how could they justify the methods that they were going to choose? Several convened councils of religious representatives repeatedly approved what Philip Powell (1952) terms a “limited slavery” (106). Those Indians found guilty of the act of raiding—that is to say, participating in a war that had been brought to them and their communities—would be enslaved for thirteen years. My focus here is on the conflict between the inadequacy of Spanish power, its inability to recognize that inadequacy, and the resulting violence that, while supposedly examined to absurdity through a parade of councils and edicts, was never actually examined at all.

To probe the simulation and use of the invented Indian as barbarian by Native actors, I explore two microhistories: the writings of Mexica historian Hernando de Alvarado Tezozómoc, a grandson of Moctezuma II, and a 1547 Zapotec and Mixtec uprising in Oaxaca, which culminated in members of these communities retaking the strategic town of Niagatlan. I explore how Tezozómoc—who wrote both Nahuatl-language and Spanish-language chronicles of Mexica history with fundamentally different content—used the image of the Indian as a barbarian as a vehicle for introducing subversive speech into the narrative of the Spanish conquest. Because the colonizer had drawn the Indian as barbarian outside of the map of reason, it followed that what the

barbarian would say would be unreasonable. By populating this barbarian with criticisms of the conquest itself, Tezozómoc both utilized and broke the image.

In Niaguatlan, Zapotec men who had not allied themselves with the uprising and escaped its violence were interviewed by a local Spanish official to determine the cause of the revolt. In their recorded testimonies, we can witness how they faced the official's predetermined answer to his own question—he blamed a messianic cult—and his subsequent inability to understand what they told him over and over again: that the attack on Niaguatlan was a rational military takeover of a strategic military point. These same witnesses were ordered to return to Niaguatlan to report on the town's condition. With obvious motives for not wanting to do so, they applied the invented Indian as barbarian to elude the trip. I study what this application reveals both about the colonizing imaginary that they navigated and how they chose to navigate it.

In this chapter, I also discuss previous understandings of hegemonic power and their inadequacies. I address the field-defining conceptualizations of Foucault's biopower and Mbembe's necropolitics, both of which maintain the representation of the Othered as a question within the frame of the colonial Self by bestowing an omniscience to power and its actors that fails to recognize the essential thread of the operation of colonial power: that is, its self-delusion, and its corresponding demystification for the colonized. It is the colonist, I argue, who operates within a necessarily (self-)limited perspective. This perspective does not recognize the colonizing requirement that the colonized take part in its make-believe, and it is ineludibly deaf and blind to how such participation leads to the rewriting of narratives of dominance and agency within its own colonial structure, which no longer means what the colonist believes—and has made—it to mean.

In this spirit, I proceed to my conclusions around the peculiar nature of colonial power, its consequent intellectual fragility, and the ensuing contradictions that resulted in Native inventions

of inventions that simultaneously reaffirmed and undid its coherence. I call for rethinking the categories of colonizer and colonized—i.e., the one who acts and the one who responds to the act—and denaturalizing the White condition of supremacist power. I interrogate how academic investigation has often left intact the same fabrications with which the colonizer made sense of the world, and therefore may both repeat and fail to critically examine this condition. Finally, I discuss how, through processes of coloniality, the relationships built by colonialism have outlived the colonies themselves, meaning that the past is never, and can never be, left in the past. I theorize about how we can continue to apply these insights to the modern neocolonial state with a cursory examination of the campaign of Marichuy, a candidate presented by the Zapatista movement in the 2018 Mexican presidential elections. I explore how the narrative of multiculturalism has created its own invented Indian, which Marichuy mobilized to enter national discourse in ways that this same discourse had been constructed to erase.

In Alva Ixtlilxóchitl's story, the old man invented the answer that the Spaniards sought. He understood the colonizers' need to fashion that answer as reality for *themselves*. In a tautological circle, they needed to believe that he believed what they needed him to believe. Such an act leads us to note a curious characteristic of Whiteness: it constructs itself as the arbitrator of all true things. It was not enough for the colonizer to believe that Natives included mythological origin stories in their histories; they needed to believe that Natives believed these origin stories in a true and literal sense, or that they were, in fact, confused. They needed to use this man as a tool for interpreting themselves as sole bearer of knowledge: the knowledge of what was real and what was not.

Levine-Rasky (2013) points out that “Whiteness silently imposes itself as the standard against which differences are known” (51); James Baldwin analyzes this exact phenomenon at a

more nuanced level by pointing out that not only does Whiteness define difference, but that invented difference is crucial for defining Whiteness. He identifies Black subjects as the White subject's "fixed star," an "immovable pillar" grounding the White condition as "reality" (*The Fire Next Time* 9). Without the racialized Other, the White condition and its oppositional nature could not exist. In the case of the Spanish colonial project, colonizers stumbling upon people, land, flora, and fauna that lay beyond the world as they had always known it sought a locus to stabilize a destabilizing landscape. Just as Christopher Columbus needed a mythical reference to describe the manatees that neither he nor his readers had ever before seen ("sirenas . . . pero no eran tan hermosas como las pintan" (miércoles, 9 de enero)), colonizers also required what Baldwin termed the "fixed star" of the racialized Other to navigate the confusion of contact. As processes of conquest and colonization unrolled across Mexico, these fixed stars unfurled along with them. Rather than fully living up to their ambition of countering Eurocentrism within the field, scholars of Latin American colonial history and literature have often continued to use those same fixed stars to guide their analyses instead of denaturalizing them. What follows aspires to be a step in that direction.

0.5

A Note on Consciousness

In this work, I purposefully do not ascribe a unifying theory of action/reaction to either settler colonist or Native agents. Instead of emphasizing singular motifs, such as the acculturation and resistance dichotomy I have outlined above, my analysis speaks to the creative entrance of Native presence into the colonial imaginary through a set of elements particular to the White

condition. I am reminded of Marisol de la Cadena's musings in *Earth Beings* (2015), where she writes of her work with the Turpos, a Quechua family, "Our conversations revealed how the historical ontology of modern knowledge both enables its own questions, answers, and understandings and disables as unnecessary or unreal the questions, answers, and understandings that fall outside of its purview or are excessive to it" (13). By decentering this ontology, she finds that "co-laboring . . . required canceling that bifurcation, and this was consequential" (14). This new consequential topography takes on the image of Strathern's cyborg as referenced by the author: "An effective circuit that is not a unit because, notwithstanding the connection, the conditions of the entities composing it are also incommensurable . . ., [suggesting] a way out of the maze of dualisms" (31). This "one is too few, but two are too many" (31) concept is a reminder to reject uniform or binary constructions and instead explore the multidimensional map of colonial being-in-the-world, who constructed it, how, and what—who—exists within and outside of it. These frictions and incoherencies are important in and of themselves, and they do not require a neat solution. They work to unseat representative constructions and create space for new forms of knowledge and understanding, forms that reach beyond colonialism's visible face.

1.0

I Get by With a Little Help from My Friends:

Leveraging the Indian as Potential Subject to Rescue White Supremacy in a New World

*They require a song of me
less to celebrate my captivity
than to justify their own.*

—James Baldwin, *I Am Not Your Negro*

The Spanish monarchy's expansion and codification of its colonial project in the Western hemisphere coincided with what has come to be known as the First Evangelization of Mexico, a period that will serve as the focal point of this chapter and, as we will see, stretched across the roughly three decades between 1524 and the 1550s. Of course, secular and regular members of the clergy were present in Mexico from the beginning, and several accompanied Cortés on his march toward Tenochtitlan; Cortés himself wrote about Friar Bartolomé de Olmedo, a Mercedarian who served as his personal chaplain, while Bernal Díaz del Castillo and other foot soldiers told of Juan Díaz, a priest who administered to Cortés' common men—as well as to the “*indios amigos*” (Díaz del Castillo, Chapter VIII). The First Evangelization, or first systematic evangelizing wave, of the territory began in earnest, however, with the June 1524 arrival of the so-called Twelve Apostles of Mexico. Later that same year, these dozen Franciscan missionaries marked the transition of Tenochtitlan to Mexico City by consecrating the first church in New Spain. As Ricard (1966) meticulously documents, they then quickly established convents in the Valley of Mexico and the region of Puebla, building friar houses in the large Native population centers of Puebla's Tlaxcala and Huejotzingo and the Valley of Mexico's former Tenochtitlan, Tezcoco, and Churubusco.

As their systematic expansion indicates, this was not the improvisational work of a group of haphazard Bible thumpers. Instead, the First Evangelization's structure operated within the limitations of a specific base: the standardization of an image of the Native, which I introduce below and term the Indian as potential subject. As I will demonstrate, this standardization undergirded the settler's understanding of himself and, consequentially, the nature of his colonizing project. That is, this project and those who sought to execute it were rooted in a universalist Christian discourse that demarcated their map of the world and its possibilities, leading to certain theological and philosophical approximations to the Western hemisphere's Native peoples as part of the difficult and often contradictory task of how to absorb those peoples into the totalizing Christian imaginary. By analyzing texts written by evangelists and *conquistadores*, as well as the theologians and legal scholars whose thought grounded a specific strategy of colonization, I trace how the structure of the First Evangelization was defined, delimited, and repeatedly contradicted by the mobilization of the Indian as potential subject in practice.

Burkhart's *The Slippery Earth: Nahua-Christian moral dialogue in sixteenth-century Mexico* (1989) takes on the early evangelization of the Mexico's central valleys with impressive attention to detail and an elegant approach to the many disconnects between Native monism and the Christian duality in the context of evangelizing agents attempting to categorize and transform Native peoples. Burkhart examines how friars strove to introduce Christian doctrine into existing Nahua monistic precepts across what she terms a Christian-Nahua "dialogical frontier" (24), arguing that evangelical efforts to fit this doctrine within Nahua morality led to confusions and misunderstandings that permitted Nahua ideology to survive intact beneath and within the blind spots of Christian symbology. "Despite the incorporation of many Christian elements, the belief system of the majority of Nahuas remained essentially untouched" (192), she claims. Burkhart,

then, defines the First Evangelization as largely a failure—“the friars’ efforts had little success” against the Nahuas’ “traditional value system” (169)—and emphasizes the continuation of pre-conquest Nahua religious practice. Importantly for our purposes, Burkhart does not ask the mirrored question: Why did the friars’ belief configurations also seem so resistant to change, or remain “essentially untouched,” despite the confusions and uncertainties that they encountered as they undertook the methodical evangelization of the Valley of Mexico? Why did the strikingly child-like image that they held of the Native, or what I term as the Indian as potential subject, continue to guide their efforts for decades, even when it was proven to be insufficient and harmful to their evangelization project? Simultaneously, in classifying Natives as subjects rooted in the pre-contact past, Burkhart tempers the possibilities of these subjects in the very dialogue she describes. Just as friars attempted to maneuver the Nahua symbolical field in order to establish Christian beliefs within it, Native individuals mapped out White colonizing discourse, and mobilized it in targeted projects within a colony that was defined by its structures. Their ability to do so hinged on this colonizing discourse’s own resistance to change, not just that of the Natives; the invented Indian as potential subject was, as we shall see, foundational to the colonization of Mexico, a construction that the White colonist resisted recognizing as its own fabrication, which can help explain why it endured despite many pitfalls.

Other approaches to the First Evangelization of Mexico also attribute the event’s failure largely to Native retention of their old religious practices in often-secretive ways, an interpretation that—as we shall see—reflects the opinion which eventually became the colonizer’s own. Jackson (2014) prefaces his collection of essays on the subject by reframing this historical moment as “cultural war,” writing that it can be understood as “a conflict initiated by a missionary campaign designed to impose new cultural and religious norms on a recently subjugated population,

resistance to the imposition of the new religion by the natives of colonial Mexico, and the continued practice of traditional religious beliefs by many natives, even if in covert form” (xvii). Díaz Balsera (2005) focuses on the hybridization of Christianity in Nahua Christian subjects who “would never fully leave behind their ancient ways of relating to the gods” (8). These readings begin from the same assumption: the White colonist is taken as the arbitrator who defined the Real, or the agent who *acted* via the fashioning and imposing of a new modernity, while the Native inhabitant was the *recipient* of the colonist’s action via the rejection of that action, as seen in the Native’s recalcitrant rooting in the past—a recalcitrance that is taken face-value through its definition as made by the colonizer. If we operate from these foundations, we will always miss the fantastical make-up of the White subject’s Real, that Real’s centrality to the colonial project, its own resistance to change, and its construction and use by Native agents. In sum, we miss the forest for the trees. As opposed to springing into being fully formed and eliciting Native response or rejection, the colonizing project was *itself* a response to Native peoples, their transcendence of the limits of the Christian world map, and their proactive understanding and use of that same world map.

1.1

Bridging the Nagging Question:

How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?

After the realization that other continents and peoples lay beyond the Atlantic Ocean, Spanish theologians worked to encompass them within their dominion by way of Christ’s universal authority. In his *Apología*, Bartolomé de Las Casas wrote that “the pagans, who never received the

faith, are not willing and actual subjects of Christ, but potential ones . . . For this reason it is clear that Christ, as Man that he is, is attributed a double power: one ‘in act,’ with respect to those who have faith in him and fulfill his commandments out of love; but also power ‘in habit’ or ‘in potential’, which is the one that corresponds to those who do not know the true God” (49)⁵. Las Casas would become known as one of the precursors of modern human rights, and his denunciation⁶ of the Spaniards’ abuse of Natives as seen in works such as the *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (1552) continues to earn him something of a cult following among theologians, academics, and activists. His approach to Indigenous peoples, however, was not rooted in ideas of their claim to dignity as the humans they already *were*. It depended upon who they could *become*: subjects and servants of Christ, or people remade in the image of their colonizers as teachers, representatives, and guardians of Christ’s universal truth. This potential, rather than their acceptance or denial of Christianity itself, ultimately gave Christ jurisdiction over them and their actions. How this jurisdiction translated to Christ’s temporal representatives—that is, Christians, and specifically the Spaniards who were led by Carlos V as the King of Spain and the Holy Roman Emperor —became a trickier matter.

Las Casas drew amply from the thought and works of Francisco de Vitoria, who sought to answer the “unasked question” of the Othered that W.E.B. DuBois (1903) would centuries later identify as lying ever-present between himself and “the other world”: “How does it feel to be a problem?” (“Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” *The Souls of Black Folk* 9). The nature of the problem

⁵ “los paganos, que nunca recibieron la fe no son súbditos voluntarios y actuales de Cristo, sino potenciales [. . .]. Por ello está claro que se atribuye a Cristo, en cuanto Hombre que es, un poder doble: uno ‘en acto’, respecto a los que tienen fe en Él y cumplen sus mandamientos por amor; pero también poder ‘en habito’ o ‘en potencia’, que es el que corresponde a los que no le conocen a Dios verdadero.”

⁶ The accuracy of Las Casas’ description of abuses committed by Spanish colonists against Indigenous peoples is beyond the scope of this study. Interested readers are directed to Hanke (1971) and Keen (1969) for competing visions of the veracity of Las Casas’ claims and his relationship to the Spanish Black Legend.

that DuBois described specifically inhabits the colonial context of racial supremacy. It centers on how to categorize individuals into representations that ground, rather than destabilize, the supremacist Self, or how to assemble what Hall terms the “constitutive outside” (8) demarcating that Self. Vitoria termed American Natives as a “controversy” (642) for this very reason—he understood them as objects which composed a theological, legal, and juridical *problem*, and he set about finding their solution. In his “El problema della salvación de ‘los infideles’ en Francisco de Vitoria” (1993), Vitoria scholar Benito Méndez Fernández recognizes this. He details how Vitoria confronted the sudden unveiling of the enormous extension of Western Christian ignorance as occasioned by the arrival of colonizers in the Americas and its resultant implications for the question of Christian superiority as understood through their status as God’s elect, a matter necessitating serious rethinking beneath the emergence of millions of human beings who had never before heard—or more crucially, had the opportunity to hear—the Word of God, and about whose existence all of his theological and intellectual forebears had been wholly and inarguably oblivious.

In medieval Christian Europe, the world functioned as a “Christian orb” (*L’Univers du XIIIe. Siècle*, Mendez Fernandez 34) that defined both individuals’ understanding of the universe and their role within it. The orb in question was small. Pagan peoples were described mythically rather than scientifically and inhabited the orb’s edges as *negro*, *etíope*, and *moro* in Asia or Africa, while scholars fixed Christian Europe at the orb’s center and used it to define the orb’s orientation.⁷ Sandra Sáenz-López Pérez (2014) analyzes the maps that accompany the eighth-century Spanish monk Beatus of Liébana’s *Commentary on the Apocalypse* as falling into two groups: schematic

⁷ While racism has long been framed as an invention of modernity, recent work demonstrates the development of racial supremacy and racialized discourse as foundational to medieval subjectivity. For nuanced approaches to race in medieval Europe, see Heng (2018) and Nirenberg (2019).

maps illustrating the division of the earth among the three sons of Noah and world maps depicting the apostles' evangelization of the earth following the death, resurrection, and assumption of Christ. These two migrations, she argues, encompassed the universe as understood in the Middle Ages: Noah had given land stretching from the Euphrates to the Indian Ocean to Shem, the eventual forefather of Christ; Syria, Arabia, and Africa to Ham; and Europe and the rest of Asia to Japheth. All peoples were descended from these three sons, and resistance against or evangelization of the heretics among them became a defining characteristic of European identity in general and Spanish identity in particular: José Antonio Maravall's work (1954) demonstrates how the fall of the Nasrid kingdom of Granada in 1492 determined the end of the reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula and the solidification of an embryonic Spanish state, which—although diverse and differentiated—had come together to carry out a divinely mandated duty of solidifying the supremacist center of the world orb against its peripheral encroaching heathens.

The emergence of the Americas onto the European consciousness, however, broke up this perceived conceptual unity. As far as anyone knew, no son of Noah had been gifted the American continents, and none of the apostles had ever set foot upon them. Suddenly, theologian-jurists were confronted with the problem of how to interpret these spaces and their inhabitants. First, what did their appearance imply not just for European knowledge of the world, but for divine knowledge of the world as described in the Bible itself? It was one thing for man, fallible by nature, to lack sight and context, but unthinkable that an infallible god and that god's infallible word could neglect to mention entire civilizations. Second, how did the doctrine of salvation hold up beneath these new circumstances? Could peoples who did not even appear in the Bible be held responsible for their actions temporally, let alone eternally? Could they be judged as eligible recipients of god's grace

and his salvation, and therefore condemned as rejectors of that grace and salvation, without ever having heard of Christ? Saint Phillip the Evangelist had, after all, gone to Ethiopia, not Mexico.

Vitoria centered the puzzle of American Natives in his *De Indis* (1538): “All this controversy. . . has occurred because of those barbarians of the New World, vulgarly called Indians who. . . have been in the power of of the Spanish for forty years” (642)⁸. His argument attempted to incorporate these “*indios*” beneath the Spaniards’ power in the legal realm by pulling them into the domain of potential salvation in the theological one, just like Las Casas. He quoted Christ’s charge to the twelve apostles: “Docete omnes gentes, at baptizantes eos in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti,” or “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). Vitoria decided to solve this “controversy” by claiming that the emergence of the Americas marked a watershed moment in the history of the Kingdom of Christ because it meant new peoples were being called to know the Gospel in numbers unseen since the founding of the Church, leading to a second wave of mass evangelization that mirrored the original one undertaken by the apostles. The door to global salvation had remained shut until the opportune moment of now, when the Christian god chose to fling it wide open—as had been inscribed in a divine plan since before the beginning of the world itself.

Vitoria’s interpretation of the event as the dawning of a new era in the history of Christianity had several philosophical consequences. Above all, it meant that Vitoria was moved to incorporate Indians within the definition of humanity as evidenced by certain indications of civilization, reason, and human characteristics of friendship and hospitality, or general fidelity to

⁸ “Toda esta controversia . . . ha sido tomada por causa de esos bárbaros del Nuevo Mundo, vulgarmente llamados indios que . . . hace cuarenta años han venido a poder de los españoles.”

natural law, the universal precepts that Aristotle had argued endured outside of variable human law and operated according to nature.⁹ As members of an inherent order governed by this natural law, *indios* had certain rights over themselves and their territory—and yet, “[i]f the signs of rationality on the part of the indigenous are obvious to all, many of their customs do not speak in the same way” (Vitoria in Méndez Fernández 59). While Vitoria classified Indians as humans made in the image of God, he also viewed them as inhabiting a lower grade of spiritual evolutionary development than their European counterparts as evidenced by their religious rites, most particularly human sacrifice.

These conclusions allowed Vitoria to classify Indians in a very particular place. They were indeed capable of receiving salvation, but they were also inferior beings in need of spiritual guidance: Indians as potential subjects. Méndez Fernández signals how Vitoria concluded that, in their current state, Indians “needed help to develop, to advance from the potential of human being that they have, to the complete act” (61).¹⁰ *De Indis* revolved around this central argument: as opposed to animals and other irrational creatures of the earth, Indians—like children—had recourse to the use of natural reason, albeit only *potentially*. Such a classification meant that they maintained a certain type of theoretical dominion over themselves rather than existing as natural slaves, but also located them beneath the tutelage, protection, and mentorship of European Christians. After all, they lacked the very elements of social and moral development that were missing from the common child. For Vitoria, this reasoning justified both God’s sudden opening of the Americas to Spain and Spain’s continued presence in and its colonization of the region. Like teachers before students, Spain’s representatives—territorial, legal, and evangelical, all collapsed

⁹ *Rhetoric* 1373b 2-8.

¹⁰ “necesitado[s] de ayuda para desarrollarse, para pasar de la potencia de ser humano que tienen, al acto completo.”

into the same function—were bound to provide Indians with the instructions, materials, and examples necessary to power their ascent up the ladders of law and spirit.

Vitoria’s understanding of the Indian as clay poised to be shaped into fully realized human beings meant that he oriented his thought toward preserving the essential component of free will, understood as man’s capacity to inflect his own destiny by good works. This is what would allow Indians, once successfully educated by God’s earthly ambassadors, to then *choose* to exercise their cultivated spiritual reason and advance up the steep path toward God’s grace and salvation. Alternatively, beneath an Augustinian interpretation of a preordained universe, God’s elect and the damned had already been chosen, and Indians had been omitted from the Bible and its map of the world for a reason. Any attempts at “saving” them would not only be futile, but also move against the prescribed order of creation. In order for Vitoria to defend the Indians’ potential salvation, then, he needed to rescue human freedom from this predetermined order and assert the capacity of man to choose his fate—enabled, of course, by the colonizing subject.

Las Casas adopted Vitoria’s focus on free will and its potential under proper instruction, writing that “we must consider that when we affirm here that the act of understanding reasons and understands voluntarily—which, it seems, corresponds to the act of will—we mean that understanding is the first principle of the human act, that which contains the root of freedom” (*De único* 39).¹¹ After achieving an understanding of the divine, man could then choose to fulfill his natural inclination toward God, which until that point had been signified by his understanding of and adherence to natural law, whose truths—according to Thomas Aquinas—were accessible for all humans. As a result, Indians could be educated to pursue their yearning for the true God to his

¹¹ “hay que considerar que cuando afirmamos aquí que el entendimiento razona y entiende de modo voluntario—cosa que, al parecer, corresponde a la voluntad—queremos decir que el entendimiento es el primer principio del acto humano, que contiene la raíz de la libertad.”

grace and, ultimately, the possibility of salvation. Likewise, Vitoria argued that the introduction of sin into the world resulted not in evilness and corruption, but in confusion between the appetites of the flesh and man's predisposition toward grace, or toward the organization of creation as the handwork of God. Once liberated from his own confusion, man could reach the state of freedom as intended by divine order.

Méndez Fernández signals how, for Vitoria, this enacted freedom was “[t]he way in which God wants to save man . . . the very constitution of man. Without freedom, man would not be saved as man, since he would lack the constitutive element of his natural being, which is the power to choose” (152).¹² By voluntarily selecting freedom over ignorance, man overcame his disorientation as caused by the Fall and returned to his natural state: that is, the state in which he could follow his desire to encounter God. For Vitoria, the Spanish monarchy—as invested with power by the universal authority of the papacy—held a legitimate right to colonization as a means of evangelization in the Americas exactly because it was through this act that Indians could be freed from the darkness of their ignorance, thereby entering their most natural form. Colonizers were liberators from the darkness of confusion. Through Spanish colonization, Indians resumed the fully human state of freedom and could choose to do what they were created to do, which was to draw close to the Christian god.

This is why Vitoria held that Indians, while mired in and confused by the desires of their flesh, were not evil. As creatures made in the image of God, they had already been pulled by the light of natural reason to Aristoteles' and Aquinas' natural law: they lived in civilized societies with recognized legal, social, and religious structures. Having reached this point, they were now

¹² “[e]l modo según el cual Dios quiere salvar al hombre . . . la misma constitución del hombre. Sin libertad, el hombre no sería salvado como hombre, puesto que le faltaría el elemento constitutivo de su ser natural, que es el poder elegir.”

potential subjects of Christendom. The divinely timed arrival of the Spaniards would allow these child-like Indians to realize their potential by equipping them with the knowledge necessary to elect to carry out good works and follow God, thereby making themselves candidates for salvation.

This invented Indian as potential subject, boldly sketched in the reasonings of Vitoria and Las Casas, provided colonizers with certain boundaries through which to view, interpret, and imagine the phenomenon of contact. Such an Indian, reasoned not only intellectuals and theologians but also explorers, *conquistadores*, and other missionaries, acted in certain well-defined ways according to natural law as written by God, behavior which in turn worked to re-center the structured White Self in an expanded global map following the dismantling of the ancient Christian world. These Indians were understood as pure in intent but confused in action. It followed that all meaning-making had to be carried out by colonial agents on the ground as they performed the roles of teacher, advisor, and interpreter of God and his law.

1.2

What the Colonizer Tells Himself About Himself:

Cortés' "Good Indians" and the Proto-Christian Figure of Moctezuma

While solidified theologically and juridically in the early sixteenth century, the fabrication of the Indian as potential subject was propagated decades earlier. Christopher Columbus—interestingly enough, accompanied by Las Casas' father—created his own images of child-like Indians. In a March 1493 letter, the admiral described the first Natives he encountered, Taíno communities in the Caribbean, as naked, well-built men and women who fled from contact with

Europeans. After being convinced that Columbus' company meant them no harm, they slowly emerged, and "whatever they have, asking for it, they never say no; beforehand, they invite the person to it, and show as much love as hearts would give, and, whether it's a thing of value, of little price, or for any small thing, in whatever way it is given, for that reason they leave happy" (9).¹³ These Indians proved their purity in their nudity and fear, their naked bodies recalling those of Adam and Eve before the introduction of sin into the world. Simultaneously, they lived their lives according to basic tenants of morality: they were generous and hospitable to guests and placed little importance on the concept of possessions, Christ-like qualities mirroring the vows of poverty taken by members of religious orders. Columbus wanted his readers to know that these people, although exotic and strange, were not *too* exotic and strange. They had been primed by God for Christian education and improvement.

We can read the growing colonial appetite for this invented Indian in how it reappears and becomes solidified decades later in the work of Francisco López de Gómara as he describes Cortés actions in Mexico. While Gómara never entered the Western hemisphere himself, he created a narrative of Hernán Cortés' exploits made from firsthand accounts related by a much older Cortés and other aging *conquistadores*. Upon returning to Spain, Cortés faced mounting debt and dwindling influence amid the Crown's moves to unseat *conquistadores* in the Americas, whom the monarchy had been quick to understand as a nascent nobility taking too much control over their lucrative overseas colonies. Gómara dedicated his work to Cortés' son Martín, writing that "[t]he conquest of Mexico and the conversion of those of New Spain, justly can and should be located among the histories of the world, both because it was well done, and because it was very

¹³ "de cosa que tengan, pidiéndosela, jamás dicen que no; antes, convidan la persona con ello, y muestran tanto amor que darían los corazones, y, quieren sea cosa de valor, quien sea de poco precio, luego por cualquiera cosica, de cualquiera manera que sea que se le dé, por ello se van contentos."

great. Because of its goodness, I write it apart from the others, as an example of all” (8).¹⁴ For Gómara, Cortés’ taking of Mexico could be read as the exemplary model of conquest, the process by which the structure of the colonizer was shaped and solidified, an action exceedingly “*bien hecha*.” For those shocked by the sudden appearance of a new hemisphere, what act could better resolidify and ground a badly shaken narrative of inherent dominance than the conquest of the mighty Tenochtitlan?

Writing of Cortés’ tributes that “he so Christianly and honorably won” (“tan cristiana y honradamente los ganó”) (9), he emphasized that Cortés’ role as *conquistador* was synonymous with his function as a Christian role model for Indians in an early state of spiritual evolution. Gómara boosted this narrative through his construction of the first Natives encountered by Cortés on his push into Mexico at the island Acuzamil, today known as Cozumel. These Natives received Cortés and company with the same fear and awe as seen in Columbus’ invented Indians—they ran and abandoned their villages to hide in the forest—but Cortés managed to entice the *calachuni*, or chief, into making contact with him by holding a handful of Natives hostage. Subsequently, “[t]he Calachuni spoke to Cortés with great humility and ceremony; and because of it, he was very well received and affectionately treated” (Gómara 42).¹⁵ The appropriate reactions of fright and astonishment—these Indians were coming face-to-face with God’s standard bearers for the first time, after all—soon gave way to the equally appropriate reactions of humility and hospitality, again demonstrating the Indians’ innate child-like fidelity to the boundaries of natural law.

¹⁴ “[L]a conquista de México y conversión de los de la Nueva España, justamente se puede y debe poner entre las historias del mundo, así porque fue bien hecha, como porque fue muy grande. Por ser buena, la escribo aparte de las otras, como muestra de todas.”

¹⁵ “[e]l Calachuni habló a Cortés con grande humildad y ceremonia; y por ello, fue muy bien recibido y cariñosamente tratado.”

The *calachuni* then ordered his people to give the Spaniards fish, honey, bread, and fruits, and immediately, without any apparent hesitation over the arrival of so many armed and peculiar strangers, came to understand “the good things the Spaniards wished to do for him” (“las buenas cosas que los españoles querían hacerle”) (42). Gómara did not elaborate on how any head of state would interpret the arrival of a conquering force as a harbinger of “*buenas cosas*” because, to a reader steeped in supremacist colonial discourse, the positive civilizing and spiritual effects of Christianization would have been self-evident. The people of Acuzamil were important to Gómara’s story because they proved that the Spaniards’ teachings could bear immediate fruit. According to Gómara, they immediately allowed the destruction of their idols: “even they themselves helped to do it” (“hasta ellos mismos ayudaron a ello”) (51). They instantly converted to Christianity, stopped carrying out sacrifices, began to worship images of the Virgin Mary and the cross “*devotamente*” (Gómara 52), and helpfully pointed the *conquistadores*’ way inland toward gold and larger cities.

Gómara portrayed Cortés’ opening interaction with Natives as a smashing success. This microhistory—one that features only briefly in the grand saga that is Cortés’ conquest of Mexico—functioned as a test case proving the whole. Cortés identified these Indians as potential subjects by tapping into their developed natural principles of humility, proper reverence, and reason, and their subsequent conversion, long-awaited even though they themselves were but dimly aware that they awaited it, was quick and complete. In another indication of the astounding longevity of the Indian as potential subject, Juan de Torquemada, a Franciscan friar and chronicler born more than forty years after the conquest of Mexico and who arrived in New Spain in 1588, would describe (1615) this image thus: “Just as with the generation of Man, first there is the decision of semen, then the shape of the embryo, then the arrangement, and the interlocking of members, divided into feet,

hands, head, and all the other necessary parts, so that the entire body is formed” (43).¹⁶ It was easy for colonizers to understand and argue that they were supporting Mexican Indians as they grew into their full personhood in the methodical and divinely ordained manner of a developing embryo.

In Cortés’ own letters, he heavily accentuated the greatness of the Valley of Mexico’s imperial culture and its practitioners’ timely preparedness for conversion to Christianity through his descriptions of Native institutions around law, religion, and society. Describing Tlaxcala, an independent city-state surrounded by the Mexica empire and, not unrelatedly, the region’s last remaining holdout against Mexica expansion, Cortés wrote that:

The city is so big and remarkable that, although there is much I could say of it which I will omit, the little I will say is, I think, almost unbelievable . . . There is in the city a market where each and every day upward of thirty thousand people come to buy and sell . . . There are establishments like barbers where they have their hair washed and are shaved, and there are baths. Lastly, there is amongst them every consequence of good order and courtesy, and they are such an orderly and intelligent people that the best in Africa cannot equal them. (*Carta segunda*, 67-68)

For Cortés, such grandeur and statecraft were “almost unbelievable,” lying at the very threshold of his ability to conceive of and experience the world. In comparison with other pagans, the Tlaxcalans were “orderly and intelligent” due to the heavy emphasis they placed on civilized virtues like cleanliness, law, and order. Why the “almost unbelievable,” however, as opposed to unbelievable? Why did this magnificent, previously unknown civilization manage to exist at the strained border of Cortés thinking, rather than altogether outside of it?

¹⁶ “Así como la generación del Hombre, que primero ai decisión de semen, luego forma de el embrion, luego compaginación, y trabaçon de miembros, repartidos en pies, manos, cabeça, y todos los otros necesarios, para que quede el cuerpo entero.”

The answer can be found in Cortés' assertion that the Tlaxcalans still differentiated themselves from the Spaniards in several important ways. Most centrally, they were not Christians. Because they did not know of Christ, Cortés explained, they first fought fiercely against Cortés, his company, and their Native allies, killing two horses, wounding three others, and injuring two soldiers. When Cortés attempted to deliver the official *requerimiento*—the spoken statement of intention of conquest required by the Crown before any battle—in the presence of a notary the following morning, the Tlaxcalans attacked even more violently: “[I]t truly seemed that God was fighting for us, because from such a multitude, such fierce and able warriors and with so many kinds of weapons to harm us, we escaped so lightly” (Cortés 60). At this moment, an unspoken other side strains against the surface of Cortés' narrative. The absurdity of the *requerimiento*—which I will return to later—goes completely untouched by the author, who was either unable or unwilling to see how officializing this farcical transaction with the presence of a notary deepened its troubling peculiarity. As ordered by the Crown, Cortés treated the Tlaxcalans as a rebellious territory over which the Spanish Empire already exercised *a priori* rule due to a god and an emperor who the Tlaxcalans had never heard of, and whom had never heard of them. For the inhabitants of Tlaxcala, this make-believe performance had to raise questions of the Spaniards' own rationality and fidelity to natural law.

The following day, “more than 149,000 [Tlaxcalans], who covered the entire ground, attacked the camp . . . and so much did Our Lord help us that in four hours' fighting we had advanced so far that they could no longer harm us in the camp” (Cortés 60). Finally, Cortés and his men burned villages and houses, and “[a]s we were carrying the banner of the Cross and were fighting for our Faith and in the service of Your Sacred Majesty in this Your Royal enterprise, God gave us such a victory that we killed many of them without ourselves receiving any hurt” (Cortés

60). After more skirmishes, during which Cortés pressed forward “secure in the belief that God is more powerful than Nature” (62), the Spaniards’ tutelage through this display of divinely orchestrated dominance finally yielded fruit:

When they saw that they could not resist, several men of rank of the town came to me and begged me to do them no more harm, for they wished to be Your Highness’s vassals and my allies. They now saw that they had erred in not having been willing to assist me; from thenceforth I would see how they would do all that I, in Your Majesty’s name, commanded them to do, and they would be Your faithful vassals (Cortés 62).

This behavior—the recognition of their own error—is what shifted Tlaxcala from an unbelievable space of barbarianism into an *almost* unbelievable one. Las Casas would argue against Cortés’ use of military might as a demonstration of the power of God. Nonetheless, both he and Vitoria would also expect that the Indian, once shown the gravity of his error, would choose to become actual subjects of God and the Spanish Crown.

This is exactly what the people of Tlaxcala did. Tlaxcalans, already living by Vitoria’s natural reason in terms of general civilizing principles, were able to understand the edifying lessons given to them through Cortés’ battlefield performances, and seeing their mistake, they begged his forgiveness for not originally “having been willing” to swear allegiance to Carlos V. Thus, Cortés’ understanding of the Indian as a child in need of and ultimately receptive to generous directive and instruction remained intact. Most essentially, Cortés’ understanding of himself and his men as the vessels through which God had choreographed this instruction also remained intact. He and the conquest that he carried forward played a divine role in bringing men into a correct perception of God. How would Cortés have defined the Tlaxcalans, and his own interaction with and role amongst them, if they had continued to resist conquest and evangelization, but nonetheless

demonstrated all of the material characteristics of advanced civilizations that Cortés had described in awe? This outcome would have been the “unimaginable.”

Such a vision of the Indian guided Cortés’ portrayal of one of most consequential Natives for Spain’s project of settler colonialism: Moctezuma II, the ruler of the Mexica. Collis argues that Cortés’ Moctezuma, “by his speeches ad actions, was portrayed as a man who voluntarily recognized the sovereignty of [Carlos V], and voluntarily surrender his empire into his hands” (xxvii). He points out that the depth of Christian overtones in Moctezuma’s speeches seem far too put-on for a pagan Mexica leader, and appear to be fabrications on the part of Cortés. This would make sense, since due to his centrality in the empire Cortés aimed to incorporate into Spanish dominion, the *conquistador* needed a particular Moctezuma who fit into Cortés’ overall thesis. According to Collis, this thesis was imperial—Cortés hoped to curry Carlos V’s favor and blessing by demonstrating that Moctezuma, the emperor of Mexico, recognized the European king as the true ruler of his region, thus underplaying Cortés’ own failure to finish territorially conquering the Mexica empire while also buttressing the Spanish Empire’s legitimacy despite this failure. I add that, informed by interpretations of and encounters with American Natives since Columbus’ own writings at the end of the fifteenth century, Cortés came to Mexico already equipped to see, understand, and map the Indian as a potential Christian subject. Moctezuma’s many allusions to Christianity—such as ordering the Spaniards to touch his body to confirm his humanity, as Christ ordered his apostles following his resurrection—do little to support an imperial interpretation of Moctezuma’s power. Instead, they can be read as Cortés recognition (even labored fabrication of) the Mexica leader’s muddled efforts to bring himself closer to God, despite the name of Christ not yet being known to him. Cortés demonstrates Moctezuma, a judicious man and king, very nearly

existing as a harmonious ideal that could attain his own salvation—although, just like the Tlaxcalans, not quite.

How could Moctezuma be simultaneously both a pagan and a proto-Christian leader? Las Casas solved the problem by stating that idolatry did not go against natural reason, but rather stemmed directly *from* it. Without direct knowledge of Christ, man’s *entendimiento confuso*—confused understanding—naturally inclined him toward and watered in him a reverence of those things that reflected the majesty of God, or nature itself. “[I]t is natural to our human nature to humble ourselves and offer our subjection and bow to and honor that which is superior to us according to our esteem” (*Apologética historia* 642).¹⁷ He added that “no people can live without God, whether false or true” (643).¹⁸ This is why he took such painstaking care to record the many gods and religious rites of Mexico, writing that “the inhabitants [of these mainlands] exceeded all the ancient nations in gods, rites, sacrifices, and divine, even if sacrilegious, cults, and religious zeal and devotion” (874).¹⁹ For Las Casas, the Indians’ idolatrous practices showed their faithfulness to natural law, not their perversion of it.

Such a construction allowed Cortés to frame Moctezuma as an almost-Christian ruler prepared, and even destined, to cede his control to the legitimate claim of an actual Christian emperor. In Cortés’ account, Moctezuma directly stated as much: “[t]he things that you say of this great lord or king that sent you here, we believe and hold to be true, that he be our natural lord” (Cortés 85). I argue that via his portrayal of Moctezuma, Cortés was not chiefly—as scholars such as Collis and Todorov have argued—attempting to demonstrate his modern mastery of a fluid

¹⁷ “[N]atural cosa es a nuestra humana naturaleza humillarnos y ofrecer nuestra sujeción y hacer reverencia y dar honor a aquello que es superior a nos según nuestra estima.”

¹⁸ “ninguna gente puede vivir sin Dios falso o verdadero.”

¹⁹ “excedieron los habitantes [de las tierras firmes] en dioses y ritos y sacrificios y culto divino, aunque sacrílego, y celo de religión y devoción a todas las naciones antiguas”

situation of beliefs and signs, but rather working to code one of his own signs into the most meaningful encounter of his campaign, thus drawing that campaign away from the unbelievable and into a text of possibility that left Indians and colonizers legible both to himself and to his royal readers. That is, the construction of Moctezuma was not an attempt to demonstrate Cortés' own cunning and craftiness vis-à-vis his taking advantage of strategic openings provided by pagan origin stories or mythology. Instead, Moctezuma demonstrated the Indians' cloudy but powerful intuition of the existence of God through their use of natural reason in one of their most impressive societies, as well as their acquiescence to the orchestrated arrival of his messengers. In this sense, Cortés' Moctezuma worked as a project of comprehensibility. He was an idealized and intelligible version of the paradoxical events that Cortés and his company encountered on the ground as they worked to recenter themselves as supremacist subject in a reordered map, one now destabilized by the so-called New World.

1.3 Teaching as a Tool of Erasure:

The Indian as Potential Subject Across the Place and Space of Empire

The imagined Indian as a potential Spaniard and Catholic was not limited to a mere discursive tool. Through the First Evangelization, it had concrete material effects on the progression of the conquest itself and the subsequent remaking of space and place that defined the colonization of Mexico. For example, a letter addressed by Carlos V to Cortés in 1523, a mere two years after the fall of Tenochtitlan, merits being quoted at length:

Having learned from your reports and those of others who have been there that the natives of New Spain are more intelligent and capable than those in other islands; and,

since therefore, they are more apt for conversion to our Lord and for being instructed and living in the Roman Catholic faith as Christians, in order that they may be saved, which is our principal interest and intention; and since we are obligated to help them to this end, I hereby charge you as well as I may that you make your chief care the conversion and indoctrination of the Indians which are under your own rule, and that you exert all your powers that the natives of New Spain be converted to our Holy faith and instructed in it, that they may live as Christians and be saved.

Since you know how subject the Indians are to their lords and so faithful in following them, it would seem that the best method of going about it would be to begin by indoctrinating the chiefs first.

In view of the long experience with the *encomienda* system in Cuba and the other islands resulting almost in the extinction of the natives, due to the ill treatment and severe labor imposed upon them by Spanish Christians, and in view of the fact that this has constituted a serious obstacle to the conversion of the Indians . . . we ordered the theologians, monks and doctors of good and holy life to assemble together with the Council and to discuss the matter.

In light of this discussion, it has seemed to us in good conscience that since God created these Indians free and not subject, we cannot order their distribution by *encomienda* or *repartimiento* among the Christians. Wherefore, I command you that you make no such distribution in Mexico. In order that they may retain their liberty, take away their vices and the abominations in which they have lived. Give them to understand the mercy which we have shown them and the desire which we have that they be instructed and well-treated so that with a better will they make come into the knowledge of our holy faith.

[Y]ou shall punish severely those who treat them ill or do them harm without your express order. In this way the Indians will come into more contact with the Christians which is the best way to bring them to the knowledge of our holy faith, which is our chief desire and intention. One hundred thousand converted in this way are worth more than one hundred thousand by any other. (in Braden 185-187)

The *encomienda* and *repartimiento* systems mentioned here, beyond being devices through which to divide and distribute Native labor, were also tools used to concentrate Native populations for instruction by paternal-figure Spaniards who would “give them to understand the mercy which we have shown them.” Preoccupied with facilitating such instruction and wary of documented cases of Native abuse at the hands of colonizers, Carlos V saw that the Natives of New Spain already lived clustered together in cities, which made his work easier. In short, this urbanization functioned as a symbol to him that they were “more intelligent and capable” than those who made their homes in villages on Caribbean islands and already fit to be evangelized—without the additional requirement of physically concentrating them via the *encomienda*.

The emperor’s recommendation that Cortés focus on indoctrinating congregated populations of Natives through their leaders found itself reflected in the work of the twelve Franciscan missionaries who arrived in Tenochtitlan in the summer of 1524. As previously mentioned, they centered their efforts on leading regional population centers: Puebla’s Tlaxcala and Huejotzingo and the Valley of Mexico’s Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and Churubusco (Ricard). Toribio de Benavente, better known as Motolinía, would become the most well-known of these missionaries. Given his nickname—which meant meaning “poor” in Nahuatl—by those who saw him walking the streets in his ragged friar’s robes, he wrote his *Historia de los indios de la Nueva España* to, in part, detail his impressive evangelical successes. “Many come to baptism, not only

on Sundays and days that are so designated, but onevery ordinary day, children and adults, healthy and sick, from all regions” (115),²⁰ he explained, estimating that five million Natives in the Valley of Mexico were baptized by 1536.

Motolinía and Las Casas were well-acquainted with each other’s work. In 1555, Motolinía wrote to Carlos V to defend the early evangelizers against what he saw as Las Casas’ exaggerated claims of complicity with the violence wrought by *conquistadores* as related in *Brevísima relación*. In his characteristically bombastic fashion, he wanted to “pray for the love of God to Your Majesty that he order his Lawyers to see and look. . . because why would it advantage some of us who have baptized more than every three hundred thousand souls and married and held vigil over many others and confessed another very large multitude, if for having confessed ten or twelve *conquistadores*, all of them and us have to go to hell?” (11).²¹ David Orique (2009) stakes a difference between these two men grounded in their spiritual formation. Las Casas, a Spanish colonist who became a Dominican friar via a dramatic conversion that followed his time as an *encomendero* owning Native labor on the island of Hispaniola and witnessing the destruction of the Native peoples of the Caribbean, studied and adopted a humanistic approach to conversion rooted in Thomistic values. Motolinía, on the other hand, was a life-long member of the Franciscan order who subscribed heavily to apocalyptic millennialism, the biblical interpretation of twelfth-century Cistercian abbot Gioacchino da Fiore that Franciscans adapted in their desire to use the evangelization of the Americas as a platform for da Fiore’s Age of the Spirit. This age would be marked by the second coming of the Messiah and the opening of his one-thousand-year reign

²⁰ “Vienen al bautismo muchos, no sólo los domingos y días que para esto están señalados, sino cada día de ordinario, niños y adultos, sanos y enfermos, de todas las comarcas.”

²¹ “rogar por amor de Dios a V.M. que mande ver y mirar a los Letrados . . . por que qué nos aprovecharía a algunos que hemos bautizado mas de cada trescientas mil ánimas y desposado y velado otras tantas y confesado otra grandísima multitud, si por haber confesado diez o doce conquistadores, ellos y nos hemos de ir al infierno?”

(Orique 12). Orique argues that while Motolinía utilitarianly supported only “partial rights” for Natives based in legal justice, Las Casas sought “full rights” based in biblical justice (23), principally bodily and religious freedom. He subscribes this difference to their own personal experiences with Native peoples, writing that Las Casas interacted “face-to-face” with Natives as a boy while Motolinía “[gazed] down on them as a loving parent looks at a needy child” (21).

Obviously, certain oppositions between the two men are clear in their differing orientations to specific practices and persons. Las Casas criticized the practice of mass baptism; Motolinía reveled in it. Las Casas was an ardent critic of Cortés; Motolinía was his measured defender. However, their understandings and mobilizations of the Indian were *not* substantially different, regardless of their childhoods, religious educations, or theological leanings. In the work they most quarreled over, Las Casas’ *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (1552), the author described the Caribbean Natives as “gentle sheep,” writing that “Of all these universes and infinite peoples . . . God created the simplest, lacking evils or duplicities, the most obedient, the most faithful to their natural lords and to the Christians who they serve; the most humble, the most patient, the most peaceful and calm, lacking resentments or uproar, not rowdy, not querulous, lacking rancor, lacking hatred, lacking the desire of revenge, people that there is in the world” (13).²² These ideal Indians are the same as Motolinía’s own Nahua ones, who are so eager to learn the prayer chants of the *Pater Noster* and *Ave María* that “wherever they went, by day or by night, everywhere one could hear the whole of Christian doctrine being sung and said, of which the Spaniards marveled very much to see the fervor with which [the Indians] said it and the desire with

²² “Todas estas universas e infinitas gentes . . . crío Dios los más simples, sin maldades ni dobleces, obedientísimas, fidelísimas a sus señores naturales y a los cristianos a quienes sirven; más humildes, más pacientes, más pacíficas y quietas, sin rencillas ni bollicios, no rijosos, no querulosos, sin rancores, sin odios, sin desear venganzas, que hay en el mundo.”

which they captured it” (34).²³ These humble and servile Indians were always, in the words of Orique, “gazed down upon.” Despite their differences, Motolinía and Las Casas agreed that Indians, good and innocent children, served as static vessels who passively reflected that which was poured into them by colonizing agents.

Such portrayals reaffirmed the project of conquest and colonization as one of liberation and instruction and solidified those carrying it out as an innately supreme group selected by God to be unifiers of nature, even—or perhaps especially—that nature which was previously unknown to them. Both Motolinía and Las Casas felt that, like minors who had reached an age of reason, Indians needed to be educated in the ways of the Church so that they could become loyal subjects of Christ, the Spanish monarch, and the Pope, thereby realizing their potential as civilized pagans who were ready to leave their antiquated and sacrilegious ways behind. Even these so-called enemies both wielded the image of the Indian as potential subject and subscribed to the corresponding understanding that colonizers were the tool God had selected to do his work. This image of the Indian as potential subject, then, was flexible across different users. This flexibility was paradoxically essential for framing what Homi Bhabha (*The Location of Culture* 1994: 66) calls the “fixity” of the Other, or the enforced order that emerges from the colonizer’s need to rectify disorder. The flexibility of the image provides the answer to the demand Bhabha states that the colonizer (“Sly Civility” 1987: 36) makes of those he colonizes: “Tell me why I am here.” Despite their described differences, Motolinía, Las Casas, Cortés, and even Carlos V all agree: the White subject existed to harvest the Indian’s eager soul.

²³ “doquiera que fuesen, de día o de noche, por todas partes se oía cantar y decir toda la dotrina cristiana, de lo cual los españoles se maravillaban mucho de ver el hervor con que [los indios] lo decían y la gana con que lo deprendían.”

As signaled above, the first institution to take on the Indian-rearing function was the *encomienda*, under which the Spanish Crown granted *conquistadores* and their associates the labor of a group of Indigenous individuals and certain tribute in exchange for ensuring their instruction in Christianity. In a letter dictated to Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza in 1536, Carlos V left careful guidelines for such instruction, a sign of how closely the Crown guarded religious direction as its *raison d'être* for conquest and governance: “Strictly prohibit the Spaniards and chiefs from hindering the Indians being taught, punishing those who do hinder them” (in Brading 195). This process of gifting Natives to *conquistadores* was rife with abuse, as Carlos V recognized. These flaws became excessively clear as the Caribbean was rapidly depopulated of Natives. Las Casas—who had been the holder of an *encomienda* himself—lobbied against it, claiming that it was equal to slavery and did nothing to turn Natives to God. It was formally abolished in the 1542 New Laws for the Good Treatment and Preservation of the Indians and replaced by the *repartimiento*, an institution stipulating that the Crown owned all Native labor. Labor tribute was now to be organized and dispensed through royal officials, although *encomienda* practices persisted.

Beyond the *encomienda* itself, other efforts to urbanize, educate, and “bring up” Natives continued undaunted, most notably the forced concentration of the sons of Indigenous nobility in schools such as the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco. In these facilities, boys were taught to speak, read, and write Spanish and Latin, educated in Christian doctrine, and instructed to return to their communities to evangelize inhabitants. Simultaneously, as Méchoulan (1981) documents, Indigenous people were granted *limpeza de sangre*, or purity of blood, status, a phenomenon that served to encourage marriages between Spaniards and Indigenous women and therefore bring Natives further under the care and tutelage of the colonizer by incorporating them, or erasing them, beneath White households. Indeed, neither the Crown nor the Supremo Concilio de la Santa

Inquisición General (the Supreme Council of the General Holy Inquisition) ever declared Native peoples to be impure, as they had with Jewish and Muslim individuals. Their flexibility around questions of Native purity was thrown into curiously stark relief by the Spanish government's early requirements that *only* those Spaniards with documented *limpieza de sangre* status emigrate to the Western Hemisphere. Núñez Arancibia (2014) determines that the monarchy's role in promoting blood purity policies was much more blatant in America than in the metropolis of Spain itself, a development the author attributes to "the project's importance in converting the Native population" (105). The Mexican inquisitor Alonso de Peralta explained that newly converted Christians were forbidden from arriving in the Americas because the Catholic monarchy worried that vulnerable Indians would be corrupted by their weak example (in Núñez Arancibia 105). These supposedly contradictory policies existed in harmony only within the contradictory framework of the Indian as potential subject itself, where all Indians operated as receptacles for the teachings of Christ, and all colonizers dispensed these teachings with their lived example and instruction.

In remote regions like the Yucatan and Baja California that existed outside of the intimate physical coexistence acted out in large cities, the construction of the Indian as potential subject inspired the resumption of a practice that Spaniards had already formulated in the colonial laboratory of the Caribbean: *reducciones*, or Spanish-built towns where dispersed Indigenous populations were forcibly brought together. These communities allowed missionaries to more easily and safely perform their work of educating newly converted—that is, baptized—Natives. Originally, *reducciones* (sometimes called *congregaciones*) were placed next to Spanish towns so that, according to the Leyes de Burgos, "with the continuous conversation that [the Natives] will

have with [the Spaniards], as well as with going to church on festive days to hear mass, and seeing how the Spaniards do these things,” they would become fully realized subjects more quickly.

These violent processes facilitated the cultural, physical, and spatial assimilation of the Native. In colonial Mexico, institutional processes moved toward elimination of the Native as such; the Indian as a potential subject represented Spain’s push for the absorption of Natives through rendering them intelligible only as embryonic Christians, or as subjects whose purpose was to be shaped into the Christian form. The Mexica and their neighbors, already concentrated in massive urban centers that facilitated systematic erasure, embodied this invented Indian. They played an essential role in defining the responsibilities and role of the White Self who was charged with rearing these precocious and precarious children, a task bestowed upon the Spaniards by God and his earthly emissaries through a series of papal bulls.

In this light, it is no coincidence that Las Casas referenced “ancient nations” when describing the religious zeal of the Mexica (*Apologética* 874), a reference also made by other missionaries such as Juan de Torquemada. He meant to draw parallels with empires like the Romans and the Greeks, showing the Mexica to be as advanced as their ancient Western counterparts on a civilizational level and equally part of a former stage of evolution in a universal Christian kingdom: the Greeks preceded the Romans, who were converted to Christianity and replaced by the Holy Roman Empire, the Catholic Church, and the Spanish monarchy. In the same way, the Indian as potential subject referred to the Indian as part of an archaic phase of the world order in which civilized pagan empires followed man’s natural inclination to search for God as Creator but remained lost in their own confused understanding until they were gifted the knowledge of Christ, at which point their old ways would be completely supplanted by

Christianity. The Romans and the Greeks were ancient history for Las Casas. Likewise, the sophisticated Mexica empire would also become ancient, if fascinating and even revered, history.

The understandings that Torquemada and others had of the evolutionary progression of time are useful when addressing their writings on the Nahua and the Mexica empire, which may seem inconsistent to the modern reader as they oscillate between admiration and denunciation. For example, León-Portilla (1999) claims that Sahagún, “[w]ithout originally intending to do so—given that his intention was to discover idolatries in order to eradicate them—he came to perceive in the culture about which he inquired human values that seemed worthy of admiration” (6). The author sees a paradox that Sahagún struggled with personally as he moved between the Nahua idolatry he sought to uproot and the Nahua cultural institutions he professed to admire. While the paradox is present indeed, I argue that it would not have appeared so to Sahagún, or to many of his contemporaries. The Mexica’s use of natural reason as reflected in their civilized society meant that they could even surpass their European counterparts in temporal areas of social and institutional organization. Their idolatry, however, rendered them inferior on an intemporal level, as fated to fall as the great empires of Rome, Greece, and Egypt. Despite their advances, they existed in their current state exactly to be conquered and evangelized, meaning that these advances could be recognized without unseating the White subject as supreme historical protagonist and divine catalyst. As Sahagún reminded his readers, “[A]s the Redeemer himself says . . . it is better for us not to have been born, than to be born to go to eternal sorrow” (3-4).²⁴

This approach allowed Sahagún to claim that “the first settlers of this land . . . were perfect philosophers and astrologers and very skilled in all the mechanical arts of strength, which among

²⁴ “[C]omo el mismo Redentor dice . . . más nos valía no haber nacido, que nacer para ir a pena eterna.”

them was more esteemed than any other virtue, and by which they rose to the utmost degree of worth . . . As for the religion and culture of their gods, I do not believe there have been idolaters in the world so reverent of their gods . . . like these from this New Spain” (9).²⁵ The strengths of the Mexica Empire and its ancestors, among which Sahagún counted the intensity of their idolatrous practices, did not contradict the colonizer’s supremacy—they only fed that supremacy as signs of these peoples’ long preparation for the teaching of the Gospel dispensed by the colonizing subject. “Nor can I believe,” Sahagún reflected, “that the Church of God will not be prosperous where the synagogue of Satan has had so much prosperity, conforming with that of Saint Paul: grace will abound where sin abounded” (9).²⁶ Indeed, the elaboration of their idolatry meant they were more appropriately equipped for conversion, not less, with Sahagún making a point of stating that the Nahua religion was much more complicated than, say, Judaism (9).

What have we learned, then, about this “fixed star” of the Spanish constellation of invented Indians? The Indian as potential subject was defined by the development and use of natural reason, most often seen in characteristics such as forming orderly, urban societies, humility, and generosity. These solid foundations, the *buena masa*, prepared him for evangelization by colonial missionaries. Like rich soil, the Indian as potential subject had bettered his human condition as much as possible in confused expectation for Catholic scriptures, and upon receiving White knowledge from the Spaniards about the universe and his own place in it, could be expected to achieve freedom from the base impulses of his flesh by denying these in favor of culminating his

²⁵ “los primeros pobladores de esta tierra . . . fueron perfectos filósofos y astrólogos y muy diestros en todas las artes mecánicas de la fortaleza, la cual entre ellos era más estimada que ninguna otra virtud, y por la que subían al ultimo grado del valer . . . En lo que toca a la religión y cultura de sus dioses no creo ha habido en el mundo idólatras tan reverenciadores de sus dioses . . . como éstos de esta Nueva España.”

²⁶ “Ni puedo creer que la Iglesia de Dios no sea próspera donde la sinagoga de Satanás tanta prosperidad ha tenido, conforme aquello de San Pablo: abundará la gracia adonde abundó el delito.”

natural reason with divine truth, thereby converting into a professed and practiced disciple of Christ. While force sometimes needed to be used to inspire these Indians to realize their errors, as in the case of Tlaxcala, this force would empower them to recognize their own sin and become necessarily contrite.

How difficult, however, was it to sustain this image against the unstable reality of conquest and colonization? Sahagún wrote that his massive work *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España* (1569) was meant above all to help identify ongoing idolatries: “To preach against these things . . . it is necessary to know how they were used in times of their idolatry, since for lack of knowing this, in our presence they do many idolatrous things without our understanding it; and some say, excusing the acts, that they are stupidities or nonsense, because they ignore the root from which they come” (5-6).²⁷ Here, the author allowed that the perceived continuation of idolatry more than forty years after the conquest of Tenochtitlan was pervasive enough to inspire twelve volumes of work spanning over two decades, directly contradicting the argument made by Sahagún—and Las Casas and Vitoria—that these primed Indian vessels would willingly and easily accept, internalize, and conform to evangelization. In the next chapter, we will explore solutions for these frustrating inconsistencies as fabricated by Sahagún and his contemporaries.

1.4 The “Good Indian” Rewrites White history:

Chimalpahin’s Act of Double Enunciation

Because of the need to inscribe American Natives into a universalist supremacist story with the White subject as center, early Spanish colonizers fixated on Native history. Even a

²⁷ “Para predicar contra estas cosas . . . menester es de saber como las usaban en tiempo de su idolatría, que por falta de no saber esto en nuestra presencia hacen muchas cosas idolátricas sin que lo entendamos; y dicen algunos, excusándolos, que son boberías o niñerías, por ignorar la raíz de donde salen.”

casual perusal of texts from this time period, and from Mexico in particular, reveals their obsession with the conceptualization and theorization of who the Native was and where the Native came from. Widely read colonial works from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are nearly uniform in their focus on the subject: López de Gómara published his *Historia general de las Indias* in two parts beginning in 1552, while over the next several decades, Sahagún—under Toral’s direction—wrote the *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España*, Durán completed *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España e Islas de Tierra Firme*, and Acosta published his *Historia natural y moral de las Indias*. These volumes would be followed by Torquemada’s *Monarquía indiana*, yet another survey of the history of the Mexica and their eventual conversion to Christianity.

Troubled by their own fixations, these authors could not help but notice their singular fascination with the history of the *indio* and feel a need to explain it. In a section titled “Que importa tener noticia de los hechos de los indios, mayormente de los mexicanos,” Acosta reasoned to his readers that

[N]ot because they are Indians should one be dismissive of their things, as in nature we observe not only generous animals and well-known plants and precious stones, . . . but also low animals and common herbs, and stones and very ordinary things, because there too exist properties worthy of consideration. So this being not more than history, as it is, and not fables, nor fictions, it is not a subject unworthy of being written and read. But there is another very particular reason, that because they are of people of little esteem, whatever is worthy of remembrance within them is esteemed even more, and being matters different from our Europe, as those nations are, it gives one greater pleasure to understand the roots

of their origin, their way of proceeding, their prosperous and adverse events. And it is not only pleasurable but also advantageous, especially for those who must approach them, since the information about their things invites them to give us credit for ours . . . I will therefore treat, with the Lord's help, the origin, and notable events and occurrences of the Mexicans . . . And finally it will be possible to understand the disposition in which the most high God decided to choose, in preventing these nations the light of the Gospel, of his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ Our Lord (437-438).²⁸

The Mexica's history as written by Acosta, then, served dual and interrelated purposes. First, it created a legible narrative to explain the absence of American Natives in the Bible, thereby preserving Christianity's claim to a totalizing history of the universe. Second, and consequently, it imbibed these otherwise "gentes poco estimadas" with the value of certain "*razón y prudencia*," since their decrypted history undergirded and reaffirmed the mastery of the White subject. Like "*animales bajos*" and "*yerbas comunes*," the study of the Indian's history provided matters worthy of consideration due to the larger and more essential story such a study supported. Of course, Acosta was the indispensable catalyst in this entire process—he alone worked as the White codebreaker of Indian history, which without his reading existed only as "*fábulas, y ficciones*." When told properly, however—which is to say, when read by the colonial Self about itself—the

²⁸ "[N]o por ser indios es de desechar la noticia de sus cosas, como en las cosas naturales vemos que no sólo de los animales generosos y de las plantas insignes y piedras preciosas, . . . sino también de animales bajos y de yerbas comunes, y de piedras y de cosas muy ordinarias, porque allí también hay propiedades dignas de consideración. Así que cuando esto no tuviese más que ser historia, siendo como lo es, y no fábulas, y ficciones, no es sujeto indigno de escribirse y leerse. Mas hay otra muy particular razón, que por ser de gentes poco estimadas, se estima en más lo que de ellas es digno de memoria, y por ser en materias diferentes de nuestra Europa, como lo son aquellas naciones, da mayor gusto entender de raíz su origen, su modo de proceder, sus sucesos prósperos y adversos. Y no es sólo gusto sino provecho también, mayormente para los que los han de tratar, pues la noticia de sus cosas convida a que nos den crédito en las nuestras. . . . Trataré pues, con ayuda del Señor, del origen, y sucesiones y hechos notables de los mexicanos . . . Y últimamente se podrá entender la disposición que el altísimo Dios quiso escoger, para evitar a estas naciones la luz del Evangelio, de su unigénito Hijo, Jesucristo Nuestro Señor."

history of the Indian transformed from a confusing and troubling stain on that Self's supremacy to a reaffirmation of that very supremacy's innate positioning in the natural order of the world.

We have already explored how the invented Indian as potential subject was bestowed an idyllic history by colonizers in which Natives had been locked away separately from the rest of humanity while awaiting the arrival of the Word of God. Native history—or its lack thereof—had to be broken down by a White subject in order to be conferred meaning. According to Torquemada:

One of the things that cause the greatest confusion in a republic and that brings the most folly to men who want to deal with their causes is the lack of punctuality in considering their histories; because if history is a narration of true things that happened and those who saw and understood them did not leave them by memory, it would be audacity on the part of the one who later . . . goes in blind to study them. This (or almost this) is what happens in this story of New Spain; because as the ancient inhabitants of it did not have letters, nor did they know of them, neither did they keep histories with them (I, XI, 49).²⁹

Torquemada noted that books found by conquistadores upon their arrival were made of “characters and figures” (“*caracteres y figuras*”) that, in his estimation, had no defined meaning, and after recounting origin narratives from the Mexica and the Tezcocoans, argued that waves of conquest in the Valley of Mexico had further aggravated Native historical confusion. It was only Andrés de Olmos, the friar who authored the first Nahuatl grammar manual recognized by colonizers as such and “a very curious scrutinizer of the secret and particular things of [this New World]” (“*muy curioso escudriñador de las cosas secretas y particulares de [este Nuevo Mundo]*”) (Torquemada

²⁹ “Una de las cosas que mayor confusión causan en una república y que más desatinados trae a los hombres que quieren tratar sus causas es la poca puntualidad que hay en considerar sus historias; porque si historia es una narración de cosas acaecidas y verdaderas y los que las vieron y supieron no las dejaron por memoria, sería fuerza al que después . . . vaya a ciegas en el tratarlas. Esto (o casi esto) es lo que pasa en esta historia de Nueva España; porque como los moradores antiguos de ella no tenían letras, ni las conocían, así tampoco no las historiaban.”

I, XI, 50), who was able to make some sense of the many myths and legends, linking linguistic and historic study to White mastery. The history of the Indies was composed of many “*cosas secretas y particulares*” that the White subject uncovered and brought to light. Even though these secrets told things about Native people, Natives were unable to make sense of them.

As a result, Spanish colonizers rejected the histories that Natives told about Natives from the very beginning of the colonial project. After the fall of Tenochtitlan, they and their allies destroyed Mexica temples and the sacred texts these temples housed, as well as centers of learning and study. They also massacred priests, who functioned as scholars and preservers of written and oral histories. Baudot (1983) traces how, during the chaotic moments of the Spanish conquest, Spanish soldiers and Tlaxcalans destroyed ancient archives in Texcoco; a few years later, Mexico’s first archbishop—Juan de Zumárraga—ordered the burning of Texcoco’s remaining books and art. Landa wrote that, during his 1562 *auto de fé* in Maní, he destroyed a large number of Maya books: “These people also used certain characters or letters with which they wrote their ancient things in their books and made them understood and taught. We found a great number of books of these letters, and because they had nothing in which there was no superstition and falsehoods of the devil, we burned them all, which awed them and caused them great sorrow” (105).³⁰ Baudot argues that anywhere from 27 to 40 books were burned that day. Landa didn’t include an official count because the number of texts was irrelevant to his mission, which was to obliterate every trace of “*superstición y falsedades.*”

³⁰ “Usaba también esta gente de ciertos caracteres o letras con los cuales escribían en sus libros sus cosas antiguas y las daban a entender y enseñaban. Hallámosles gran número de libros de estas sus letras, y porque no tenían cosa en que no hubiese superstición y falsedades del demonio, se los quemamos todos, lo cual sintieron a maravilla y les dio mucha pena.”

While the *conquistadores* and their religious counterparts did not document with exactness their destruction of Native knowledge, their policy of denying validity to that knowledge while simultaneously working to annihilate it as uniquely dangerous was clear. On one hand, men like Acosta derided Native knowledge as “*lleno de mentira y ajeno de razón,*” while on the other, men like Cortés, Zumárraga, and Landa burned books and murdered priests to violently obliterate such knowledge in a brutally tangible and physical way. This obliteration was followed by knowledge’s subsequent reconstruction at the hands of the White subject. Friars like Sahagún, Durán, Olmos, and Torquemada worked to piece together new versions of Native history from the ashes of conquest, baptizing themselves as uniquely endowed “*curioso[s] escudriñador[es] de las cosas secretas y particulares de [este Nuevo Mundo]*” in their efforts to join fragments of history understood as enigmas receptive only to their interpretation—after destroying and denying Native histories themselves.

In sum, the colonial project denied the existence of Native knowledge while also demolishing it, all before moving to reconstitute it beneath the gaze of the White subject as universal knower. This created a strange double-flow of information: friars learned Native tongues using resources like Olmos’ *Arte para aprender la lengua mexicana* (1547) in order to discover “the secrets that there are in [the tongue]” (“*los secretos que hay en [la lengua]*”) (Sahagún 53). At the same time, and without seeing any inherent contradiction, the Crown sought to obliterate these languages and enthusiastically supported the Franciscan policy of sending young Native men from noble families to ecclesiastical schools in order to teach them Spanish and core fundamentals of classical Western education, including Latin and Greek. Beneath the colonial map of being, the act of knowing—what would be known, how, and by whom—could be conceived only through the prism of Whiteness.

Mignolo (1995) analyzes how Alejo Venegas, “a well-known humanist and man of letters in the Spain of Carlos I” (220), defined two types of books: the “Archetype Book,” an exemplar and uncreated book inscribed into nature by God, and the “Metagraph Book,” the book read by human beings. The purpose of the latter was to help man comprehend God’s truth as expressed in the Archetype Book and identify falsities as propagated by the Devil, meaning that the creation of knowledge and history served the entwined functions of underscoring Christian universality and denying alternative forms of knowing. This gave knowledge of Indians and the Indies a crucial centrality inside of the colonial map of being while also denying the possibility of Native knowledges existing as such.

It is in this constricted and complex context of knowing and knowers that Native and Mestizo scribes, generally educated in religious schools, began to create their own written chronicles of Native history, chronicles that inevitably dialogued with those accounts written by colonizers themselves. One of those scribes was Domingo Francisco de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, better known as Chimalpahin. Born more than fifty years after the conquest of Tenochtitlan, Chimalpahin’s family was descended from Chalca nobility, a regional confederation of states that were some of the last to be conquered by the Mexica in the 1460s after a long and bloody war between Chalca (Tlalmanalco, Amaquemecan, Chimalhuacán, and Tenango Tepopollan) and the Triple Alliance (México-Tenochtitlan, Tezcoco, and Tlacopan). When he was 15 years old, Chimalpahin took religious vows and entered the Hermitage of San Antonio Abad, an institution on the edges of the transitioning Mexico City. In fact, the hermitage was located directly along the causeway through which Cortés entered Tenochtitlan for the first time from the mainland (Romero Galván 1998). As a result of his birth and his education, the author wrote elegantly in both Nahuatl and Spanish, and his work included Nahuatl translations of

Spanish volumes such as the cosmographer Henrico Martínez's *Repertorio de los tiempos* (1546). Chimalpahin wrote *Las relaciones*, composed in Nahuatl and originally titled *Diferentes historias originales*, between 1606 and 1631.

Las relaciones consist of eight texts that narrate events in Chalca history between 1272 and 1591. Chimalpahin organized most of these texts into an annual form that divides its contents into years transcribed in both Nahua and Christian dates. In his first *relación*, the author discussed the creation of Earth and man, identifying Adam and Eve as the progenitors of all humankind: "And it is true that all became children [of Adam] and he also became the father of all fathers" (15).³¹ He also discussed a sort of transcendental knowledge—what Aquinas and Victoria might call the light of natural reason—as a key element of man being made in the image of God, stating that this knowledge first revealed itself in Gentiles:

And those who first arranged things in this way, who did so, were Gentile priests who favored all that is divine, since true wisdom is in the highest and, furthermore, being so elevated, it is something that we justly must consider a norm on the Earth to which we belong insofar as we are human; for those that we have seen, even being idolatrous Gentiles or Christians, they begin with our Lord God, because certainly he is the origin of the beginning, the basis of all that is good, that is right. And those that we have mentioned, all idolaters, Gentiles, had a presentiment of the only *téutl*, God.³²

³¹ "Y es verdad que todos vinieron a ser sus hijos [de Adán] y también él se convirtió en padre de todos los padres"

³² "Y aquellos que primero dispusieron las cosas en esta forma, que así lo hacían, eran sacerdotes gentiles que favorecían todo lo que es divino, pues la verdadera sabiduría está en lo más alto y, además, al ser tan elevada, es algo que justamente debemos considerar norma en la Tierra a la que pertenecemos en cuanto que somos humanos; pues aún siendo idólatras gentiles o cristianos los que hemos visto, comienzan por nuestro señor Dios, porque ciertamente él es el origen del principio, base de todo lo bueno, lo recto. Y aquellos que hemos mencionado, todos idólatras, gentiles, presintieron al único *téutl*, a Dios."

With this intricate move, Chimalpahin shored up the universality of Christian history as defined by the White supremacist Self via the recognition of a unifying Christian logic to the universe, a logic serving as “*el origen del principio*”. He echoed and then furthered Las Casas’ outline of the Indian as potential subject by affirming that the Chalca were imbued with the need to search for God *and* that they had experienced unique presentiments of God—provocatively called “*el único téutl*” in classical Nahuatl, the only deity—as the “*base de todo lo bueno, lo recto.*”

What did his use and extension of these arguments accomplish? It incorporated Natives into the history of the world, denying attempts such as those made by Acosta to “*entender la disposición que el altísimo Dios quiso escoger, para evitar a estas naciones la luz del Evangelio, de su unigénito Hijo, Jesucristo Nuestro Señor.*” Chimalpahin assured his Native readership that not only did God not deny Native peoples the light of the gospels, but that he had given them intimate, specific, and *a priori* knowledge of those gospels and their creator. By accessing the discourse adopted by Las Casas and Vitoria around natural law and reason, the author advanced their logic around the Indian as potential subject to new, revolutionary, and perhaps inevitable conclusions. Las Casas argued that idolatry extended from man’s “*entendimiento confuso,*” a cloudy understanding inclining him toward nature as an echo of divine majesty. Chimalpahin asserted two further corollaries: first, that such understanding was a gift of favor bestowed by God in order to permit the reading of his divine nature through his imprint on the physical world; and second, that despite and even because of their idolatry, the pre-conquest Chalca were faithful to God through a deeper and more essential “*verdadera sabiduría*” reflected in their harmony with natural law. In fact, Chimalpahin wrote that the Tlacochalca—ancestors of the Chalca—were guided to the Americas from the Old World by “Tloque Nahuaque, . . . our Lord Jesus Christ” (“*nuestro señor Jesucristo*”) (33), just as God had guided the Israelites out of Egypt and to the

founding of Israel. They could not be understood as idolaters at all; instead, they and their descendants functioned as part of God's chosen people who, instead of suffering from Las Casas' "*entendimiento confuso*," knew God by different names.

The author came to these theses by cleverly leveraging the same universalizing—yet contradictory—logics that created the colonial map of the constructed Indian as potential subject. First, he considered proposals like Acosta's, writing that "maybe it's true. . . that, in the time in which they came to live; the devil was perverting the aforementioned ancients" (33).³³ He ultimately rejected this reasoning, however, by using an argument employed by Vitoria: "since [the Tlacochalca] came to live they came to arrange things, since they brought them they put them in order" (33).³⁴ Making recourse to the calendar as an example of the ability of these "*mencionados antiguos*" to bring order to disorder, Chimalpahin recognized and surmounted the contradiction between disorderly spiritual lives and orderly civil ones so emphasized by the colonizer: there had been no contradiction after all. We remember how Las Casas argued that "we must consider that when we affirm here that the act of understanding reasons and understands voluntarily—which, it seems, corresponds to the act of will—we mean that understanding is the first principle of the human act, that which contains the root of freedom" (*De único* 39).³⁵ Chimalpahin suggested that the Native, as an unerring adherent to natural law, had always understood this law, and because he was free from human-induced impediments, the Native had

³³ "tal vez es verdad . . . que, en el tiempo en el que llegaron a vivir; el diablo andaba pervirtiendo a los mencionados antiguos."

³⁴ "desde que [los Tlacochalca] vinieron a vivir vinieron a disponer las cosas, desde que las trajeron las ponían en orden."

³⁵ "hay que considerar que cuando afirmamos aquí que el entendimiento razona y entiende de modo voluntario—cosa que, al parecer, corresponde a la voluntad—queremos decir que el entendimiento es el primer principio del acto humano, que contiene la raíz de la libertad."

always been able to reason his way to and choose salvation, even when lacking the names of God and Christ. Because the Devil was chaos, God had to be present within Native order.

Through shoring up the colonial discourse of the uniform evolutionary nature of history, Chimalpahin accessed the colonizing imaginary's own representations of the Indian in order to question White supremacy as that history's foundation and protagonist. If history were truly universal, it followed that its cipher did not have to be the colonizing Self, but rather could be the Tlacochalca or their descendants, the Chalca. In one particularly memorable passage, the author used as an example of Christian piety a Chalca woman named Sila—who lived before the Spanish conquest—as a kind of pre-evangelization saint: “[F]rom [Sila] we take example and sign, since every day, at dawn, when she got up from her bed, she immediately went and entered the other area inside the house, in the corner she would collect herself; yes, she trusted her idols, her gods, there she prayed to them for herself and for the effort of her work and for everything she would do during the day” (7).³⁶ Sila, despite praying to her pre-conquest “*ídolos*” and “*dioses*,” knew God through her deeper understanding of natural law. Even after the arrival of the Spaniards, Chimalpahin stated, she still served as a Christian example of devotion because of her prayers to her gods, not *despite* them. Whereas Las Casas might have argued that the force of the prayers themselves demonstrated strong, if misplaced, religious zeal, for Chimalpahin such zeal was not misplaced, but rather faithful to God through his other names and revelations. Hardworking and God-trusting, Sila entered history through the door of the Indian as potential subject, exceeded that representation, and accessed the plane of not only a subject fully realized and saved, but even as the saintly.

³⁶ [D]e [Sila] tomamos ejemplo y señal, que cada día, ya al amanecer, cuando se levantaba de su lecho, en seguida iba y se metía en otro lado, en el interior de la casa, en el rincón se recogía; sí confiaba en sus ídolos, en sus dioses, allí les rogaba por ella y por el esfuerzo de su trabajo y por todo lo que haría durante la jornada.

In their translations of *Las relaciones* into English, Lockhart, Schroeder, and Namala (2006) write that Chimalpahin's texts demonstrate the "persistence, if in a modified form, of Nahua concepts, structures and values at the very core of Nahua-Spanish contact" (5), pointing in particular to his method of transcribing dates in both their Nahua and Christian forms. I argue that rather than a persistence of pre-conquest Chalca concepts, the author's negotiation of history exhibited his shoring up and use of invented Indians with the objective of making possible new presences for Native actors in his contemporary colonial imaginary. Exactly because invented Indians did not resemble any real Native, they were untethered to any historical referent and could be manipulated to permit new visions of the colonial representative terrain beneath new terms.

A good example of this tactic can be found in Chimalpahin's discussion of the Tower of Babel, centered on his argument that the ancestors of the Chalca had not been present at this momentous event representing one of mankind's greatest sins: "And the ancient Tlacoachcalca took up a very great story. . . where they mark the beginning of the ancient dates of the Tlacoachcalca; they are not equated with the Christian count of years" (VII, I, 146-147).³⁷ The Chalca claimed that their ancestors changed their language at a point when they suddenly became mute, "ever since it happened in his time, as the ancient Tlacoachcalca deigned to say" (VII, I, 146).³⁸ They had not been in Europe but in the Americas, and this occurred at the moment that, in "their history [of Europe], . . . The men from there where it is called Babylon built the artificial hill. In a single moment, because of their pride, because of their arrogance, the true, the only God twisted their

³⁷ "Y los antiguos tlacoachcalca tomaron a su cargo un relato muy grande . . . donde hacen comenzar el principio de la antigua cuenta de los tlacoachcalca; no se equipara con la cuenta de los años *crisiana*."

³⁸ "desde que alguna vez ocurrió en su tiempo, tal como se dignaron decirlo los antiguos tlacoachcalca."

tongues” (VII, I, 147).³⁹ Chimalpahin took great care to emphasize the confusion and perverted understanding of Nemrod, the great-grandson of Noah, and his followers, an element that accentuated the Tlacochalca and the Chalca’s favored *a priori* understanding of God through his creation. Due to the errors committed in “*their history*” (emphasis mine), or Western Christian history, the ancestors of the Chalca were struck dumb at Tlapallan Nonohualco, victims of the sin committed at Babylon even though the geographic spot where the sin took place was “far away” (“mucho más allá”) (VII, I, 147).

Josefina García Quintana (in *Septima relación*, 2003) sees this focus on the Tower of Babel as a “somewhat broad digression to refer to the disruption of languages” (xiii). However, when read next to the author’s vindication of Natives as not only potential subjects, but rather as chosen ones in a universal march toward a heavenly kingdom on earth, it becomes clear that Chimalpahin chose to highlight this episode for specific reasons beyond linguistic ones. Whereas colonial writings identified the Tower of Babel as the point from which Natives had separated from fellow humanity following the chaos of God’s linguistic punishment, Chimalpahin’s account placed his ancestors far from the scene of the crime, affected by an error that they did not commit. Still within the boundaries of the purportedly universal gaze of White history, it stripped away that White subject’s supremacy to give the Chalca people a sympathetic role in the evolutionary history of the universe.

This is why the author’s decision to write *Las relaciones* in Nahuatl is so crucial. Why address his work to a band of readers as narrow as that afforded by literate Nahua at the beginning of the seventeenth century? An answer may be found in who made up this audience at the time of

³⁹ “su historia [de Europa], . . . construían el cerro artificial los hombres de allá donde se llama Babilonia. En un momento, por el orgullo, por la arrogancia de ellos, el verdadero, el único Dios hizo que se les trastocara la lengua.”

Chimalpahin's writing. The colonial state worked very hard to facilitate the spread, acceptance, and absorption of a universal historical narrative across its American empire in general and Mexico in particular. Swarthout (2004) points out that in 1550, Carlos V ordered that state schools be created to teach the tenements of Christianity and the Spanish language to all Natives, a decree echoed by Felipe IV in 1634 and Carlos II in 1686 (35). He argues that little was done on the ground to implement these edicts due to missionaries who preferred to isolate their vulnerable and impressionable *indios* from the corrupt influence of civil Spaniards.

Instead, religious orders in Mexico pursued a tactic originally employed by the Franciscans in sites such as the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco—they took the sons of the most respected Native nobles and trained them according to a model of European elite higher education (Cortés 2008). Students studied the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and logic) and the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music), while friars and students together designed written Nahuatl grammars and dictionaries, put together a dense body of materials detailing Nahua culture and customs, and translated doctrinal pieces into the Nahuatl language. Their ultimate goal was to return these men to their communities as recognized leaders and eventually ordained priests, employing them in the evangelization, conversion, and spiritual formation of the Indian as Christian. Las Casas epitomized such an approach in his 1534 book *De unico vocationis modo omnium gentium ad veram religionem*, which outlined a peaceful path to evangelization through education that inspired his own colonial experiment in Vera Paz, Guatemala, from 1537 to 1550.

These attempts to evangelize, Hispanicize, and ultimately acculturate a selective slice of Indigenous nobility demonstrated the colonizers' ever-present need for Native buy-in to the supremacist fantasy with which they grounded their own presence in New Spain. This need was both blisteringly practical—greatly outnumbered, religious and state authorities understood the

importance of leveraging existing networks of Native power and authority—and deeply foundational. The Christian remodeling of the top echelon of Nahua society, the same civilization whose capital city appeared to Bernal Díaz del Castillo as “the things of enchantment related in the book of [the chivalric romance *Amadís de Gaula*] . . . Some of our soldiers asked if what they saw, if it was between dreams. . . things never heard, nor seen, nor even dreamed of” (57-58),⁴⁰ served as a kind of pilot project for what colonizers told themselves about themselves regarding their unique mandate to bring this socially advanced flock to a state of grace conducive to divine salvation.

As a result, these early processes sought to transition traditional Nahua education into Christian teaching, much in the same way Cortés argued that the Spanish conquest of Tenochtitlan was a natural and predestined next stage of the Mexica Empire’s own evolution. It is no coincidence that the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco was built on the site of an elite Mexica school, or that friars and *gramáticos*—Native scribes and translators trained at these education centers—labored to standardize regional dialects into a Classical Nahuatl that, as Rocío Cortés argues, was defined by “synonyms and parallel concepts between Spanish and Nahuatl [and] . . . a Nahuatl rhetoric based upon Christian models,” such as the language seen in Molina’s *Vocabulario en lengua castellana y mexicana* (1555) and Olmos’ *Arte de la lengua mexicana* (1547). Both authors, along with Sahagún, taught at the Colegio de Santa Cruz and worked with Nahua students there. However, the middle of the sixteenth century marked a dramatic shift in overall support for such policies. By 1555, the opposition was so great that Alonso de Montúfar, the second archbishop of Mexico, inaugurated the city’s first Provincial Council on June 29 with

⁴⁰ “las cosas de encantamiento que cuentan en el libro de Amadís . . . Algunos de nuestros soldados decían que si aquello que veían, si era entre sueños . . . cosas nunca oídas, ni vistas, ni aún soñadas.”

the explicit goal of revisiting the Church's approach to Native participation in the overall project of evangelization. Ending with decrees that consisted of 93 chapters, the Council ultimately produced guidelines around doctrinal instruction that prohibited a host of Native actions: entrance into the clergy, access to catechism, and even the ability to paint without supervision by an ecclesiastical authority. What caused such a wild swing in the settler colonist's program of evangelization?

Gruzinski (1993) suggests that these measures were taken in response to a development that deeply troubled the Church: the existence of clandestine circles whose members translated doctrinal texts into Nahuatl without official permission. A general feeling circulated that the original plan of training young Indian nobles and sending them out to convert their communities was spiraling out of control—as early as 1539, the plan was frustrated by the prosecution and execution of don Carlos Ometochtzin, one of the first graduates of the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco and grandson of the Tezcocoan ruler Nezahualcoyotl.

Juan de Zumárraga convicted Ometochtzin of idolatry and heresy for possessing images of Quetzalcóatl, Xipe Tótec, and other Nahua gods, being identified as a participant in sacrificial rituals, and speaking out generally against Spanish rule. A Native witness to his trial attributed to him a radical declaration: “Brothers . . . who are these that command us and are above us. . .? Well, here I am, I who am lord of Tezcuco. . . and we must not allow anyone to place himself among us or equal us. After we were dead that may well be, but now here we are and this land is ours and our grandparents and ancestors left it to us” (in Zabala 1992, 294).⁴¹ Ometochtzin's trial indicated

⁴¹ “Hermanos . . . ¿quiénes son estos que nos mandan y están sobre nosotros . . .? Pues aquí estoy yo, que soy señor de Tezcuco . . . y no hemos de consentir que ninguno se ponga entre nosotros ni se nos iguale. Después de que fuéramos muertos bien podrá ser, pero agora aquí estamos y esta tierra es nuestra y nuestros abuelos y antepasados nos la dejaron.”

at least a perceived Native resistance to what colonizers hoped to naturalize as an organic progression from Native rule to Spanish dominance, which, alongside the emergence of groups of Nahua elite who translated doctrinal texts outside of the direction of Spanish officials, demonstrated a gap between the invented Indian and actual Native bodies. The latter behaved in unpredictable and unexpected ways that did not align with the colonizer's evolutionary religious, social, and civil projects. The desperation of a cornered colonizer when confronted with this gap shone through in events such as Ometochtzin's execution; like Landa's inquisitorial machine in the Yucatán, which we will examine in the following chapter, it revealed the outer limits of a fabricated reality and the supremacists' ability to perceive it as such, and therefore incited a dramatic shift in official administrative strategy. Rather than training Natives to eventually join the clergy, as Las Casas and others had advocated, White colonizers turned to violence and explicit omission in a rededication to stripping invented Indians of any creative or generative possibilities and reaffirming their positions as strictly receptive objects, or receptors and reproducers of White knowledge.

This is what makes the Chimalpahin's vision within these supposed boundaries all the more striking. He wrote more than five decades after the shift as represented in the 1555 First Provincial Council of Mexico, meaning that by this time, producing Native knowledge through the code of colonial discourse and Native agency within the colonial imaginary was a radical act—one that the author carried out through his historical accounts. By situating the universal Christian trajectory of the universe within a Nahuatl-narrated Chalca history, and not the other way around, Chimalpahin hijacked this history to an unexpected and unprescribed end. He changed its narrative Self, working as an agent alongside the limits of colonial reality in order to rewrite universal history itself.

Whereas scholarship has traditionally analyzed him as a figure who, in the words of Tavárez (2010), took on a lifetime occupation of the “compilation of historical accounts about a renowned Nahua altepetl in Central Mexico from scattered pictographic, oral, and alphabetic sources into a more coherent set of alphabetic texts for posterity” (in Schroeder 18), Chimalpahin’s active interventions within history extend far beyond mere compilation. In addition to penning his own *relaciones*, the author did a highly unusual thing—he sat down with a copy of López de Gómara’s popular *La conquista de México* and selectively edited it. Gómara had sourced his material from Cortés himself, and Chimalpahin’s changes to that material rank among the only known Native revision of a particular colonizing text. The original edits made by Chimalpahin are now lost. What survives is an eighteenth-century copy from Lorenzo Boturini’s collection that has become known as the Browning Manuscript, which begins with the phrase: “The Conquest of Mexico Written by d[o]n Dom[ing]o de S[a]n Antón Muñón [Chimalpahin] Quauhtlehuanitzin,” giving authorial recognition to Chimalpahin over Gómara himself. The text’s copyists, including Boturini, seemed to recognize Chimalpahin as the sole author; Tavárez points out that one even claimed Chimalpahin as a witness of the conquest, despite his having been born decades after the fall of the Mexica Empire. For a certain length of time, at least, Chimalpahin overshadowed Gómara completely as narrative voice.

Chimalpahin’s revisions of colonizing history demonstrate his deep knowledge of the colonizer, and how this knowledge allowed him not only to unseat the colonizer as historical protagonist, but to also render the unseating without the colonizer’s awareness—and even with his aid. James Baldwin told White people that “[y]ou never had to look at me. I had to look at you. I know more about you than you know about me” (“I Am Not Your Negro”), and this look—this knowledge—undertaken by Chimalpahin meant that his White readers were unaware of how he

had displaced them in their own histories about their divine conquest of the Native peoples of whom Chimalpahin was part.

As an editor, Chimalpahin directly referred to himself in the text only once. When Gómara described the lords accompanying Moctezuma during his first meeting with Cortés on November 8, 1519, he wrote that the arriving party included Moctezuma's nephew Cuitlahuac. Chimalpahin corrected Gómara, noting that "although the author Francisco Rodríguez [*sic*] de Gómara" believed Cuitlahuac to be Moctezuma's nephew, "he was not his nephew but a blood brother by his father or mother. I say this, don Domingo de San Antón [Chimalpahin] Quauhtlehuanitzin" (182).⁴² He took on the authoritative voice of historical referent, using his Nahuatl identity as a litmus test against which to compare Gómara's claims. In this way, Chimalpahin pointed to a fragment of history beyond the knowable of the White author—how would Cortés, much less Gómara, have understood the relationship between Cuitlahuac and Moctezuma? Chimalpahin dedicated many of his margin notes to highlighting his ability to know this White unknowable; by injecting Native names, titles, and social connections into Gómara's original passages, the Nahuatl author claimed access to specific historical knowledge denied to the supposedly supremacist subject. Gómara, for example, named only two of Moctezuma's companions during this momentous event, whereas Chimalpahin identified nine others. Such clarification of participants functioned as a constant concern of the editor, along with inserting detailed descriptions of particular Nahuatl customs and practices, such as the minutiae of Moctezuma's crown (187).

It is essential to note that Chimalpahin's edits do not reveal a Native "counter-text" to Gómara's account. He did not write an alternative history of conquest. He left long sections of

⁴² The use of the erroneous last name "Rodríguez" indicates that Chimalpahin did not work from a copy of *La conquista de México* that included Gómara's full name.

Gómara's writing without comment, and he did not negate many of the original author's more polemical claims, such as Gómara's assertion that Moctezuma and his subjects believed in the Spaniards' divinity. He labelled Moctezuma a barbaric Indian by declaring him a cannibal, but in a twist of irony, added that Moctezuma did not eat children, as Gómara sensationally claimed; he only ate male sacrificial victims, and specifically "their feet and heels, as he regarded them the most flavorful flesh, but this he did only a few times. The former kings were very cruel and the eating of human flesh did not disgust them" (189). This passage seems heavy with sarcasm—surely enough, Moctezuma was a barbarian, but like Cortés indicated with Moctezuma's elegance and providential knowledge of the Spanish arrival, he was only a *slight* barbarian. He was not an irredeemable barbaric Indian, the typology we will examine in our third chapter, but rather a less barbaric Indian who only ate the most delicious parts of solely male sacrificial victims. Did Chimalpahin laugh while writing this section? Maybe he did.

In another turn, Chimalpahin seemed to support the narrative of providential design behind the Spanish conquest, writing in that "[i]f the Mexica had greater understanding, they could well have destroyed the Spaniards with many ruses by which they would all perish [. . .] but for the divine will of God's Providence, because they were unable to apprise their situation or destroy the causeways with many bridges that the Spaniards crossed or the numerous springs located along the road to Mexico" (178). His positioning was complex, after all—the Chalca had only been conquered by the Mexica in the second half of the fifteenth century, and animosity between the groups persisted over time due to the Mexica's heavy taxation of their neighbors. The Chalca ultimately aligned with the Spaniards and participated in the overthrow of Tenochtitlan as "indios amigos," a development reflected in the editor's attitudes toward the Mexica as a political power.

With his ironic asides and complex relationship with the Triple Alliance taken into account, it is obvious that Chimalpahin did not set out to create a “decoder ring” from which to read a secret Native truth on the other side of colonial representation. Instead, what was so powerful and potentially destabilizing about his project was that he built it within and around the terrain of colonial construction. By shoring up invented Indians through his writings and edits, he demonstrated that a Native could become the narrative voice of the universal history claimed as a unique birthright by the White Self, an unthinkable development within the colonizer’s limited and tightly circumscribed understanding of the world. Sahagún, in an approach that mirrors Acosta’s response to the origin histories given by the Incas, writes that “for the origin of these people the tale that the old people give is that they came from the sea. . . that they came out of seven caves, that these seven caves are the seven ships. . . but, why do I stop to relate conjecture?” (9-10).⁴³ For Sahagún, “it is certain that these people are all our brothers, having come from the trunk of Adam like us, they are our neighbors, whom we are obliged to love as ourselves” (10).⁴⁴ His generous attitude, however, does not change the core of his view on Natives speaking about themselves: they cannot do so, and they must be loved *despite* their inability to locate themselves properly within the world and within history.

Chimalpahin has often been seen as a paradoxical figure who demonstrated a “contrast between his abundant writings and what is known about his life” (Tavárez 17). A minor player in Nahua nobility, we have seen how his Nahuatl-language annuals were directed to a narrow segment of the literate Native elite, as opposed to the more common strategy of addressing Native

⁴³ “[d]el origen de esta gente la relación que dan los viejos es que por la mar vinieron . . . que salieron de siete cuevas, que estas siete cuevas son los siete navíos . . . mas ¿para qué me detengo en contar adivinanzas?”

⁴⁴ “es certísimo que estas gentes todas son nuestros hermanos, procedentes del tronco de Adán como nosotros, son nuestros prójimos, a quien somos obligados a amar como a nosotros mismos”

histories to colonial officials in Spanish in order to attain titles, land, or tax relief. In addition, projects such as his edits of *La conquista de México* shored up a universal Christian narrative of history by recreating the invented White Self as an agent of divine providence acting on invented Indians. Yet as argued by Bhabha (1986), mimicry becomes a sight of double articulation: the shift in enunciation from a constructed White subject to a Native originally understood only as an *object* of that enunciation creates an effect upon colonial discourse that is both “profound and disturbing” (Bhabha 126). Taking the British Empire as his prototype, Bhabha finds that mimicry both “appropriates” while also acting as a sign of the inappropriate, “the representation of a difference that is in itself a process of disavowal” (126). He claims that the ambivalence, or slippage, of mimicry “does not merely ‘rupture’ discourse, but also creates an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a ghostly ‘partial’ presence . . . [T]he very emergence of the ‘colonial’ is dependent for its representation upon some strategic limitation or prohibition *within* the authoritative discourse itself” (127).

In Bhabha’s case study, the mimicry of the metropolis by its peripheries articulates an unbridgeable and inconceivable gap between the universally egalitarian rhetoric of the Enlightenment and the lived experience of British colonial subjects. In the case of Mexico at the turn of the seventeenth century, Chimalpahin’s shoring up of the Christian historical narrative and the invented Indians who populated it allowed him to shift that narrative’s focus, subject, and knowledge, embodying a troubling fissure between those inventions and lived reality that the colonizer could not identify: how could an Indian retell, and indeed reshape, invented Indians without doing the same to the White subject who had created them? Through Chimalpahin, the Indian made the impossible leap from categorized object to unthinkable subject-object. Despite the new rules put into action by the First Provincial Council to avoid this very possibility, Native

creativity demonstrated the fixed star of the Indian as potential subject to not be fixed at all, undoing the image by rebuilding it around the paradox between the universality of the colonizing Christian worldview and that worldview's singular access to White supremacist agents. Without Native support in the form of successful evangelization and spiritual evolution, the fabrication the colonizer had made of himself by inventing the Indians around him could not stand. As Chimalpahin demonstrated, however, Native shoring up of this invented Indian also destroyed the colonizer's fantasy of Self and Other by violating the possibilities of both. This was the loop of contradiction at the heart of the First Evangelization's imaginary: the supremacist subject defined itself by its sole claim to speech while also demanding its Indian construction to speak in affirmation. By undertaking such speech, Chimalpahin destabilized the imaginary entirely.

2.0 What Goes Bump in the Night:

Fabricating the Indian as Idolater to Answer the Colonizer's Creeping Self-Doubt

Well, I know how [power] works, it has worked on me, and if I didn't know how power worked, I would be dead.

—James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*,

Because the Indian as potential subject operated as colonial invention, the lived experience of colonialism necessarily exceeded its carefully demarcated boundaries. This Indian was expected, after various degrees of persuasion, to recognize the errors of his ways and turn to pursue a path of Catholic piety, an expectation grounding the fervent belief—adopted at the highest levels of Spanish government—that the Spaniards were liberators unleashed upon ignorance at a divinely predestined moment in history. After the initial pains of conquest, newly liberated peoples, according to theologian-philosopher-jurists like Vitoria and Las Casas, would largely be aware of the true object of their natural yearning for God, grateful for their broken chains, and earnest about pursuing free lives as Christians. As we have already seen, however, the rift between the Native behavior Spaniards expected to see and the Native behavior they observed never closed.

Motolinía reported that colonizers often did their best to ignore this rift. Throughout the same mass conversions and baptisms that characterized the First Evangelization, “[i]n all the temples of idols . . . demons were served and honored. Busy building Mexico, the Spaniards . . .

were content that there was no sacrifice of public homicide before them, which hidden around Mexico were not lacking, and in this way idolatry was at peace” (30).⁴⁵

Not everyone was satisfied by such low standards, however. According to Motolinía, on January 1, 1525, an early group of friars—of which he may have been part—got so fed up with the continued adoration of the Nahua pantheon that they declared physical war on these practices. They spent the hours between ten in the evening and dawn the next day chasing people out of pagan temples in Tenochtitlan. They then proceeded to Tlaxcala, where they entered religious buildings and houses alike and were horrified to find the images of the crucified Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary that the conquistadores and their accompanying clergy had gifted to the Tlaxcalans—“thinking that they worshipped them alone” (“pensando que a ellas solas adorarían”) (Motolinía 31)—set among what they determined to be idols. In still more cases, Indigenous practitioners had hidden idols behind Christian imagery hanging on walls, or according to Motolinía, even within the very altars themselves. “[I]t was that they, as they had a hundred gods, wanted to have a hundred and one; but the friars knew well that the Indians worshiped that which they used to” (Motolinía 31).⁴⁶ This meant that large portions of the masses Cortés claimed to have converted to Christianity and won as subjects of Spain and the Catholic Church, such as the inhabitants of the city of Tlaxcala whose images the friars were now destroying, had in fact regressed to their idolatrous ways—or, perhaps even more disconcertedly, had never left them behind in the first place, and still didn’t see why they should. Motolinía indicated that the idols

⁴⁵ “[e]n todos los templos de los ídolos . . . eran servidos y honrados los demonios. Ocupados los españoles en edificar a México . . . contentábanse con que no hubiese delante de ellos sacrificio de homicidio público, que escondidos y a la redonda de México no faltaban, y de esta manera se estaba la idolatría en paz.”

⁴⁶ “[F]ue que ellos, como tenían cien dioses, querían tener ciento y uno; pero bien sabían los flaires que los indios adoraban lo que solían.”

were hidden, but also pointed out that Natives simply added Christ and the Virgin to their existing divine repertoire. Maybe they didn't intend to hide the idols at all.

How could such behavior be interpreted within the carefully constructed framework of the Indian as potential subject? Tlaxcalans checked every box: they lived as a dense urban population with well-developed legal and civic sectors and fervent religious sentiment. We recall how, according to Cortés, after initial resistance “[t]hey now saw that they had erred in not having been willing to assist me; from thenceforth I would see how they would do all that I, in Your Majesty’s name, commanded them to do, and they would be Your faithful vassals” (Cortés 62). They destroyed their own idols, accepted the arrival of the Christian God, and played a pivotal role in aligning themselves with Cortés to overthrow the Mexica. Within the very first years following the Conquest, however, Spanish friars found them simultaneously worshipping their old gods and the Crucifix and blending idols with various forms of Christian imagery. These were not the actions of men liberated from their ignorance by good Spanish teaching and example.

What was at risk by widespread contradiction of the invented Indian on which key narratives of conquest and colonization had been built, not to mention the Crown’s official—if shifting—approach to its American territories in general and to Mexico in particular? At first, as Motolinía wrote, these developments were ignored, whether out of expediency or an inability to look at them and what they represented; after the inhabitants of Acuzamil tore down their own idols, Cortés did not return to ensure that they had not returned to pagan worship. He may have been even less willing to take a critical look at the Tlaxcalans as *indios auxiliares*, or Indian auxiliaries who contributed crucially to Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s estimate of the 200,000 allied Native forces that offered the muscle necessary for Cortés to topple Tenochtitlan. After the conquest of Mexico ended, however, Motolinía explained that the persistent adoration of Native

deities became impossible to ignore—or so one would assume. Motolinía wrote that although certain friars began ringing warning bells, religious and government officials “each one had his own care, as the saying goes . . . and idolatry was as complete as before” (30).⁴⁷

Why did Spanish administrators refuse to see such cracks in the social and cultural order they claimed to be building in Mexico? The answer is twofold. First, the continuance of these practices and the implied inability of the Spaniards to successfully convert *indios* endangered the foundations of the Spanish colonial empire as maintained in papal bulls and lines of juridical thought. More centrally and deeply, however, it threatened the very core of the colonial supremacy. What did idolatry say of the White subject as master and teacher of universal knowledge? Was their knowledge incorrect? Was their teaching insufficient? It was one thing for Natives to require time and care to transition from the idolatrous ways. Certain backsliding was permissible. But the general trend should have been toward the erasure of idolatry, and as Motolinía indicated, his experience told only of the opposite.

2.1 The Indian as Idolater to Veil a Growing Problem:

Why Isn't This Easier Yet?

To answer these questions and mitigate these risks, colonial writers often employed the mechanisms of another invented Indian: the Indian as idolater. Whereas the Indian as potential subject could not lie because, even in his confused strivings, he lived according to natural reason and lacked the agency to stray from it, the Indian as idolater did lie, and supremacist reasonings

⁴⁷ “cada uno tenía su cuidado, como dicho es . . . y estabase la idolatría tan entera como de antes.”

around why give us a glimpse into the great tension at the heart of this particular construction. Sometimes, colonizers argued that this Indian lied because the Devil had a firm grasp of the Americas and was reluctant to give up his power, holding more tightly to his slice of the earthly kingdom than the Spaniards had first anticipated. Other times, the same people argued that this Indian lied because it was in his corrupt temperament to do so; he could no more avoid lying than he could avoid eating or drinking. Still other times, he lied due to poor Spanish treatment and example. These interpretations demonstrate Spanish stress around the problem of evil, or lack of the expected progress of Christian good, in the Americas and their uncertainty about the consequences of representing the Indian moral character as either good or bad. In all cases, however, just as in the construction of the Indian as potential subject, agency and choice were eliminated from the equation for Native bodies—driven by demonic forces, nature, or circumstances, the Indian as idolator lied without choice or reason.

For Motolinía, who worked in Mexico directly after the conquest of Tenochtitlan, the obstinate problem of idolatry was due to the confluency of these factors. First, the devil played an active role in holding Indians hostage to his reverence and worship. Writing of Native boys trained under friars and their reports back to their masters about acts of idolatry and sacrifices committed in Native communities, he explained that “Although there were some bad Indians who hid idols, there were other good Indians, already converted, who, seeing them as evil and an offense from God, warned the friars . . . As [the bad Indians] used to, *still instigated by the devil*, they looked for time to sacrifice, because . . . the sacrifices and cruelties of this land and people surpassed and exceeded those of all the world” (39, emphasis mine).⁴⁸ Here, the devil continued to provoke

⁴⁸ “aunque había algunos malos indios que escondían los ídolos, había otros buenos indios, ya convertidos, que, pareciéndoles mal y ofensa de Dios, avisaban de ello a los frailes . . . Como solían, todavía instigándoles el demonio,

Indians, causing them to deny natural reason's culmination in Christian doctrine by inciting them to deceive; they hid idols and looked for opportunities to commit sacrifices by staying faithful to their erroneous pre-conquest ways. Because the devil had once commanded these civilizations, it made sense to Motolinía that he would not be so easily dissuaded from pursuing and damning Indian souls.

In another passage, however, the same author argued that the lack of fluency in Indigenous languages displayed by the very first emissaries of the Spanish Crown in Mexico—both conquistadores and their religious companions—contributed to poor understanding of doctrine that brought about lying and continued idolatry: “Language is necessary to speak, preach, converse, teach and to administer all the sacraments, and not least for knowledge of the people, who are naturally fearful and very timid, who do not seem to have been born but to obey, and if they are put in the corner, there they remain as if nailed to the spot” (120).⁴⁹ If the Indian was born to obey, his behavior would therefore be contingent upon the quality of the instructions he received, and his deception and concealment would be indictments not of himself or his own will, but of his instructors' ability and character. As a result, Motolinía dedicated himself to learning Nahuatl. He felt that if he could speak their language, his Indian flock would better understand and embody his teachings, and he would better understand them as objects of his study.

Once again, Motolinía sought to portray Natives as child-like. Just in the same way as a child might stop misbehaving and begin to respond appropriately to clear, well-placed boundaries, Indians would react positively to friars fluent in Native languages who were equipped to resolve

buscaban tiempo para sacrificar, porque [. . .] los sacrificios y crueldades de esta tierra y gente sobrepusieron y excedieron a todas las del mundo.”

⁴⁹ “La lengua es menester para hablar, predicar, conversar, enseñar y para administrar todos los sacramentos, y no menos el conocimiento de la gente, que naturalmente es temerosa y muy encogida, que no parece que nacieron sino para obedecer, y si los ponen al rincón, allí se están como enclavados.”

the missteps and confusions that otherwise led to dangerous doctrinal pitfalls. In the example of Tlaxcalans mixing Christian images with idols, for insistence, Motolinía wrote that friars later explained to them that images of Christ and the Virgin required their own dedicated church separate from all other representations:

They took away as many [pagan images] as there could be, telling [the Indians] that if they wanted to have an image of God or of Santa Maria, they should make a church for them . . . [A]lways they tried to keep their temples healthy and whole, although later, as things went forward, they began to use their *teocalme* to build the churches and to remove stone and wood from them, and in this way they were skinned and demolished. And the stone idols, of which there were infinite numbers, not only escaped broken and shattered, but came to serve as foundations for the churches, and as there were some very large ones, the served as the best of the world for the foundation of such a great and holy work (31).⁵⁰

Motolinía indicated that Tlaxcala's inhabitants had not been properly informed that they needed to worship Christ and the Virgin separately in buildings designed for that purpose, which is why they worshipped them alongside their idols in their *teocalme*, or traditional temples. Once they were told, they began to build churches and eventually cared so little about their *teocalme* that they tore them apart to get additional construction materials. The idols were profoundly forgotten, and Tlaxcalans used them as parts of their new churches' foundations.⁵¹ While Motolinía explored

⁵⁰ “[S]e las quitaron cuantas [imágenes paganas] pudieron haber, diciéndoles [a los indios] que si querían tener imagen de Dios o de Santa María, que les hiciesen iglesia . . . [S]iempre procuraron de guardar sus templos sanos y enteros, aunque después, yendo la cosa adelante, para hacer las iglesias comenzaron a echar mano de sus *teocalme* para sacar de ellos piedra y madera, y de esta manera quedaron desollados y derribados. Y los ídolos de piedra, de los cuales había infinitos, no sólo escaparon quebrados y hechos pedazos, pero vinieron a servir de cimientos para las iglesias, y como había algunos muy grandes, venían lo mejor de mundo para cimiento de tan grande y santa obra.”

⁵¹ In the eternal ambiguity of these interactions, the use of idols to build churches may have been seen as a transgressive, rather than obedient, act; Sahagún certainly thought as much about the first chapel of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which was built on the remains of a temple dedicated to the Nahua goddess Tonantzin (90). The fluidity

multiple explanations for the deception and transgressions of his deceiving Indians, he was also convinced that—due to their submissive nature—better teaching and more dedication on the Spaniards’ part could eliminate most of these incidents. “*No parece que nacieron sino para obedecer,*” he claimed.

Motolinía wrote in the first years after the conquest, when a certain amount of miscommunication was to be expected amidst messy transitions. The tensions modern readers can identify at the center of his Indians would only become more dire as the colonial regime further entrenched itself. On November 30, 1537, more than a decade after the fall of Tenochtitlan, the bishop Zumárraga wrote that the Indians were still not behaving as they should, explaining in a letter to the General Council that “[t]he natives still use their Gentile rites, especially in superstitions and idolatries and sacrifices, although not publicly as they used to, but at night they go to their shrines . . . and it is believed that few of the elders have left their sects and inclination completely, nor do they stop having their hidden idols, although we admonish them many times and threaten them” (García Icazbalceta 1881: appendix, 21, 91).⁵² Zumárraga’s report reads like a story fashioned for cheap jumps. His Indians slipped into their old centers of worship in the dead of night and secretly held demonic ceremonies that included sacrificing to hidden idols. Sly and dark, they were no longer “born to obey” but resisted all attempts at correction.

The idolatry situation had grown even more severe by the time José de Acosta wrote his *Historia natural and moral de las Indias* (1590). At the end of the sixteenth century, Acosta found

of colonial attitudes regarding Native use of idols and temples only highlights that lack of concerted policy on the subject and the inconsistent use of invented Indians according to the changing needs of the colonial gaze.

⁵² “[l]os naturales aún usan sus ritos gentílicos, especialmente en las supersticiones é idolatrías é sacrificios, aunque no públicamente como solían, mas de noche van á sus adoratorios . . . y se cree que pocos de los mayores han dejado sus sectas y afeción del todo, ni dejan de tener sus ídolos escondidos, aunque los amonestamos muchas veces y los amenazamos.”

himself confronted with a colonial situation that remained chaotic. Decades after Cortés destroyed Tenochtitlan and claimed victory over the Mexica empire once headed by Moctezuma, Native populations throughout the Americas had collapsed. Livi-Bacci describes how, by 1550, Amerindian peoples had been nearly wiped out in the Caribbean; meanwhile, the coastal areas of the Gulf of Mexico found themselves depopulated through violence and malaria. Spanish officials working to adapt and amend Mexica taxation systems recorded a Central Mexican population shift from 2.7 million people in 1568 to 1.4 million in 1595 (Livi-Bacci 2006). Cook and Borah's classic study provides a more devastating estimate of demographic change in the region: from 16.8 million Natives in 1532 to 1.075 million in 1605 (1979), although the authors possibly overestimated initial Indigenous populations by taking at face value conversion figures provided by Juan Torquemada in 1615. Separately, Whitmore used a computer simulation to calculate a population breakdown to 11.5 percent of preconquest numbers (1991). In any case, the sixteenth century brought a demographic collapse to Mexico more severe than nearly any other seen throughout human history. In addition, or perhaps as a result, Tavárez documents (2011) that incidents of idolatry as Spaniards defined it only increased. Friars and priests claimed that regional religious practices continued to develop independently of their intentions and instructions. Roiled with death, chaos, and idols, Spaniards must have struggled to see Mexico as a land whose inhabitants had just been redeemed from their own ignorance and converted into subjects of Christ by a masterful stroke of God's divine will.

Indeed, it would only make sense for these cracks within the image of a global Christian empire to trouble colonists' conception of themselves and their project. Acosta sought to fill them, at least partially, by providing a bigger role in his work for the devil than that of his predecessors, especially Vitoria. According to Acosta, Indians were not living by natural reason waiting upon

the name of Christ, but instead trapped in the workings of the devil and, in the absence of repeated interventions by the Spaniards, going to hell. More active than Motolinía's demonic forces, this devil deceived humans by inciting them to misinterpret natural and manmade objects as gods and operated as a powerful figure that "in nature is superior to man" ("en naturaleza es superior al hombre") (313). In fact, Acosta explained, before the coming of Christ the devil "had the greater part of the world subject" ("tuvo sujeta la mayor parte del mundo") (312), and after the arrival of the Gospel, he was banished from "the best and noblest part of the world" ("la mejor y más noble parte del mundo") and caged in its inferior part. That is, he was driven out of Europe and shut up in the Americas, where, far from being filled with proto-Christians as argued by Columbus, Cortés, and Las Casas, "there are hardly any peoples who are not idolaters" ("apenas se hallan gentes que no sean idólatras") (312).

The Devil fooled the Indians by making perverted reverse images of divine institutions, working to "feign with his darkness the light" ("fingir con sus tinieblas la luz") (335). Acosta gave the example of the Mexica festival honoring the god Vitzilipuztli as a mockery of the Corpus Christi and the sacrament of communion. According to him, the Mexica referred to consecrated pieces of cornmeal as the bones and body of Vitzilipuztli and divided them among festival attendees, who "received it with so much reverence, fear and tears, that it was amazing, saying that they ate the flesh and bones of God" (364).⁵³ For him, phenomena such as this did not show strivings toward an omnipresent God and incipient Christian devotion, as Las Casas argued and Cortés illustrated with his image of Moctezuma, but rather the demonic perversion of truth and nature. "Who will not be amazed that the devil was so careful to be worshipped and received in

⁵³ "recibíanlo con tanta reverencia, temor y lágrimas, que ponía admiración, diciendo que comían la carne y huesos de dios."

the way that Jesus Christ our God ordered and taught, and as the Holy Church accustoms it? It is truly clear what was said from the first, that as much as he can, Satan tries to usurp and steal for himself the honor and worship due to God. . . because he is a murderous and unclean spirit, and the father of lies” (Acosta 364).⁵⁴ This interpretation marked a notable shift from the benevolent reading of other theologians and philosophers, such as Las Casas, of Native religious practices as demonstrations of Indians’ aptness for Christian conversion.

Could this Indian as idolater, who was specifically targeted by the Devil, still apply natural reason to his surroundings and thereby escape demonic trickery? Acosta did not think so. In the first chapters of his work, he discussed the thought of ancient philosophers in relation to cosmology, geography, and history and deconstructed them, revealing errors in Aristoteles and Plato, as well as among his own contemporaries. If these great men—founders of Western thought—could err, then there was little hope left for the Indians, trapped with the devil at the edges of the world. “[I]t is not only useful,” Acosta wrote, “but absolutely necessary, that Christians and teachers of the law of Christ, know the errors and superstitions of the ancients, to see if they are clearly or secretly used by the Indians now” (387).⁵⁵ It was up to Christians to identify these errors because Indians were incapable of doing so. The devil, the “*padre de mentira*,” lied to Indians and therefore Indians lied. This relationship was clear. Indians lied without any specific intention, and in fact, they possessed no understanding of what led to their actions; understanding was left to colonizers alone. In this way, the determination of meaning was still

⁵⁴ ¿A quién no pondrá admiración que tuviese el demonio tanto cuidado de hacerse adorar y recibir al modo que Jesucristo nuestro Dios ordenó y enseñó, y como la Santa Iglesia lo acostumbra? Verdaderamente se echa de ver bien lo que al principio se dijo, que en cuanto puede, procura Satanás usurpar y hurtar para sí la honra y culto debido a Dios . . . porque es espíritu homicida e inmundado, y padre de mentira.”

⁵⁵ “[N]o solo es útil, sino del todo necesario, que los cristianos y maestros de la ley de Cristo, sepan los errores y supersticiones de los antiguos, para ver si clara o disimuladamente las usan también agora los indios.”

guarded for the White supremacist subject within the invention of the Indian as idolater, just as it had been for the Indian as potential subject.

Acosta put this argument to work in the seventh book of his volume, which sought to give a history of the Mexica empire. Such a task was necessary because, according to him, the Mexica themselves were still incapable of telling their own history, just as his predecessors had claimed. They were unable to refer to any record of their own origins, and they had only “*mitos y fábulas*” that, instead of emerging from hazy confusion, as Sahagún had claimed, were now concocted by the devil himself. After reviewing a handful of them, Acosta rhetorically wrote in his statement that echoes Sahagún, “Mas ¿de qué sirve añadir más, pues todo va lleno de mentira y ajeno de razón?” (119)—“But what is the use of adding more, since everything is full of lies and oblivious to reason?” As a direct correlation of his conclusion, he chose to provide these Indians with a history that, in his words, was worthy of being read (437): a history they could not supply for themselves. He framed that history as an inversed retelling of the founding of Israel after the Israelites wandered for 40 years in the desert before reaching the promised land, starting with the nomadic Chichimecas and extending beyond the founding of Mexico as the moment in which “the father of lies would fulfill his people” (“el padre de las mentiras cumplierse con su pueblo”) (448). Acosta worked as the reader’s translator: he took what he deemed as falsehoods of the Indians—as seen in Native chronicles—and introduced the order of a Western account.

The emphasis placed by Acosta on the deceiving devil and his manipulation and control of Indians is shared by many of his contemporaries in Mexico, including Sahagún, Diego Durán, and Juan Torquemada. Examples can be found, for instance, in Sahagún’s *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, penned throughout the 1560s, 70s, and 80s. The work is composed of twelve books cataloging Nahuatl language and culture from a Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco point of view,

written in conjunction with assistants who had graduated from the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco. The effort that Sahagún's piece represents is monumental; in it, he records minute information about pre-Columbian Mexica life, from cuisine, farming practices, and economic systems to religious festivals and calendar mechanisms. Its most famous extant manuscript, the Florentine Codex, is bilingual in Spanish and Nahuatl across opposing folios and includes over two thousand drawings rendered by Native-identifying artists with a mixture of Native and European techniques.

Why undertake such a colossal enterprise? Sahagún anticipated this question by providing an answer in his prologue: "The doctor cannot correctly apply medicines to the patient [without] first knowing from what mood, or from what cause, the disease proceeds" (26).⁵⁶ The sickness that Sahagún referred to was idolatry, which, he argued, continued unabated. According to the author, knowledge of Native culture was imperative to proper sight, or to seeing beyond the surface of things to understand the true meaning of Native signs and symbols and correctly identify, and uproot, idolatry. In his analogy, the friar was the doctor and the Indian the sick man, the causes of his sickness hidden to those unversed in Native life and ritual—but also, ironically, to Natives themselves. Knowing all things Indian, but not being Indian, was necessary to uncover the diabolical secrets of the Indian. That is what the Indian as idolater meant: dangerous practices hidden away from obvious view and the need for exposure.

Sahagún wrote that, in 1569, "Going to see the river mouths that are on top of the *Sierra de Toluca*, some clergy found in one of the mouths a very recent sacrifice or offering, which had been made five or six days before, and which, according to what was implied, had been made on

⁵⁶ "El médico no puede acertadamente aplicar las medicinas al enfermo [sin] que primero conozca de qué humor, o de qué causa procede la enfermedad."

the part of more than fifteen towns; and in all these said mountains they would find new offerings every year” (94).⁵⁷ For Sahagún, idolatry was not only a real, continuous threat, but a clandestine one, and its clandestine nature made even more powerful. The drive to uncover the shrouded secret of idolatry illuminates much of his work. While Motolinía learned Nahuatl to offer better instructions to those potential subjects who were born to obey, Sahagún wrote in Spanish and Nahuatl so that his Spanish-centric readers would have access to “the secrets that there are in [the tongue]” (53).⁵⁸ He facilitated the composition of a written Nahuatl-language account of the Spanish conquest of Tenochtitlan “not so much to extract any truths from the tales of the Indians who found themselves in the conquest, as to put the language of the things of war and weapons that the natives use, so that terms and ways of saying can be derived from there” (IV, 20).⁵⁹ For Sahagún, fluency in Nahuatl was a weapon in a divine war. It served as a clarifying tool not for Indians who sought to understand Christianity, but for Spaniards who needed to identify deception. The author wanted his brethren to use his insights in order to recognize and vanquish the sickness of idolatry.

In his *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España e islas de Tierra Firme*, finished around 1581 and therefore roughly contemporaneous with Sahagún’s work, Dominican friar Diego Durán described incidents in which deceptive Indians chose a specific patron saint for their town because the saint’s feast day coincided with an important pre-Hispanic religious festival. He also explained how these Indians would sing along to prayers with purposefully low voices so that their

⁵⁷ “yendo acaso unos religiosos a ver las fuentes que están sobre la Sierra de Toluca, hallaron en una de las fuentes un sacrificio u ofrenda muy reciente, de cinco o seis días antes hecho, que según daba a entender el sacrificio fué envidado de más de quince pueblos; y en todas estas sierras dichas hallarían cada año ofrendas nuevas.”

⁵⁸ “los secretos que hay en [la lengua].”

⁵⁹ “no tanto por sacar algunas verdades de la relación de los mismos indios que se hallaron en la conquista, cuanto por poner el lenguaje de las cosas de la guerra y de las armas que en ella usan los naturales, para que de allí se pueden sacar vocablos y maneras de decir.”

evangelical instructors could not hear how they distorted the words. Juan de Torquemada, writing several decades later at the beginning of the seventeenth century, depicted many more of these occurrences. In one passage, he discussed the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco and Native nobles' failed efforts to spare their sons from its forced re-education practices: "Instead of bringing their own children, they brought others, those of their servants, or vassals. And God wanted, that wanting to deceive, they were deceived, and mocked, because those children of plebian, and common, people, being there indoctrinated . . . emerged as skillful men, and later came to manage the Republics, and their masters. And it could be that God ordered it so, so that the [Native] Nobility would cease completely" (28-29).⁶⁰ This theme of *engaño*, or deceit, powers the narratives of late-sixteenth-century and early-seventeenth-century chroniclers, providing an obstacle to—but also, as in the case of Torquemada's nobles, a tool for—God's ultimate providence. It was God's plan that, in hoping to deceive the Spaniards, the Indians were themselves deceived into carrying out God's will. They, of course, remained ignorant to these levels of deception.

As we can see, the Indian as idolater progressed from an Indian muddled in the confusion of conquest, as in the case of Motolinía, to an Indian who necessitated not clearer instructions in his own language, but rather astute decipherers of the true foundations of his behavior as manipulated by the Devil. In line with Acosta, Sahagún remarked that "the devil neither sleeps nor has he forgotten the honor that these natives gave him, and that he is waiting for an occasion so

⁶⁰ "[E]n lugar de traer a sus hijos, trajeron otros mocuelos, de sus criados, o vasallos. Y quiso Dios, que queriendo engañar, quedaron ellos engañados, y burlados, porque aquellos hijos de gente plebeya, y común, siendo allí doctrinados . . . salieron hombres hábiles, y vinieron después a manejar las Repúblicas, y a sus amos. Y pudo ser, que lo ordenase Dios así, para que cesase de todo punto el Señorío."

that he could return to the lordship that he has had” (269).⁶¹ From exploring the difficulties and insufficiencies faced by friars in communicating the complexities of the Christian religion to dramatically scaling up the role of the devil in hindering Christian conversion, these theologians plotted out many reasons for what they saw as the Indian’s deceitful, and perhaps ultimately wounding, allegiance to false idols.

Baldwin, reflecting on the aversion White Americans demonstrated toward examining their own attitudes and inner lives, claimed that “whatever white people do not know about Negroes reveals, precisely and inexorably, what they do not know about themselves” (*The Fire Next Time*, “Letter from a Region of My Mind” 104). His mediations on knowing and not knowing in the supremacist context of the mid twentieth-century United States points a provocative path in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Mexico, where the colonizer obsessed over knowing—and, as we shall see, inventing—the hidden unknowns of the idolatrous Indian. Like their earlier fixation with the *potential* of their subjectivity, this obsession tells us little about Natives and much more about those who engaged in settler colonialism. In some cases, readers can glimpse through the multiple facets of invented make-believe and catch flashes of the confusion, anger, and self-doubt that plagued the White consciousness as it faced its own repetitive lack of success. What had been written of in heady anticipation as the amplification of Christ’s kingdom and the acquisition of millions of Christian and Spanish subjects did not go as had bene expected. Given their Self-defining role as bearers of truth in the darkness, colonizing voices found themselves frustrated by a failure they could not name.

⁶¹ “el diablo ni duerme ni está olvidado de la honra que le hacían estos naturales, y que está esperando coyuntura para si pudiese volver al señorío que ha tenido.”

We can witness glimpses of this wound in the words of Sahagún, who is often framed of as a benevolent scholar of Native practices motivated by an almost scientific curiosity. He left a copy of one of his sermons that he addressed in Nahuatl to a Nahua audience about Nahua ancestors: “Because if they could know so much, that they could make a concept of the world: how did they not more easily find the Lord of it?” (78).⁶² Referring to the Mexica belief that the first women to die in childbirth had become divinities called *cioateteu* or *cioapipilti*, he continued, “From your account, we know that this worshipping of women is such a thing to be mocked and laughed at, that there is no need to speak of disproving it via the authorities of Sacred Scripture . . . This seems more a matter of senseless children, than of men of reason. Other countless follies and other countless gods your ancestors invented, that neither paper nor time would suffice to write them” (91-94).⁶³ Sahagún’s declarations reveals a flash of White anger—why, in light of their great civilizational advances over which the first European arrivals to the Americas had marveled, were these Indians so resolutely affixed to their idolatrous practices, “*cosa de niños y sin seso*”? Why did they refuse to be properly taught, despite being treated so well?

Sahagún, unable to critically evaluate the contradictions and instabilities of his own role or the settler colonialist undertaking of which he was inextricably part, attributed these pitfalls to the Indians’ inability and insufficiency. Every current affliction of the Native population—including the massive loss of Native life to plagues, pestilences, and violence—could be portrayed as a result of their own continued errors. After all, as Torquemada stated, “God punishes sins with sins”

⁶² “Porque si pudieron saber tanto, que podían hacer concepto del mundo: ¿cómo con mayor facilidad no hallaron al Señor de él?”

⁶³ “Por vuestra relación, sabemos que es esta adoración de mujeres cosa tan de burlar y reír, que no hay para qué hablar de la confutar por autoridades de la Sagrada Escritura . . . Esto más parece cosa de niños y sin seso, que de hombres de razón. Otras locuras sin cuento y otros dioses sinnúmero inventaron vuestros antepasados, que ni papel ni tiempo bastarían para escribirlas.”

(21).⁶⁴ Sahagún’s eruption against the Natives that he had dedicated a great part of his life to studying and evangelizing vividly revealed his frustration—and his inability to examine his own role in creating it.

In this fantastic topography of the seen versus the unseen, it was no coincidence that the element of hiding became an essential component to idolatry as Sahagún and his peers defined it. Reflecting on idolatry’s transition from the Iberian Peninsula and the context of Jews and Moors to New Spain and American Natives, Mina García Soormally writes that “[i]dolatry thus became an accusation that could be adapted according to the particular group that was in the eye of the accuser, rather than tied to a specific set of practices” (2019: 166). She points out that as opposed to being fixed solely to a particular action—such as worshipping another deity, for example—the core of idolatry in colonial Mexico was its implied deceit and vice-versa; one simply could not exist without the other. Deceit implied idolatry, and idolatry deceit.

Tavárez (2011) discusses at length a 1540 case in which the first bishop of Mexico, Zumárraga, tried an idolatry case against Don Pedro, the ruler of Totolapa, with the aid of his translators. Don Pedro was charged with concubinage and idolatry. Native witnesses swore that the *cacique*, baptized fifteen years earlier as a subject of God and Spain’s law, had buried several idols beneath maize fields around his house nearly a decade prior. In the interrogation of Don Pedro performed by Zumárraga with the aid of Nahuatl interpreters:

His lordship asked whether a black figurine of a man seated on a high-backed seat, which he showed to him, is recognized by him as an idol, and whether he has had it in his house, and what is its name. [Don Pedro] said that he recognizes said figurine not as an idol, but

⁶⁴ “Dios castiga pecados con pecados.”

as a candle holder, which he has kept in his house, and that his name is Black Hunchback. When asked to confess how long he has had said figurine in his house, he said that he has kept it for more than sixty days, as far as he remembers, and that he kept it by a window. (in Tavárez 38)

The bishop, satisfied with these answers, subsequently steered his questions toward two other figures: a black figure with a robe and another destroyed figure. Tavárez insightfully argues that for Zumárraga, the visibility of an image corresponded directly to its identity as an idol. Since the hunchback was not hidden but instead prominently displayed in the window of a home, it could *not* be an idol. The figures secretly buried beneath the maize field—how secretly could be a point of contention, since several Native individuals reported being aware of them—were what piqued Zumárraga’s interest. Separately, the bishop attempted to track down images he believed had been taken from Tenochtitlan’s Templo Mayor and hidden in various places by safekeepers appointed by Moctezuma himself, showing that his relentless prosecution of idolatry revolved around his obsession with finding and destroying concealed images (Archivo General de la Nación, Inquisición).

Incidents such as these demonstrated the Spaniards’ utilization of the Indian’s idolatry as a guiding light in their interactions with Natives, particularly in the years following the conquest. Confronted by a dismal and disorderly reality, this image allowed them to refract disastrous setbacks on the Indians’ own deceptions, whether rooted in misunderstandings, their own inferior nature, the power of the Devil himself, or some combination of all three. The Indian as idolater maintained the constructed White Self as the center of a battle being waged by God’s providence, creating a cloak for the gap of self-doubt faced by those who understood themselves as divine emissaries, but were now facing frustration and the danger of their failure.

2.2 The Indian as Idolater Across Place and Space:

A Rocky Transition from the First to the Second Evangelization

The use of the invented Indian as idolater moved religious and civil policy in early colonial Mexico. As this image became more defined across space and time, strategies such as the promotion of communicating core tenants of Christianity to Natives in their own language, imagery, and terminology drastically shifted. Now, Indians had to be constantly and vigilantly monitored to prevent their sly usage of that same language, imagery, and terminology with the goal of unmasking their diabolical concealment. In historical terms, this change has become known as the transition between the First and Second Evangelizations, respectively. Alberro (1999) notes that during the First Evangelization of Mexico, missionaries showed a remarkable flexibility in making connections with pre-existing religious customs, undertaking a systematic substitution of geographic, symbolic, and nominal pagan entities by their Christian counterparts.

Pedro de Gante, a Flemish Franciscan friar who arrived in Mexico before the twelve missionaries previously described and who later created the Colegio de San José de los Naturales, the first school founded by Europeans in the Western Hemisphere, wrote about how such an approach was necessary to keep Natives from fleeing contact with priests:

By the grace of God, I began to understand them and to see how they must be won. I noted that in their worship of their gods, they were always singing and dancing before them . . . Seeing this and that all of their songs were addressed to the gods, I composed very solemn songs regarding the law of God and the faith . . . Likewise, I gave them certain patterns to paint on their shawls for the dances as they were accustomed to do, according to the dance and songs which they sang” (Códice Franciscano, *Nueva Colección de Documentos*, IV, 221-225).

Gante also held religious gatherings on outdoor *patios*, as was Mexica tradition, and alongside his colleagues worked to translate Christian doctrine into songs in Nahuatl that would attract Native peoples (Braden 157).

Motolinía was a full-throttled participant in this approach. As previously noted, he recounted Native enthusiasm for singing: “And so that they would take it better and feel some type of flavor [of the doctrine], [the clergy] gave [the Indians] the *Per Signum Crucis*, *Pater Noster*, *Ave María*, *Credo* y *Salve Regina* as singing, with the commands in their language, of an amusing simple song” (34).⁶⁵ He also documented how the Nahua learned Latin lyrics by associating them mnemonically with words in Nahuatl—for example, *pater* became connected to the word *pantli*, which meant “little banner,” and *noster* with *nochtli*, the prickly pear cactus fruit known in Spanish as *tuna*. The *Pater Noster*, then, became represented by an image comprising a banner and *tuna*. Motolinía claimed startling success with these methods—9 million total baptisms given by the Franciscans (117) and nothing less than the eradication of idolatry itself: “Later, when they went converting and baptizing the Indians, they discovered many [idols] and brought them to the courtyards of the churches to be burned there publicly. . . . And in this way they also gave and brought a great quantity [of idols] that were publicly burned in many places. Because where the doctrine and word of Christ has reached, nothing [of idols] has remained that is known or that should be accounted for” (266-267).⁶⁶ By the late 1530s and early 1540s, however, this first wave of evangelization was overcome by a second that rejected Motolinía’s conclusions about his own

⁶⁵ “Y para que mejor lo tomasen y sintiesen algún sabor, diéronles cantando el *Per Signum Crucis*, *Pater Noster*, *Ave María*, *Credo* y *Salve Regina*, con los mandamientos en su lengua, de un canto llano gracioso.”

⁶⁶ “Después, cuando se fueron los indios convirtiendo y bautizando, descubrieron muchos [ídolos] y traíanlos a los patios de las Iglesias para allí los quemar públicamente . . . Y de esa manera también dieron y trujeron mucha cantidad que se quemaron públicamente en muchas partes. Porque adonde ha llegado la dotrina y palabra de Cristo no ha quedado cosa que se sepa ni de que se deba hacer cuenta.”

accomplishments and sounded a much louder alarm over idolatry than its predecessor. It called initial mass conversions superficial and rejected the translation of Christian doctrine into Native symbols, seeking instead to break these symbols down into their constituent parts so that deceiving Indians could no longer hide pagan practices behind false Christianity. Juan Zumárraga's prosecutions of Native nobles accused of idolatry grew throughout the 1530s, while Diego de Landa ordered a violent inquisition in the Yucatán in the 1560s. In the 1550s, Sahagún denounced the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe as a conflation of the Mexica goddess Tonantzin, a criticism explored at length by Miguel León-Portilla (2000). This focus on the deceptive Indian was honed at the First (1555) and Third (1585) Mexican Provincial Councils of the Church, which fiercely regulated all doctrinal works in Native languages by insisting they be removed from Native hands and that all new translations be approved by an ecclesiastical language expert. While the ability of the Church to control the flow of all documents in the region should not be overstated, breaking these edicts was punishable by excommunication, which demonstrated the gravity placed on this control by the colonizing regime.

Simultaneously, two legal and political spheres were established in the colonial system: the *república de españoles* and the *república de los indios*. Indians were no longer thought of merely as children; since they obstinately returned to their idols, they were seen as morally fragile, inferior, and weak. As Martín de León recorded (1611), because of this inadequacy they were expected to observe only 10 of the canonical 41 annual Christian holidays and keep just a partial fast during Lent. In 1571, an order by the Vatican held that new Inquisitional offices set up in Mexico held jurisdiction over non-Native subjects, while the punishment and prosecution of Natives was left to the local ecclesiastical courts. Tavárez points out that while in practice the division of

responsibility was much cloudier, in theory it kept Natives under a close and constant eye to guard against their trickery and deceit.

This second fixed star, then, the Indian as idolater, took on force in the decades following the conquest of Mexico as the evangelization and Hispanicization of Natives proved thornier than anticipated. Population collapses, diseases, and a feeling of helplessness and exasperation before the uncontrolled development of religious practices found their manifestation in the chimera of the lying Indian, who lied either due to his confusion, his inferior nature, or the Devil's incessant manipulation of his actions.

This image became so strong that contemporary academics have sometimes been seduced by it. Alberro claims that "the natives tried to preserve [their] sacred geography whose origins were lost in the darkness of their own history, with the perhaps vague hope of preserving some of their ancient beliefs and practice before the inevitability of the imposed conversion" (36).⁶⁷ Such an interpretation propogates the deceiving Indian who was not completely aware of the reasoning behind why he deceived ("*tinieblas de su propia historia,*" "*esperanza tal vez vaga*") before an unstoppable converting force ("*lo inevitable de la conversión impuesta*"), a reading that would be entirely at home in the works of writers such as Sahagún and Durán, both of whom Alberro relies on heavily. In her essay "Acerca de la primera evangelización en México" (1994), Alberro recurs to a similar analysis when focusing on Torquemada's description of religious festivals and feasts, arguing that the friars' syncretic approach to conversion allowed them to undertake a massive, if superficial, evangelization while also permitting natives to "fake compliance with Christian rites"

⁶⁷ "los indígenas trataron de conservar [su] geografía sagrada cuyos orígenes se perdían en las tinieblas de su propia historia, con la esperanza tal vez vaga de preservar algo de sus antiguas creencias y prácticas ante lo inevitable de la conversión impuesta."

(19).⁶⁸ Her interpretations of the hidden idolatrous side of phenomena like saint-centered cults, geographic temple placement, and holy feast days square directly with those of the missionaries whose writing she uses, and her word choice—“*tinieblas*,” “*vaga*,” and “*fingir*”—conveys certain judgements of Native behavior that mirror the missionaries’ own.

Did idolatry really increase in mid-sixteenth century Mexico? The time period’s particular conception of idolatry as a concealed and secretive enterprise makes it difficult to determine. What was being reported as idolatry? Can we define idolatry well enough as an ontological reality to trace its waxing and waning? I argue that we cannot, and that the dark, secretive nature of how idolatry was interpreted in this space and place precludes a quantitative study of it as such. Idolatry, just like the Indian as idolater, was an invention whose versions were made for a particular moment. Nonetheless, the White subject *believed* that idolatry was surging, and this surge helped colonists explain and naturalize excessively uncooperative elements of surrounding reality.

2.3 Native Creativity to Survive the Limits of the White Imagination:

How Idolatry Became a Gimmick in Yucatán

James Baldwin describes the supremacist subject as not knowing or wanting know, and subsequently, depicts how a person who has been Otherized confronts an invisible fourth wall—DuBois’ veil—during his interactions with the supremacist’s limitations via experiencing a racial performance that the supremacist cannot recognize as performance. “There is no reason for you to try to become like white people,” Baldwin writes to his nephew, “and there is no basis whatsoever

⁶⁸ “*fingir cumplir con los ritos cristianos*”

for their impertinent assumption that *they* must accept *you*. The really terrible thing . . . is that *you* must accept *them*” (8). Sahagún, Acosta, and others wrote extensively about the limitations of the lying idolatrous Indian. However, here we will analyze how, outside of supremacist make-believe, it was the Native who had to come to terms with the confines and restraints of the White subject, a subject capable of interpreting what he experienced only through the two-dimensional images he created for that purpose.

Why does the colonized person, in the words of Baldwin, work with these restraints? In order to live: “Every Negro boy . . . who reaches this point realizes, at once, profoundly, because he wants to live, that he stands in great peril and must find, with speed, a “thing,” a gimmick, to lift him out, to start him on his way” (*The Fire Next Time* 24). I understand the term “gimmick” to refer to some element of the Othered body that the White colonizer can look upon, recognize, categorize as Other, and thus permit to exist in space as the colonizer articulates it. It is an overexaggerated adoption of construction that permits clarity for the White Self, undertaken as a strategy through which the Othered body can lay a claim to life within a hostile territory delimited by that Self’s constricted and mystified grasp of the possible. Baldwin runs through the list of gimmicks for a Black man in the context of mid-twentieth-century America: a prizefighter, a singer, a dancer, a “sordid” life of “whores and pimps and racketeers on the Avenue” (38), and the gimmick that he took for his own, a subjectivity defined by the Black church. For the Natives of early colonial Mexico, one strategy of “shoring up” the White imaginary involved adopting a set of gimmicks that defined Native subjectivity for White colonizers: taking up and embodying invented Indians with the goal of being recognized by the colonizer as a legible body.

A 1567 letter written to Felipe II by four Maya nobles from Yucatán’s province of Maní provides an example of this strategy in action. In it, the authors denounced Franciscan missionary

Diego de Landa's persecution of their people throughout that decade. Landa's excesses in the region are well-known: he armed an inquisitorial machine that included *auto de fé* ceremonies, jailing, and widespread torture resulting in the death of Native inhabitants throughout the summer of 1562. The story of how Landa came to wield such power is telling: in 1561, the Franciscan friars of the missions of Guatemala and Yucatan voted to unite their territories into an independent missionary province, and at a meeting held in Mérida, they elected the thirty-seven-year-old Landa to serve as the region's first Provincial. It was a crucial moment for the new leader. As Inga Clendinnen (2003) documents, by 1562 the seventeen-year-old Franciscan mission in the region was beginning to hum along. Twelve monasteries had already been established, and while more remote areas remained unreached, up to two hundred small villages boasted at least a local church. Landa was selected to preside over a period of unabashed and unbridled expansion; even so, rumblings of potential trouble echoed beneath the surface.

According to Diego Quijada, who served as the Yucatán's first *alcalde mayor* between 1560 and 1565, the secular priest Lorenzo de Monterroso punished the Maya of Sotuta, a remote region between Mérida and Valladolid, for making offerings of food and drink to images they kept hidden in their *milpas*, or agricultural fields (Scholes and Adams 1938). Sotuta, however, had only recently been settled by the friars, so just as Motolinía had argued about Tlaxcala decades earlier, the Church reasoned that vestigial forms of idolatry would continue early on as part of a population's embryonic steps toward Christianity. Monterroso ordered a punishment of light whippings and believed that he had remedied the problem, much like Motolinía argued that the destruction of idols and temples in Tlaxcala, along with the order for each Native community to build its own church out of the rubble, had cured the Tlaxcalans of their initial regression into idolatrous ways.

Another incident, however, occurred in Maní during Landa's first full year of tenure. In the mid-sixteenth century, Maní—despite its small size—formed an important node of the Franciscan regional project. Strategically set in the center of the Yucatán Peninsula, it represented the Order's foothold from which it planned to settle vast portions of difficult peninsular terrain. Construction of Maní's Convento de San Miguel Arcángel began in 1548, four years before even Valladolid's extraordinary Convento de Sisal, and along with two other convents—San Francisco Conkal to the northeast and San Antonio de Padua Izamal to the east—the settlement was elevated to *doctrina* status in order to function as a base of operations at a reasonable distance from the city of Mérida (Jackson 2013). Included within San Miguel Arcángel was the first religious school erected for the Maya peoples of Yucatán, a clear indication that the friars, operating from the creation of the Indian as potential subject, saw Maní as fundamental to their mission of bringing up child-like Indians to full participation in Christ's kingdom.

The progress that they saw themselves as having accomplished and the resultant inroads toward the evangelization of villages across the region were potentially endangered in the beginning of May 1562. Two young Native men hunting close to Maní uncovered a cave in which they found images and human skulls. They went to San Miguel Arcángel and reported what they had seen to Fray Pedro de Ciudad Rodrigo, the convent's head friar, who ordered the cave's contents to be brought to the monastery's patio and examined by six of his colleagues alongside a handful of local *encomenderos* (Scholes and Adams 1938). The inclusion of *encomenderos* is noteworthy, given the tension between the heads of *encomiendas* and religious clerics and the institution's formal abolishment beneath the New Laws of 1542, an abolishment that tarried in taking effect in remote regions like the Yucatán. Friar Diego de Landa wrote openly of his tense relationship with *encomenderos* in his *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*; Santacruz Anton (2019)

summarizes Landa's position as "i[i] Christianization is placed in the hands of the colonists and secular authorities, the mission is doomed to failure" (90-91).⁶⁹ The evolution of Landa's views, particularly around violence and the union of the Church and *encomienda* demonstrated the weight given to this event of idolatry, an event that the colonial system picked and probed with zeal precisely because of its troubling nature to that very system, which grounded both religious and civil authorities.

At the end of their deliberation, the friars ordered their Native associates and servants to bring 40 Indigenous men and women who lived near the cave into the monastery for individual questioning. What they uncovered was something that, in its way, was even more upsetting than the idols themselves—the individuals freely confessed to owning the images. They did not claim the human remains, signaling to the cave's long tenure as a sacred site since well before the arrival of the Spaniards (Scholes and Adams 1938), but explained that they used the images to bring about good harvests.

Here, we observe a boundary line for the White subject in the Yucatan idolatry saga that signaled a shift in perspective and necessitated a pivot in invented Indian imagery. What unnerved Ciudad Rodrigo and his companions, both ecclesiastical and secular, was not necessarily the possibility of idolatry itself. They had already seen innumerable cases of idolatry in places like Sotuta and during the evangelization of the Valley of Mexico. Instead, what perturbed them was the Maya's inability to grasp idolatry at all after their careful instruction—and these Indians' consequential lack of remorse over their actions. These idyllic Indians still, even after careful

⁶⁹ "[s]i la cristianización se pone en manos de los colonos y de las autoridades seculares, la misión está abocada al fracaso"

tutelage, did not seem to understand that they had done anything wrong. This caused confusion for the Franciscan friars, who lived among, studied the language of, and educated the Maya with the belief that they were pulling souls up the evolutionary ladder towards God's salvation. While they could expect constant course corrections, such a vast blindness to the nature of good and evil among the people they had understood to be their faithful and flourishing flock blurred their carefully cultivated image of the Maya and, more centrally, of their unexamined image of themselves. What could such crossed wires mean for Franciscan methods, and even for the Franciscan mission itself?

Ciudad Rodrigo had no legal authority to mete out physical punishment, but nevertheless ordered the questioned Natives to be tortured. Bartolomé de Bohorques, a Spanish witness, testified that

Seeing the said friars that the said Indians confessed to having so little number of idols, they began to hang many of the said Indian from their hands, tied by the wrists together with strings, and thus they went lifting them from the ground, telling them to declare entirely the whole number of idols . . . Those which said they did not have more than they had declared. And seeing this, the said friars ordered some of them to tie large stones to their feet. . . and if they still did not declare more idols, they whipped them . . . And once finished, they ordered them to be whipped there publicly. (Declaraciones de algunos testigos sobre la investigación de las idolatrías” Scholes and Adams 25-26)⁷⁰

⁷⁰ “visto por los dichos frailes que los dichos indios confesaban tener tan poca cantidad de ídolos, comenzaron a colgar muchos de los dichos indios de las manos atadas por las muñecas juntas con cordeles, y así los iban alzando del suelo, diciéndoles que declarasen enteramente toda la cantidad de ídolos . . . Los cuales decían que no tenían más de los que habían declarado. Y visto esto, los dichos frailes les mandaban atar algunos de ellos unas piedras grandes a los pies. . . y si todavía no declaraban de más cantidad de ídolos dábanles algunos azotes . . . Y luego acabado, mandábanlos azotar allí públicamente.”

The campaign of mass arrest and torture started before Landa arrived in Maní, and Ciudad Rodrigo's unlawful reactions revealed something about the man behind them. They were the acts of a man confronting a deep anxiety, facing a shadowy but no longer avoidable stumbling block that revealed a gap between a fabricated image of the Indian and the lived experiences of actual people. This excess stretched beyond the boundaries of the thinkable for Ciudad Rodrigo and his companions, creating a moment of shift in which a turn was necessary in order to maintain their knowledge of themselves as dominant actors carrying out God's work.

The uneven history of Spanish inquisitions around idolatry further supports this hypothesis. We have already seen how García Soormally argues that idolatry served as an empty signifier, molded to fit whomever the accuser wished to target when dealing with difference at various levels. This is a key contribution to the literature treating idolatry in the Spanish Empire: “[I]dolatry becomes useful in its plasticity, in its adaptability. Idolatry is then a relative term marked by social and cultural coordinates, a polyvalent term that can find meaning in very different contexts” (166). However, she then works to define idolatry as “those beliefs and practices that do not conform to those of the hegemonic power and become, for this reason, sinful, erroneous, and false” (166)—and yet not all practices that contradicted hegemony were treated with the same gravitas within the zone of idolatry.

In *The Night Battles: Witchcraft & Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth & Seventeenth Centuries* (1966), Carlo Ginzburg describes events that took place throughout what is today northeastern Italy and occurred on a parallel timeline with the early colonization of Mexico. These events centered on popular regional beliefs that transformed Christianity in specific ways considered heretical enough to attract the attention of the Catholic Inquisition. Nearly 50 men and women were tried for their participation in a cosmological ritual activity that took place on certain nights

on the Christian calendar, known as Ember Days. On Ember Days, they believed that their souls rode various animals to a field beyond village territory and battled as an army—complete with drummers, buglers, and captains—against the souls of other individuals who identified as witches, all with the goal of protecting both the harvest and their Christian faith. On their way home, the spirits of both parties would quench their thirst with beverages left out for them at villagers’ houses, thereby implicating all neighbors in the battles—and the heresy. The “good walkers,” or *benandanti*, claimed that they had been born with their gift after coming into the world with a piece of caul, or amniotic sack, still covering their heads. They readily admitted to these beliefs, which they did not see as denial of Christianity or an elaborate syncretism of paganism and Christianity, but rather Christianity itself as they observed it.

As in the case of the Maya of Maní, these individuals did not hide their practices. As such, we can assume that they saw themselves as faithful adherents to Christianity. Folk religion and its developments were nothing new to the Church, and the events in Maní were not even unique in their time. In Italy, the vast majority of these cases were never brought to a conclusion, and the Holy Office of the Inquisition showed “basic indifference” to prosecuting the accusations, which were “lazily protracted over the years” (71). Indeed, local officials even resisted the Inquisition’s jurisdiction, accusing its officials of “always seeking to enlarge their field of competence” (71) by punishing people for superstitious practices, with one authority complaining that “the inquisitor should not meddle with superstitions” (in Ginzburg 72). In the only two cases resulting in conviction, the condemned insisted that “we fight for the faith of Christ” (in Ginzburg 32) and were sentenced to six-month prison terms that were soon remitted.

The mildness demonstrated by the Church’s reaction to these heretical confessions stands in stark contrast to the extreme violence carried out in Maní. As we have explored, idolatry in New

Spain was characterized overall by its hidden nature—the Indian as idolater intentionally concealed the truth, which was why the colonizer faced such slow inroads and so many regressions during the evangelizing process. This act of concealment on the part of the Indian and the decoding it necessitated re-framed and re-centered the White subject despite fractures within the colonial project that, as Motolinía explained, colonizers could not ignore despite their best efforts to do so. In this fragilely elaborated scenery, the Maya *not* concealing their idolatry perturbed its construction. A possible disturbing conclusion was that there was nothing nefarious about what they did, and that their worship was sincere. They had understood and practiced Christianity according to their own needs and purposes, believing this to be in accordance with what they had been taught. Whereas a handful of northeastern Italians could do this, the invented Indian that underpinned colonial logic could not. He had no creativity or agency of his own. What did his genuine belief in heretical worship say about that Indian, and about those who had fashioned him in their image?

This liminal space beyond the boundaries of the known disarticulated Native bodies because these bodies suddenly exceeded their representations in unavoidable ways. As a result, the White subject struck out in an attempt to bend and break those bodies back into legible images. The brutality increased when Landa arrived in Maní nearly a month later. Clendinnen (2013) explains how Landa sought the aid of Spanish officials because he wanted to prosecute Native nobles and found himself backed into a corner. While some of the Natives that worked for the monastery could be pressed into rounding up common people, they refused to act against their leaders. Landa reacted by employing colonial townspeople to undertake these higher-status arrests. In the coming months, his Inquisition adopted detention and torture as its method of operation, with more than 4,500 Natives being brutalized that summer. The terror culminated in an *auto de*

fe, in which—after a mass was recited—idols, books, and the remains of Maya ancestors were burned while Natives sentenced to be punished received up to 200 lashes of the whip on an elevated stage, had their hair shorn off, and were condemned to ten-year periods of service in the name of the friars or certain Spanish townsmen (“Declaraciones de algunos testigos sobre la investigación de las idolatrías” Scholes and Adams 27)—far more serious sentences than the cancelled six-month prison terms doled out in Europe.

These reactions to the exceeding of a racialized imaginary eventually began to impact the daily lives of the colonists themselves. Settlers, anxious about disappearing Native labor and its subsequent effects on the annual tribute they relied upon, began to grow restless. Some Maya fled, many were arrested, and agricultural fields lay untended. The situation threatened to reach a boiling point when in August, Francisco de Toral—a Franciscan missionary who had worked in central Mexico and who charged Bernardino de Sahagún with creating his massive manuscript to document Nahuatl customs—took office as the first Bishop of Yucatán. After surveying the chaotic circumstances of the region, he concluded that Landa had stepped out of the boundaries of his office as Provincial. Toral opened an investigation into his subordinate’s acts and maneuvered the case back to Spain, where Landa would await judgement on the charges brought before him in the Council of the Indies. The 1567 letter written by Maya nobles was penned in the context of influencing the Council’s vote against Landa’s formal exoneration.

An unapologetic Landa argued that his extralegal methods were had been necessary because “all [the Maya in question] being idolaters and guilty, it was not possible to proceed strictly juridically against them . . . because . . . it would be impossible to finish with the province of Mani alone in twenty years, and meanwhile they would all become idolaters and go to hell” (“Petition of Fray Diego Landa to Don Diego Quijada, 4 July 1562” Scholes and Adams 12). He

maintained that his swift violence had been undertaken to show *mercy* to the Maya, so that they could be cleansed of the sin that the friars had emphatically uncovered and spared eternal torment. The Maya nobles who signed the 1567 letter—Don Francisco de Montejo Xiu, ruler of Maní, Jorge Xiu, ruler of Panabch'en, Juan Pacab, ruler of Mona, and Francisco Pacab, ruler of Texul—knew that the persecution and torture of their communities would be read alongside the invented idolatrous Indian who merited such “mercy.” Their intimate knowledge came from having endured the Inquisition themselves. In fact, it is against this image that they deployed a fascinating story in their 1567 letter, a letter that did something exceptional: it both utilized invented Indians as a rhetorical device and, in an exceptional passage, revealed their fabrication as a colonial fantasy that the letter’s very readers could never grasp.

First, the authors deftly utilized invented Indians in the rhetoric of the letter itself. They explained that the Inquisition had come at a crucial moment of their newfound faith, when “[a]fter goodness came to us, which was to know God our lord as only true god—leaving behind our blindness and idolatries—and Your Majesty as temporal lord, before we opened our eyes wide to knowing one or the other, a persecution came upon us, the greatest that can be imagined” (“Queja de cuatro gobernadores yucatecos 12 de abril 1567” in Lienhard 68).⁷¹ This phrase expertly wielded the image of clear and cloudy vision so dear to the missionary enterprise of the Indian as potential subject, casting the authors in the role of the recently born—an analogy which would be used again by Torquemada—who were then preyed upon in their vulnerability by the very shepherds entrusted with their care, echoing the complaints of Las Casas in *La brevíssima*. Worse,

⁷¹ “[d]espués que nos vino el bien, que fue conocer a Dios nuestro señor por solo verdadero dios—dejando nuestra ceguedad e idolatrías—, y a V.M. por señor temporal, antes que abriésemos bien los ojos al conocimiento de lo uno y de lo otro, nos vino una persecución, la mayor que se puede imaginar.”

“Being in this tribulation and these labors, trusting in the justice of Your Majesty to hear us and keep order, Dr. Diego Quixada, who at that time was [mayor of the Yucatan provinces], came to help the tormentors, saying that we were idolaters and sacrificed men and other things that were completely alien from all truth, for even in our infidelity [of idolatry] we did not commit them”⁷² (“Queja de cuatro gobernadores yucatecos 12 de abril 1567” Lienhard 68). These new Christians, then, argued that they were doubly failed by both the Church and the State to whom God had entrusted their guardianship, whose representatives not only tortured and killed them but made up lies about them, ones that were so fantastic that the Maya did not even commit such atrocities before the arrival of the Spaniards in their complete “*infidelidad*.”

It is worth noting that the authors specifically pointed out and denied the charge of human sacrifice, which was intertwined with cannibalism as a grave violation of the natural law that men should be able to intuitively grasp and follow. Human sacrifice was specifically signaled by Sahagún as proof of the Indian’s duplicitous, deceptive nature, a nature which allowed idolatry to continue to fester in the Valley of Mexico under the surface of false Christian practice as late as 1569. These nobles understood the importance of denying that specific accusation, which they did not only for themselves but also for their ancestors. They tried to preserve an image of the pre-conquest Maya as people living in a state of proto-Christianity, lacking only the Word of God and Christian instruction to realize their full Christian potential and join the Spaniards as God’s elect; as Torquemada would later write, “It is no small mercy that God has done, for those of us who are his Christian People, in having brought us to him” (“Prologo al libro sexto”).⁷³ The only element

⁷² “[e]stando en esta tribulación y trabajos, confiando de la justicia de V.M. que nos oyera y guardara justicia, vino el doctor Diego Quixada, que a la sazón era [alcalde mayor de las provincias de Yucatán], a ayudar a los atormentadores, diciendo que éramos idólatras y sacrificadores de hombres y otras cosas ajenas de toda verdad, que en nuestra infidelidad no las cometimos.”

⁷³ “[N]o es pequeña merced la que Dios ha hecho, a los que somos de su Cristiano Pueblo, en avernos traído a él”

separating the pre-contact Maya from the pre-contact Spaniards was God's timing of his grace, rather than any inherent element of natural disposition.

This theme of the child-like flock continued in the nobles' description of Landa's *auto de fe*, during which civil and ecclesiastical authorities unearthed many old "statues" (adamantly not idols) and even disinterred the dead to burn their remains—itsself a great violation of natural order—alongside old books and other artifacts as part of public bonfires that took place in Maní's town plaza. They then sentenced many Maya to work as "slaves" for the Spaniards, the term "slave" being a charged one since the enslavement of Native peoples had been officially abolished in the Spanish Americas since 1542: "[These events] caused us great amazement and fright, because we did not know what it was, because we were recently baptized and not instructed . . . [We] were seized and imprisoned and carried in chains, like slaves, to the monastery of Mérida . . . And there they told us that they had to burn us, without us knowing why" ("Queja de cuatro gobernadores yucatecos 12 de abril 1567" Lienhard 69).⁷⁴ Confused, seeking refuge and instruction and finding nothing other than punishment they did not understand or deserve, the Maya were desperate, and to make the unwarranted pain stop, they confessed to doing things they had not done.

It is at this point that the authors took a fascinating turn by unmasking the construction of the invented Indian as idolater to which Landa referred:

And if idols were found or found by us, we took them out of the graves of our ancestors to give them to the priests, because they sent us to bring them, saying that we had said under torture that we had them. And all the earth knows how we went to look for them at twenty,

⁷⁴ "[Estos sucesos] nos pusieron gran admiración y espanto, porque no sabíamos qué cosa era, por recién bautizados y no predicados . . . [N]os prendieron y aprisionaron y llevaron en cadenas, como a esclavos, al monasterio de Mérida . . . Y allí nos decían que nos habían de quemar, sin saber nosotros por qué."

thirty, or one hundred leagues away, where we understood that our ancestors had them and where we had left them when we were baptized, and with a healthy conscience they could not punish us for them like they did. (in Lienhard 70)⁷⁵

According to the authors, the priests were psychologically incapable of understanding any other explanation for the practices they erroneously believed that they had uncovered. What other possibilities existed? In terms of a fabricated Indian that only received White knowledge and correction, there was no room for creative Other understandings of Christian practice, Other uses of images, or Other relationships with the Christian god—insidious, rampant, and most importantly, secret idolatry offered the only conceivable explanation. Once the friars connected these dots, their surroundings turned from a territory slowly moving toward the arms of God to a land hiding the trickeries of the Devil, and this Devil was everywhere. In fact, they were so insistent upon the existence of widespread covert idolatry that, the authors explained, they forced the Maya to invent it for them.

Confessing to worshipping their former gods under torture, the Maya ransacked their ancestors' graves to find the supposed idols and turn them over to the Franciscans, thus coloring in the latter's prefabricated Indian imaginary and fulfilling a desperate demand that the Franciscans could not recognize they were making. The Maya employed a complex strategy: faced with the liminality of the White imagination and the disarticulating violence that lay beyond its extreme boundaries, they shored up the invented deceiving Indian so that their bodies could be associated with a representation already codified in the associative language of White thought, which could

⁷⁵ “Y sí ídolos se hallaron o hallamos nosotros, los sacamos de las sepulturas de nuestros antepasados para dar a los religiosos, porque nos mandaban traer, diciendo que habíamos dicho en los tormentos que los teníamos. Y toda la tierra sabe cómo los íbamos a buscar veinte, treinta y cien leguas, adonde entendíamos que los tenían nuestros antepasados y nosotros habíamos dejados cuando nos bautizamos, y con sana conciencia no nos podían castigar por ellos como nos castigaron.”

not and would not allow itself to recognize bodies beyond this language. In order to survive White confusion and the danger of re-conceptualizing the White Self, they picked up what Baldwin terms a “gimmick,” using the stunt of idolatry to make themselves legible to the colonizer beneath the images of a deceptive Indian and thus escaping the region of chaos and bodily dismemberment beyond the barriers of the colonizer’s imaginary.

There are independent testimonies—many, interestingly enough, from Spaniards themselves—corroborating these authors’ story. In one instance, Juan de Palomar, a Spanish resident of the Maní province, reported before an official investigation that Ciudad Rodrigo had visited the Mayan village of Tekax to begin inquisitional proceedings against some of the Native residents there. Palomar testified that as they were being tortured, three of these Natives confessed to owning idols and were told by Ciudad Rodrigo to gather the offensive objects and bring them to him. Unable to find anything that would pass as such idols, all three fell into despair and hanged themselves. Ciudad Rodrigo then arrested and brought to Mérida Diego Uz, “*cacique* and very principal lord of the town of Tekax” (Scholes and Adams 220)⁷⁶ who suffered particularly beneath the subsequent torments, Palomar commented, due to his great size. Uz told Palomar that he had confessed to owning forty idols to appease his torturers but had no hope of turning them in—the idols in question didn’t exist. Hearing this, Palomar entreated Landa to release Uz. He was unsuccessful, so he went to Tekax and “spoke to Don Juan Uz, son of the said Don Diego, and asked him why he did not send the idols to his father so that he could come [home], who said and responded to this witness that his father had submitted a testimony and in order to fulfill what had been confessed, [Don Juan Uz] was going around looking for idols to borrow from among the

⁷⁶ “*cacique* y muy principal del pueblo de Tekax”

Indians so that he might send them” (Scholes and Adams 220).⁷⁷ Palomar and his fellow Spanish witnesses were aware of the Natives’ exchange of invented idols and how they circulated with the purpose of satiating the Franciscans’ need for idolatry. With Palomar’s help, Diego Uz’s son eventually scrounged up something that passed as 40 idols so that his father could return to his village, but his injuries were so severe that he died two weeks later anyway.

Were the friars truly unaware of these occurrences that were taking place beyond church walls? The cognitive dissonance demonstrated by these two currents of action is dizzying, and yet somehow, the torture, confessions, and sentences continued to be deemed as necessary not for the White subject, but for the spiritual health of the made-up Indian. Perhaps we can surmise that the friars assumed they were uprooting idolatry with the collateral damage of a few cases. Juan de Palomar, however, indicated the existence of a very tangible shadow market of borrowed “idols,” ample evidence that the misunderstandings extended beyond rare exceptions.

Francisco de Montejo Xiu, the *cacique* who ruled Maní and signed the 1567 letter, was himself arrested and tortured during the summer of 1562. Also known by his original Maya name of Kukum, in 1548 he surrendered to Francisco de Montejo, the Spanish conquistador of Yucatán and founder of Mérida. He was subsequently baptized under that conquistador’s name and, beneath a philosophy of the Indian as potential subject and the Spanish kingdom as natural heir to its Native predecessors, allowed to conserve his position as local lord; in fact, Maya nobility gathered at his house in 1557 to settle official boundaries for their lands and towns. The meeting produced a curious document titled “Memoria de la distribución de los montes,” part of the grouping “Title of the lands of Maní” collected in the *Papeles de los Xiu de Yaxá* (Quezada and Harada 2001). In it,

⁷⁷ “habló a don Juan Uz, hijo del dicho don Diego, y le dijo que por qué no enviaba los ídolos a su padre para que viniese, el cual dijo y respondió a este testigo que su padre se había levantado testimonio y que para que se cumpliese lo que había confesado andaba buscando los ídolos entre los indios prestados para los enviar.”

the Maya used their own numeric system to count days while also adopting Spanish calendric units, including months and years. It included a similar coexistence in concepts of space between *uay* (“here”) defined as an Indigenous municipality, or *cabildo indio*, with strict boundaries established beneath the authority of the Spanish government, and *uay* defined as the diverse and geographically dispersed population that accepted Kukum Xiu, or Francisco de Montejo Xiu, as its legitimate ruler.

These details demonstrate that by the 1560s, Francisco de Montejo Xiu was well-accustomed to navigating his power against the tumultuous map of the colonial imaginary. His success in doing so may have been what ultimately drew colonizers’ attention and ire: in 1561, one year prior to the events in Maní, he was charged with drunkenness and adultery and sentenced to being whipped and stripped of his honorable titles. Apparently, however, Xiu’s rank among the Maya survived despite this punishment. One year later and nearly fifteen years after his baptism, he was accused of idolatry; Landa went so far as to identify Xiu as the genesis of the problem in Maní, writing of “an Indian lord of this town named Francisco de Montejo [Xiu], who was and is imprisoned by the Holy Office for idolatry and witchcraft and for violent indications that he has been the main cause of the ills of this province” (Scholes and Adams 70).⁷⁸ During the *auto de fe* on July 12, 1562, Xiu was whipped again alongside other Native lords, his hair was cut off, and his titles were taken from him once more, clear evidence that the Spaniards understood something that they never confronted directly—namely, his first demotion hadn’t stuck. Landa went further by claiming that Xiu had ordered his subjects, unsuccessfully, to set fire to Maní after the *auto de fe*, and he requested that Quijada allow him to relocate the trials to Mérida, a request Quijada

⁷⁸ “un indio señor de este pueblo llamado Francisco de Montejo [Xiu], el cual estaba y está preso por el Santo Oficio por idolatrías y hechicerías y por indicios que hay violentos de que él ha sido la causa principal de los males de esta provincia.”

granted. Xiu eventually admitted to idolatry and produced some satisfactory idols, permitting him to live to protest Landa's official exoneration and reinstatement in the Yucatán region five years later.

In the letter that Xiu—still recognized as *halach uinic*, or head cacique—wrote alongside his fellow Maya lords, he related and explained the Maya's picking up and donning of idolatry as a gimmick adopted for survival beyond the border of White thought. This border represented not just the limits of that thought, but also the disintegration of the Native body, and in this case, of Xiu's own body. Baldwin writes that “I did not intend to allow the white people of this country to tell me how I was, and limit me that way, and polish me off that way. And yet, of course, at the same time, I was being spat on and defined and described and limited, and could have been polished off with no effort whatsoever” (*The Fire Next Time* 42). The danger that Baldwin describes is not metaphorical or allegorical, but corporeal; it is the threat of torture and death at the hands of a White subject who knows only to “define,” “describe,” and “limit” when responding to an Othered body that lives beyond or outside of its definitions, descriptions, and limitations. It is literally a matter of life and death.

Mary Douglas' work on boundary maintenance and matter out of place (1966) continues to be instructive for understanding the twin reactions of repulsion and obsessive anxiety when a system is confronted by its own liminality. Much like “our own notions of dirt that [use] a kind of omnibus compendium which includes all the rejected elements of ordered systems,” the hastily built inquisition headed by Landa and the bodily torture carried out by the Franciscans reveal how uneasy actors bring classification procedures to bear on something that is misplaced or unplaceable: “Where there is dirt there is a system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements”

(Douglas 36). Idolatry functioned as an element that could be named, thereby finding a home within and reinforcing the overall organizational system of the epistemological map of the colonizers—a map inhabited by inventions. The cave filled with statues outside of Maní and frequented by Maya individuals willing to discuss their use lay far beyond the edges of Spanish constructions of the Indian and therefore beyond the edges of the colonizer's construction as Self. Were the same Natives who came to mass and school, who took communion, and who sang the *Ave María* also returning to their caves and statues and seeing *no contradiction* in the matter whatsoever? The dislocation that Ciudad Rodrigo felt upon seeing the heaps of statues on San Miguel Arcángel's patio precipitated an unpleasant encounter with the Veil that the White subject avoids by only seeing the images he projects upon it. In this moment, reality deviated from its colonial mapping.

In the resultant anxiety around the supremacist's dominance, or lack thereof, of his surroundings, the letter written by Xiu and his counterparts displays how Native actors creatively and resourcefully appropriated the gimmick of idolatry in order to escape a beyond-the-border region of bodily disarticulation. They sewed up the sundered fourth wall of colonial performance with their confessions, re-projecting images on the Veil, reentering the colonizer's zone of the imaginable, and daring to survive. This gimmick, therefore, worked to associate the Native body with a fabricated identity, and thus create a possible road forward in the make-believe that guided the supremacist colonizer's interaction with the real as directed by the dynamics of fantastical colonial power. Simply put, the colonizer could not repair his own wound and demanded that the Native do so. At the same time, the existence of the gimmick did not just shore up the colonial imaginary. It also directly contradicted it by throwing into bold relief the mechanics of its construction. We know this because many Spanish colonists and missionaries recognized the

gimmick for what it was—and in the case of Palomar, actively helped Native actors to carry it out. Yet despite these troubling waves, efforts to maintain the imaginary through forced confessions remained in place rather than direct confrontation with the boundaries themselves, which White superiority depended upon making invisible.

The Yucatán Inquisition has been widely treated in academic literature. Scholes and Roys undertook a detailed comparative analysis of related historic documents and extracted data on idolatry and human sacrifice to prove each's existence in post-conquest Yucatán (*Fray Diego de Landa and the Problem of Idolatry in Yucatán* 1938). Tozzer (1941) argues “that the thousands of idols collected and destroyed could not have been fabricated out of the imagination,” with the prominent Greenleaf (1994) and Gibson (1964) agreeing that the incident demonstrated that the Church “touched but did not remold native habits” (374) of deity worship and sacrificial practices. Gibson writes that “[a]lthough it cannot really be demonstrated, it may be assumed that the pagan components of modern Indian religions have survived in an unbroken tradition to the present day” (134), while Greenleaf summarizes, “It is certain that the Mexican Holy Office of the Inquisition was no more successful than the larger structure of the Spanish church in forcing the Indians to acculturate” (374). Tozzer agrees, asserting that the presence of recurrent idolatry and human sacrifice can be understood as a fully tested fact in mid-sixteenth century Yucatán.

What these scholars fail to recognize, however, is that—as Tavárez (2011) states—“idolatry as a legal and social category could only be willed into existence by the concerted action of accusers and suspects in a courtroom” (2). Idolatry, which we have already established as an invented category whose composition and severity changed across space and time, functioned as a complex charge that implied a specific understanding of Christian doctrine as read at a specific moment in a specific place. The Maya's first confessions demonstrated an Other logic around the

subject, while idolatry was attached to these events due to the supremacist's inability to accept that logic's existence, the Maya's capacity to elaborate it, or the supremacist's own capacity to dialogue with it. It was Native creativity that equipped Maya agents like Xiu and his fellow nobles to interact with constructions that assumed their incapacity to interact, allowing them to move both inside and outside of the contradictory colonial imaginary surrounding idolatry by shoring it up and dismantling it. They survived to continue manipulating that imaginary, even to the point of leveraging the absurdities of invented Indians to lobby the Spanish government to punish the person whom they saw as their chief tormenter.

3.0 Beyond the Pale:

Fashioning the Indian as Barbarian to Manage Unthinkable Resistance

Neither civilized reason nor Christian love would cause any of those people to treat you as they presumably wanted to be treated; only fear of your power to retaliate would cause them to do that, or to seem to do it, which was (and is) good enough.

—James Baldwin, “A Letter to My Nephew”

Beyond the thriving centers of Spanish colonization where the Indian as potential subject and Indian as idolater were elaborated to address colonizers’ emerging needs, racial supremacy also had to confront the limitations of its power and influence among Indigenous groups that markedly and consistently resisted Spanish expansion over time. Acknowledging these limitations emerged as the most delicate of dances. First, colonizers could not surrender the legitimate right to claiming and settling land as they had built it through the tool of evangelization, because to do so would be to surrender the very fact of the colony itself. Second, they could not identify any rational basis upon which to reject Christian doctrine and Spanish civil society or allow that the project of evangelization as it had been designed was inadequate. Their colonizing identity, after all, fed from its naturalized superiority, eliminating the possibility of the self-sight that enables reflection. Unable to look at these stubbornly resistant Natives and see rational actors, colonizers sketched the outline of another invented Indian: the Indian as barbarian. Due to his inherent inadequacies and immoral nature, this Indian was not the target of evangelization, but rather strategies of what Spanish officials termed “pacification.”

Considering the Renaissance philosophy of writing he outlines, Mignolo (1992) traces illiteracy and absence of letters as the foundation of Spanish representations of the barbarian in colonial America. He notes the second of four classes of barbarians defined by Las Casas and Sepúlveda—those who “lack a form of literal expression which is to their language as Latin is to ours and, finally, they do not practice or study letters, and these people are known as barbarians . . . namely, because they lack a certain talent or quality” (*Apologética historia* 638). While Las Casas and Vitoria, following the vein of Aquinas and Aristotle, recognized illiteracy as emblematic of a type of barbarianism, Las Casas also added that some illiterate peoples may “in every other respect . . . be considered wise and refined, and they are neither ferocious, odd or rough” (638). As writings by Cortés and Díaz del Castillo confirm, colonizers were dazzled by the sophistication of so-called illiterate cultures; as Mignolo points out, Sahagún took special care to document the Mexica’s elaborate verbal behavior and advanced rhetoric to establish their civility despite their lack of written letters. That is, illiteracy was an unstable signifier of barbarianism, interpreted differently according to context. The most stable element of barbarianism as defined by the elaborators of the Spanish colonial imaginary is not mentioned by Mignolo: resistance.

The colonist Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, for example, used the term “pacification” to refer to a war of conquest whose ultimate aim was the submission of rebellious Natives to Church and Crown. That is, “pacification” did not refer to a peaceful process, but rather the implicitly and explicitly violent means by which submission was achieved. When discussing the king’s response to an Indigenous rebellion on the island of Hispaniola in 1519, two years before Cortés’ conquest of Tenochtitlan, Oviedo wrote, “and not wanting to come to obedience for the sake of peace, war of fire and blood was to be made upon them, very fitting, in such a way that punishment would not

be lacking in proportion to their merits” (125).⁷⁹ Francisco de Barrionuevo, a military captain sent to achieve this peace, stated to a Native chief: “If you love the life of you and yours, you will love the royal service and peace that His Majesty offers you, you will free your soul and the souls of many” (131).⁸⁰ In his *Historia de las Indias*, Bartolomé de Las Casas himself evaluated the use of the word “*pacificar*” in Oveido:

Following the dead, [the *conquistadores*] distributed the other subjugated among themselves, which is the objective of the wars that they call conquests (and this Oviedo calls in his *Historia* “*pacificar*,” along with all those who boast of themselves as *conquistadores*), in order to throw [the Natives] into the mines and work them on other farms and jobs, where they were eventually consumed and used up. . . This fruit [the depopulation of the islands] has come and comes from the pacification that Oviedo speaks of at every step. . . And it is a sight to be seen how Oviedo aggrandizes and exaggerates them, like people who have done great feats, and all are gentlemen and noble people, according to him, those who make these works happen here. (388-391)⁸¹

Las Casas demonstrated how, during the Spanish territorial conquest of Mexico, “pacification” was understood as a euphemism for genocide committed against certain Native bodies through killings and slavery. His tongue-in-cheek remark hints, however, that the process of pacification was *framed* quite differently.

⁷⁹ “e no queriendo venir a su obediencia por bien de paz, le fuese fecha la guerra a fuego e a sangre, muy en forma, de manera que no faltase el castigo a proporción de sus méritos.”

⁸⁰ “Si amáredes vuestra vida e la de los vuestros, amaréis el real servicio e la paz que os ofrece Su Majestad, libraréis vuestra ánima e las de muchos.”

⁸¹ “Después de los cuales muertos, los demás sojuzgados repartiéronlos entre sí, que es el fin de sus guerras que llaman conquistas (y esto llama Oviedo en su *Historia* *pacificar*, y todos los que se jactan de conquistadores) para los echar a las minas y ocuparlos en las otras granjerías y trabajos, donde al cabo los consumieron y acabaron . . . Este fruto ha salido y sale de la pacificación que dice Oviedo a cada paso . . . y es de ver cómo los encarece y sublima Oviedo, como quien ha hecho grandes hazañas, y todos son caballeros y gente noble, según él, los que a hacer estas obras acá pasan.”

The legality of such methods is often traced back to Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, the philosopher and theologian that history has deemed Las Casas' nemesis due to their encounter in the Valladolid debates of 1550-1551. Sepúlveda understood natural law differently than Vitoria and Las Casas, who argued for certain rights and obligations attributed to all mankind as potential subjects of Christ. According to Sepúlveda, this natural law only applied to nations that could be understood as civilized according to judgement of wise and virtuous men, a code for those verified by a supremacist identity. Just as a doctor should be trusted with determining the healthy from the sick, Sepúlveda would trust the judgement only of the world's elect, or the culturally advanced, to determine who was civilized and who was not. While all humans were afflicted with sensual appetites, thereby inclining them toward sin and ruination, natural reason—God's eternal law written into human hearts, "the one that declares, in the conscience of good men, what is good and just, what is bad and unjust" (Sepúlveda 67)⁸²—propelled them toward good. This law was not present solely in Christians; to the contrary, Aristotle was one of the philosophers most admired by Sepúlveda and someone who Sepúlveda understood to be a key antecedent to his own work. However, other men ruled by their natural appetites had allowed these desires to completely corrupt their capacity for natural reason, and as a result, reduced themselves to a state of inferiority in which they forfeited their rights and obligations beneath natural law.

Via this reasoning, Sepúlveda pushed his argument that Indians were morally and socially inferior to their European counterparts due to their bodies being ruled by earthly desires as opposed to their spiritual inclinations:

⁸² "la que declara, en la conciencia de los hombres de bien, lo que es buen y justo, lo que es malo é injusto"

Because it is written in the book of Proverbs: "He who is a fool will serve the wise." Such are barbarian and inhumane peoples, alien to civil life and peaceful customs. And it will always be just and in accordance with natural law that such people submit to the empire of more cultured and humane princes and nations, so that, thanks to their virtues and the prudence of their laws, [the inhumane peoples] lay down barbarism and reduce themselves to a more humane and civilized life. to the cult of virtue. And if they reject such an empire, it may be imposed on them by means of arms, and such war will be just, as natural law declares. (Sepúlveda 85)⁸³

By claiming that this barbaric Indian was guided by compulsions of the flesh as opposed to the reasonings of the spirit, Sepúlveda reasoned that it was naturally just for these Indians to be ruled by a Christian empire, and that if they resisted this correct order of things, they were interrupting an innate balance toward peace and natural law and therefore merited subjugation via war, "and this has as its objective the fulfillment of the natural law for the great good of the vanquished, so that humanity may learn from Christians, so that they become accustomed to virtue, so that with sound doctrine and pious teachings they prepare their spirits to gladly receive the Christian religion; and as this cannot be done until after they have been subjected to our empire, the barbarians must obey the Spaniards, and when they refuse they may be compelled" (94-95).⁸⁴

Using Aristotle's idea of natural slaves and Augustine's argument that the pursuit of peace must

⁸³ "Porque escrito está en el libro de Proverbios: "El que es necio servirá al sabio." Tales son las gentes bárbaras é inhumanas, ajenas á la vida civil y á las costumbres pacíficas. Y será siempre justo y conforme al derecho natural que tales gentes se sometan al imperio de príncipes y naciones más cultas y humanas, para que merced á sus virtudes y á la prudencia de sus leyes, depongan la barbarie y se reduzcan á vida más humana y al culto de la virtud. Y si rechazan tal imperio se les puede imponer por medio de las armas, y tal guerra será justa según el derecho natural lo declara."

⁸⁴ "y ésta tiene por fin el cumplimiento de la ley natural para gran bien de los vencidos, para que aprendan de los cristianos la humanidad, para que se acostumbren á la virtud, para que con sana doctrina y piadosas enseñanzas preparen sus ánimos á recibir gustosamente la religión cristiana; y como esto no puede hacerse sino después de sometidos á nuestro imperio, los bárbaros deben obedecer á los españoles, y cuando lo rehúsen pueden ser compelidos."

include compelling and fighting others for its long-term preservation, Sepúlveda contended that barbarian Indians had to be submitted to their natural superiors by force.

What characteristics determined the Indian to be a barbarian, or controlled by his carnal appetites and not his spirit? Sepúlveda offered several answers. First, that he lacked prudence and humanity because he lacked literacy, having kept no written record even of his own origins except “certain obscure and vague things”⁸⁵ (105) and possessing no written laws. Second, that he violated natural law with his warlike nature and his “monstruous hunger for the flesh of their enemies”⁸⁶ (105), a reference to the ghastly sin of cannibalism that exceeded all human depravity and which even most pagan peoples rejected as against human nature. Third, that he was a coward, since thousands and thousands of these Indians fled before very few Spaniards; in fact, their greatest leader, Moctezuma, had found it impossible to overcome only a few hundred Spanish soldiers headed by Cortés. Fourth, that his sins in general were so horrendous and abhorred by God—to anthropomorphism, Sepúlveda added incest, bestiality, and idolatry—that he would be unable to choose to follow natural reason even if he tried.

Not only was war justified in this case, but it would demonstrate a lack of Christian mercy if Spaniards elected *not* take up arms. While they would gain some benefit from such battle, for the Indians the reward would be far greater: “Just as we are obliged to show the way to wandering men, so the law of nature and of human charity obliges us to bring the heathen to knowledge of the true religion . . . and if we do not do so, we do not comply with the law of nature or the order of Christ, who commands us to do onto other men what we would like them to do onto us”

⁸⁵ “cierta cosa obscura y vaga”

⁸⁶ “hambre monstruosa de las carnes de sus enemigos”

(Sepúlveda 137).⁸⁷ Barbaric Indians could not be forced to believe in Christ, which was an act of free will, but their worst impulses could be curbed, thereby removing their souls from the blackest of the moral danger in which they had placed themselves.

The act of not being Christian, then, was not itself enough to deem a people “barbarian.” This designation was made according to two different evaluations: first, the degree of their sins and whether or not those sins violated the natural law that separated men from animals, and second, whether or not the people in question recognized their own inferiority and submitted to the rule and judgement of virtuous men, i.e. the colonizing Self. This, of course, created a closed loop of double reasoning—Indians either recognized their inferiority and acquiesced to the legitimacy of Spanish rule, or they did not do so and thereby proved that inferiority twofold. Within such a construction, the central Self’s mastery was reinforced from all sides. Resistance, or any lack of acknowledgement of the colonizer’s ascendancy and authority, would be met with “merciful” violence beneath the reasoning of “*amor al prójimo*”—love thy neighbor. If the Indian as potential subject was distinguished by his meekness, gentleness, obedience, and peaceful nature, making him a prime candidate for the salvation of his soul, the Indian as barbarian was his shadowy opposite. In an echo of Columbus and later Motolinía, Vasco de Quiroga—the first bishop of Michoacán—wrote in 1531 that “[the people of Michoacán] know not how to resist anything they are ordered to do . . . and are so docile that the Christian teaching can be impressed upon them if diligence is used, for they are naturally humble, obedient, indifferent to the world and to nakedness, going barefoot and bareheaded, with long hair, as the apostles were accustomed to go” (in Braden

⁸⁷ “Así como estamos obligados a mostrar el camino á los hombres errantes, así la ley de naturaleza y de caridad humana nos obliga á traer á los paganos al conocimiento de la verdadera religión . . . y de no hacerlo no cumpliremos la ley de naturaleza ni el precepto de Cristo, que nos manda hacer con los demás hombres lo que quisiéramos que hiciesen con nosotros.”

203). In the barbaric Indian, these “simple” qualities—nakedness and poverty—became signs of his corrupted nature and lack of civility, and any docility he showed was transformed into cowardice while any aggression became a symbol of bestiality. In this way, the Indian as barbarian was meant to enumerate, label, and codify certain Indian behavior, namely resistance, so that it, too, could be encompassed within the colonial map of the domination of things.

Acosta made ample recourse to the image of the Indian as barbarian to describe those peoples of Mexico that had still not been unequivocally conquered by the end of the sixteenth century. As he explained in his summary of Mexican history:

Today there are in New Spain this kind of people, who live from their bow and arrows, and they are very harmful because in order to commit evil and assaults, they organize themselves and join together, and the Spaniards have not been able, by goodness or by harm, by skill or by force, to reduce them to law and obedience, because as they have neither towns nor a specific place, fighting with them is purely the mounting of wild beasts, which spread through and scourge the roughest and most hidden mountainous regions . . . And it is of this kind of barbarian Indians that one speaks . . . when one says that they need to be compelled and restrained with some honest force, and that it is necessary to teach them first to be men, and then to be Christians. They mean these same [Indians] that were those who in New Spain they call Otomies, who are commonly poor Indians, and inhabit rough land. (439)⁸⁸

⁸⁸ “Hoy día hay en la Nueva España de este género de gente, que viven de su arco y flechas, y son muy perjudiciales porque para hacer mal y saltar, se acaudillan y juntan, y no han podido los españoles, por bien ni mal, por maña ni fuerza, reducirlos a policía y obediencia, porque como no tienen pueblos ni asiento, el pelear con éstos es puramente montar fieras, que se esparcen y escoden por lo más áspero y encubierto de la sierra . . . Y de este género de indios bárbaros, se habla . . . cuando se dice que tienen necesidad de ser compelidos y sujetados con alguna honesta fuerza, y que es necesario enseñallos primero a ser hombres, y después a ser cristianos. Quieren decir que de estos mismos eran los que en la Nueva España llaman otomíes, que comúnmente son indios pobres, y poblados en tierra áspera.

This is an example of simplistic living and poverty being interpreted not as virtues, but as barbarianism. The Otomí people were viewed as barbarians because of their material destitution, their dispersed population over inhospitable terrain, their warlike nature (“viven de su arco y flechas”), and overall, their tireless resistance to Spanish domination.

Acosta believed that these individuals needed to be forced to comply with the colonial order through violence because they had more in common with animals than with men—first they had to be taught to be human, and then they, like other Indians, could be taught to be Christians. Accordingly, he categorized them at a lower stage of spiritual and civilizational evolution than their “docile” counterparts who operated within Spanish colonial jurisdiction. Sepúlveda stated it a necessity “that those whose natural condition is such that they must obey others, if they refuse their rule and there is no other recourse, be dominated by arms” (53).⁸⁹ Acosta contrasted the barbaric Otomis with the civilized Nahua people, *nauatlaca*, “which means people who explain themselves and speak clearly, unlike that other people, barbarian and lacking reason” (Acosta 439).⁹⁰ Like the Romans conquered the babbling tribes, the Nahua conquered the territories of central Mexico. Those who escaped their conquest would now be conquered by Christianity, whose ambassadors—in the vein of the Old Testament Israelites—were justified, and indeed, responsible for combatting them with fire and fury in order to promulgate peace.

The political impact of the invented Indian as barbarian can be most clearly seen in the act of the *requerimiento*, or the Requirement, a text elaborated as part of the 1512 “Ordenanzas para el tratamiento de los indios.” It was prepared by Juan López de Palacios Rubio, a staunch supporter

⁸⁹ “que aquéllos cuya condición natural es tal que deban obedecer a otros, si rehúsan su gobierno y no queda otro recurso, sean dominados por las armas.”

⁹⁰ “que quiere decir gente que se explica y habla claro, a diferencia de esa otra bárbara y sin razón”

of monarchical power and territorial conquest who—like Sepúlveda and Vitoria—never crossed the Atlantic himself. Palacios Rubio argued that no one, including the Spaniards, was entitled to take away Native property either before or after their conversion, with the glaring exception of those operating under what he deemed “just cause,” which Christiane Birr comments worked as a never-ending fountain of resource for Spanish agents.

In discussing what constituted just cause, Palacios Rubio explicitly mentioned Native refusal to admit Christian missionaries to travel and teach freely in their lands, as well as the denial of Christian authority (in Birr 272). He was called upon by King Fernando II, Carlos V’s father, to draw up the *requerimiento*. This text was to be read out loud to Natives by *conquistadores*, and it ensured that the arriving party informed the Natives about to be conquered how God, creator of the world, had chosen Peter and his successors in Rome as monarchs of the world, with higher authority than all other rulers on earth. One of those successors, Alexander VI, had given possession of the Americas and its inhabitants to the King of Spain, together with a responsibility to ensure their conversion to the true religion of Christianity. As a result, the Natives in question could recognize the conquering army’s authority and receive their rights as free Christian subjects, or they could resist their arrival, be codified as barbaric Indians, and incite immediate just war based on the line of reasoning laid out by Sepúlveda that saw any resistance as an impediment to natural law and a clear hallmark of savagery. If these Natives proved themselves to be savages, then they would be killed, their women and children enslaved, and their belongings taken.

This imposing text was understood to be a fair explanation of the natural order that undergirded all things and an adequate warning of what opposing this order would inevitably cause: a war waged with compassion so that Indians might see the error of their ways and reclaim some slim possibility of salvation. Sepúlveda added, “Not only do I say that we must conquer

barbarians so that they will listen to our religious teachers, but also that threats and terror should be added to doctrine and admonishment . . . and on this I have the authority of St. Augustine . . . ‘If they are terrified and not taught, domination will seem wicked; but on the contrary, if they are taught and not terrorized, they will harden themselves in the old ways and become slower and lazier to enter the path of salvation’ (147).⁹¹ Terror became a merciful act, making fear itself a policy against those who did not recognize Spanish dominance. As the *requerimiento* stated:

We shall take your wives and your children, and shall make slaves of them, and as such shall sell and dispose of them as their Highnesses may command; and we shall take away your goods, and shall do all the harm and damage that we can, as to vassals who do not obey, and refuse to receive their lord, and resist and contradict him; and we protest that the deaths and losses which shall accrue from this are your fault, and not that of their Highnesses, or ours, nor of these who come with us. And that we have said this to you and made this Requirement, we request the notary here present to give us his testimony in writing, and we ask the rest who are present that they should be witnesses of this Requirement (in Hanke 33).

The Requirement document was extremely legalistic, and the image of a conquistador reading such a high-stakes text in Spanish to Natives who did not speak Spanish or live within the Judeo-Christian world that it so absolutely references seems more than a bit absurd. It also seemed absurd to some observers at the time.

⁹¹ “no solo digo que debemos conquistar á los bárbaros para que oigan á nuestros predicadores, sino también que conviene añadir á la doctrina y á las amonestaciones las amenazas y el terror . . . y tengo sobre esto la autoridad de San Agustín . . . ‘Si se los aterra y no se les enseña, la dominación parecerá inicua; pero al revés, si se les enseña y no se les infunde terror, se endurecerán en la costumbre Antigua y se harán más lentos y perezosos para entrar en el camino de la salvación.’”

Oveido, whose portrayal of Francisco de Barrionuevo reading the *requerimiento* in Hispaniola is included above, was sent by the Governor of Cuba to accompany a reconnoitering group of about three hundred men who had set off from Santa Marta. Hanke (1949) notes that Oveido subsequently provided the first recorded instance we have of an attempt to read this formidable document to Natives, where the author, upon entering a deserted Native town, declared that “it appears to me that these Indians will not listen to the theology of this Requirement, and that you have no one who can make them understand it; would your Honor be pleased to keep it until we have some of the Indians in a cage, in order that he may learn it at his leisure and my Lord Bishop explain it to him?” (in Hanke 33-34). He then handed the document to the group’s captain, who “took it with much laughter, in which all those who heard the speech, joined” (in Hanke 34). This laughter is telling—through the refraction provided by Oveido’s joking image of Indians in a cage, the company laughed at its invented Indians. Of course the Natives they encountered on the ground could not understand the *requerimiento*; they needed to be taught Spanish first. And yet how could they not also have been laughing at *themselves* via the ludicrousness of the policy that they were sent to carry out, a policy crucial to their claim of conquest itself? Did they not see that they, too, searching for Natives to whom to read the *requerimiento*, were simulated? Hanke’s listing of the outlandish ways in which the formalities of the *requerimiento* were rendered are notorious, and Las Casas in particular complained about them: the *requerimiento* read to empty homes when no Natives could be found, *conquistadores* muttering its phrases on the edges of sleeping towns before attacking, ship captains reading the text when they were still on board and then sending out enslaving parties to unsuspecting islands, and other absurdities.

Was the *requerimiento*, then, meant for Natives at all? The evidence demonstrates that it was not. Written in Spanish according to the Spanish juridical and theological tradition and in

response to the great Spanish question—is this treatment and this undertaking just, or more centrally, how can we still be who we think we are in the wake of this New World?—the text is notable because it spoke to an empty placeholder, a constructed Indian referred to in the second-person “you,” an Indian who did not exist. Much like Oveido pontificating to an empty village, the *requerimiento* was not directed at any real individual, and the men in charge of delivering it knew this to be true. This is exactly why they muttered it to trees, empty homes, and on ships still offshore; reading a document aloud that condemned its targets to servitude or death performed the same function whether it was carried out before a rock or before Indigenous peoples who could not understand what was being said, by groups of colonizers who could not understand what Natives said in return.

That function was to root in place a White way of being in the world by naturalizing a dominance that was anything but natural. What the *requerimiento* refused to recognize was not just that it was speaking to an invented Indian, which some Spaniards were able to laugh about, but also that it was speaking from an imagined Self, or a subject as equally simulated as its object—and about this they could not directly laugh.

What relevance did Alexander VI’s bull have in lands that he did not even know existed, and never visited? How could his claim carry any more legitimacy than those made by Native rulers and peoples? How could one differentiate the White origin stories and reasonings with which supremacist subjects attempted to solve these problems from the Native histories that Acosta termed “*lleno de mentira y ajeno de razón?*” (119). Were Christopher Columbus’ search for hidden Japanese words in the Taino language, Acosta’s transformation of key figures in Mexica history into demons, and Cortes’ argument that his forces had been aided by the visual appearance of the Virgin Mary any less ridiculous than Native worshipping of a different set of images that did not

include Christ? The *requerimiento* was not made to prevent a specific behavior, but rather to prevent the asking of a specific question by the supremacist subject about itself. This text did so by demanding awe, fear, and acquiesce from the inferior rest, and the invented Indian as barbarian translated any failure to oblige into yet another coded representation that could be classified by an order that declared its own hegemony across not only territories it controlled, but—above all—those it did not.

In his second letter to Carlos V, Cortés described how the nobles of Churultecal, today known as Cholula, plotted to kill him and the men of his company. He stayed in the city for three days, and during that time received less attention than that to which he was accustomed when among Native populations. Eventually, a woman spoke with Cortés' Native interpreter, Doña Marina, and warned her to escape and seek shelter before an imminent attack that was to be carried out in the dead of night. Doña Marina told Cortés about the plan, and Cortés called the city leaders into a meeting upon which he then opened fire. In the resulting carnage, he estimated that “in two hours more than three thousand men were killed” (73).

Gómara gave different numbers—a five-hour battle that took the lives of six thousand men or more—and graphically described the destructive behavior carried out by the Christians in retaliation for the barbarism of these Indians as shown by their refusal to recognize Spanish dominance and legitimacy:

The Spaniards burned all the houses and towers where they met resistance and drove out the inhabitants. They were dripping with blood and walked over nothing but dead bodies. . . . [The Indians] were urged to surrender but refused, and so they were burned along with the temple, while they complained to their gods how badly the gods had treated them in failing to come to their aid and the defense of their city and sanctuary.

The city was put to the sack. Our men took the gold, silver, and featherwork, and the Indian friends a quantity of clothing and salt, which is what they most desired, and then destroyed everything they could, until Cortés ordered them to stop. (129)

Cortés asked the surviving noblemen “for what reason they had wished to kill me so treacherously,” (74), and Gómara added the version of the *requerimiento* that followed: “For this piece of wickedness they would all die, and as a reminder of their treachery the city would be destroyed and no trace of it would remain . . . The Cholulans were terror-stricken” (128). After the slaughter they confessed everything, answering that they had been forced to do it by Moctezuma’s ambassadors from another province, Culua. Cortés believed their story and released them “[a]fter having spoken to them at length concerning their error . . . and on the following day the whole city was reoccupied and full of women and children, all unafraid, as though nothing had happened . . . After fifteen or twenty days which I remained there the city and the land were so pacified and full of people that it seemed as if no one were missing from it, and their markets and trade were carried on as before” (74).

The inhabitants of Churultecal first refused to acknowledge Cortés’ supremacy over their bodies and their territory. They did not concede him as a legitimate force at all—instead of meeting the Spaniards on a battlefield, as one would do with an enemy state, they schemed to kill them secretly at night, an act which—besides being cowardly—belittled its target. Such “treachery,” as Cortés referred to it, demonstrated their barbaric ways and permitted Cortés to use whatever means necessary to pacify both the city and its people. His remedy of a bloody massacre, he explained to Carlos V, was the perfect solution—the lords of Churultecal recognized their mistake, and the city immediately reverted to a broad peace even more complete than the one that had preceded it because Cortés was even able to broker friendly relations between Churultecal and the rival state

Tlaxcala. Churultecal's nobility even pointed Cortés to another nest of barbaric Indians: Culua. Therefore, Sepúlveda's words about the benefits of terror on a barbaric population were fully realized here, with the absurd image of Churultecal humming along two weeks later as if the massacre of thousands of its citizens had never happened. "Since those troubles," Cortés explained, "they have all been and continue to be very faithful vassals of Your Majesty and very obedient in whatever I, in Your Royal name, have requested of them, and I believe that they will remain so" (75). The converted barbarian suddenly had the potential to become a Christian and Spanish subject, shaping him from one fixed star to another in the White constellation of Native bodies.

Cortés story in Culua, however, had a different ending. According to Churultecal's nobles, officials in the province of Culua had ordered the secret attack on Cortés and his company. This, to Cortés, was the unthinkable—not only had the people of Culua resisted his dominance themselves, but they also incited other Indians to do so as well, including certain neighbors who had already pledged their support to Cortés and destroyed their own idols, like the Tlaxcalans. Since even good Indians were only as good as their surrounding input of influences, Culua's dangerous "hindrance to the subjection of these parts to the service of Your Highness" (Cortés 148) could not be allowed. "I will say only that after we had made our demands for peace on Your Majesty's behalf and they had not complied, we made war on them and they fought many times with us" (146).

What fate befell these people who "did not comply," even after "many times"? Cortés continued:

I made of them slaves of which I gave a fifth part to Your Majesty's officers, for, in addition to their having killed the aforementioned Spaniards and rebelled against Your Highness's service, they are all cannibals, of which I send Your Majesty no evidence because it is so

infamous. I was also moved to take those slaves so as to strike some fear into the people of Culua and also because there are so many people that if I did not impose a great and cruel punishment they would never be reformed. (149)

His description of Culua's inhabitants reads like a greatest hits list centered on barbaric atrocities. They killed Spaniards, who had a rightful claim to the territory of New Spain, and they rebelled against their legitimate ruler, Carlos V. Most interestingly, perhaps, Cortés also decried them as cannibals—one of the greatest violations of natural law—while offering no proof to sustain the accusation, gesturing toward their supposed global notoriety as such and subsequently claiming that the Tlaxcalans had informed him of their demonic practices of eating human flesh. It is highly doubtful that the Spanish emperor, embroiled as he was in the Reformation and resulting catastrophes across Europe, would have been able to point out Culua by name as a cannibalistic territory or the Tlaxcalans as knowledgeable on the subject, but then again, the fact of the matter wasn't really the point. The point was that they were unredeemable barbarians, far too gone down the path of corruption for evangelization in their present state. Such warped natures, beneath the framework of just cause, were adequate conditions to justify slavery.

3.1 Indian as Barbarian Across Place and Space:

“A Limited Slavery”

These same justifications permitted the enslavement of specific Native peoples to continue in Mexico for more than a century, despite it being formally abolished by the New Laws in 1542. As José Cuello documents (1988), the discovery of silver in the arid highlands to the north of the Valley of Mexico and continued resistance from regional nomadic groups led to the Mixtón and

Chichimeca Wars from 1542 to 1590, during which time the “barbaric Indian” exception was amply used to rationalize the enslavement of Native peoples who then provided forced labor to the mines. Acosta wrote specifically of the Chichimeca, saying that they “did not have a superior [leader] nor recognize any, did not worship gods, and did not have rites nor any religion whatsoever” (493). Robert Jackson (2013) explores how, simultaneous with the genocidal violence waged against the Chichimeca, Augustinian missionaries created *doctrinas*, or *reducciones*, to attempt to congregate and convert members of Chichimeca groups, particularly in what is today to the north and east of Mexico City in the modern state of Hidalgo. Jackson signals that the Chichimeca were viewed as a particularly barbaric people not only because of their continued resistance to Spanish colonization, but because this resistance threatened inroads made among other populations. This point is key—like those of Culua, the Chichimeca were labeled as savages due to the possible harm they represented not just to the expansion of the Spanish colonial project, but to its existent framework.

In October of 1569, the fourth viceroy of New Spain—Martín Enríquez de Almanza—called together Franciscan, Dominican, and Augustinian representatives to discuss the legality of the wars fought against the Chichimeca. In 1574, he did so again. One of the main topics discussed at these meetings was the enslavement of Chichimeca peoples, and in both cases, the councils approved what Philip Powell (1952) terms a “limited slavery” (106). Those Indians found guilty of the act of raiding would be enslaved for thirteen years. What Powell does not explore, however, is how one could define an act of raiding during times of war, particularly when Enríquez and his advisors confirmed a policy of what they called “guerra a fuego y a sangre,” or war of fire and blood, against resistant Natives—total war. Captured leaders were executed without any investigation into the contradiction between recognizing these leaders with such harsh

punishments while at the same time denying that barbaric Indians had any form of government implying leadership. Those Indians specifically accused of assaulting colonists could be hanged or burned, or suffer the amputation of feet, hands, or fingers, while other captured Indians were typically placed in iron chains and distributed among those colonists that made up the expedition party against them.

In one unilateral direction, then, brutality served as evidence of Indians' spiritual and institutional bankruptcy. In the other unilateral direction, brutality was not only justified, but framed as an act of mercy toward both barbaric Indians and, crucially, the Indians as potential subjects whose supposedly peaceful acceptance of Christianity they put at risk. The Franciscan chronicler Gerónimo de Mendieta (1582) further emphasized the play of invented Indians against one other by advocating for the use of Chichimeca and African slaves to work in mining, thereby relieving that burden from the Nahua communities in the Valley of Mexico. In fact, he saw the Chichimeca—and the English privateer Francis Drake—as punishment visited upon colonists due to their mistreatment of these communities. While colonizing agents, as we have seen, utilized and adapted the invented Indian as potential subject and the Indian as idolater to cover the shifting grounds of early evangelization, the Indian as barbarian also served an essential purpose in ordering and justifying the extermination of Natives who continued to elude Spanish territorial domination and exist outside of the colonial imaginary.

As a result, slavery made up a crucial piece of colonial policy toward resistant Natives for decades, even despite the New Laws, and in the Chichimeca Wars it remained officially sanctioned and promoted. In fact, in September 1575 the viceregal government of New Spain provided official rules for recapturing enslaved Chichimeca Natives who had escaped, rules modeled from those drawn up for enslaved Black individuals. Powell notes that slave service was often prohibited in

the same territory where the slave had been captured, linking this to the colonists' fear of such escape (110), but I point out that fragmenting family structures and selling Native slaves across New Spain served another purpose: the shattering of resistant communities and their dispersal within settler households as a tool of erasure. The enslavement of Chichimeca Natives continued to operate under the protection of the colonial government until the arrival of a new viceroy—Marqués de Villamanrique—in 1585, but the subsequent regularity of indictments against slavetraders make it clear that the practice survived its official sunset.

Along the spatial frontiers of Spanish dominance, the imagery of an Indian who was murderous, treacherous, and lawless permitted the enslavement and trafficking of Native bodies under the legal framework of “pacification” and “just war.” Rebellious Natives were humans but not quite; although they had been made in the image of the Christian God, they had so thoroughly corrupted themselves and their natural reason by violating the separation of humans and beasts that, as Acosta told his readers, “*es necesario enseñallos primero a ser hombres, y después a ser cristianos*” (439). These Indians, disobedient of natural law and therefore lacking potential for loyal service to the Crown and the Church, were marked for execution, enslavement, and exile. Indeed, the fixed star of the barbaric Indian allowed colonizers to confront, name, and act upon another excess to their naturalized narrative of supremacy: open, unabated, and uncontrolled resistance. This image gave them an understanding of slavery that fit within the structure of universal evangelization beneath the title of pacification, and it was a tool by which they labored to make sense of a host of Native actions that they could not understand, chief among which was the failure to marvel before and acquiesce to the supremacist colonizer's inherent ideological and territorial dominance.

As we have seen in the writings of Oviedo, the irony of the term “pacification” linked inseparably to the “barbaric Indian” did not go unnoticed by the Crown and its representative, some of whom played with it and picked at its edges—Las Casas, for instance. A more complex and biting critique of the term can be found in a letter written to Felipe II on March 17, 1566 by Pablo Nazareo. In his request for royal recognition of his family’s continued rights to their former lands, Nazareo—the husband of Moctezuma’s niece—spent a lengthy amount of time discussing his own role in battling idolatry among the Mexica. He identified himself as the rector of the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco and explained that “I, the above-mentioned Don Pablo Nazareo, having disappeared with many diverse works and evils caused by idolaters, pacified for more than forty-two years, in the company of others, I pacified these Mexican provinces by more by means of the Christian doctrine than by the Spanish sword, teaching Indian children the Christian doctrine, as well as how to read, write, sing in church and assimilate into Christian customs” (in Lienhard 50). Nazareo separated the Spanish sword from Christian doctrine, and pacification from the conquest of barbarianism. Writing in Latin, he linked himself not to Cortés but to his wife’s father and uncle in a joint pacification strategy of reason instead of violence: “I pacified . . . more by means of the Christian doctrine than by the Spanish sword” (49). There is inherent power in his indirect unveiling of the smoke-and-mirror term “pacification” and his implicit disassociation from the Spaniards, who “pacify” with a sword. The contradiction is unmistakable, and I would argue that for White readers, it lay beyond the boundary of Las Casas, one of their own, criticizing the term. It entered the realm of the unthinkable: in the eyes of this Latin-speaking Native noble married to Native royalty, who is the barbarian?

3.2 The Indian as Barbarian as Trojan Horse:

Moving Beyond the Limits of Criticism in the Writings of Tezozómoc

The employment of the Indian as barbarian within a discursive map that also hosted the Indian as potential subject and the Indian as idolater created a nuanced terrain of representation, one that Native actors within early colonial Mexico recognized and deftly mobilized. An interesting passage from *Crónica mexicana* (1598), a Spanish-language history of the Mexica people penned by a Nahuatl noble and grandson of Montezuma II, Hernando de Alvarado Tezozómoc, demonstrates this mobilization through the loop of affirmation and negation of colonial imagery that emerged from the role he gave to the Otomí people.

The Otomí, a semi-nomadic tribe displaced and marginalized by the Mexica and their fellow Nahuatl groups, functioned for Tezozómoc as a foil against which the Mexica's idealism could shine all the brighter. Tellingly, the few actual pieces of dialogue given to the Otomí were spent questioning the legitimacy of the Spanish: "'Why are we the vassals of those who come? Did they beat us in just war? Ea, Chichimecas, to arms against them!', and as mountain people, they then took up arms" (440). At the chronicle's close, the Nahuatl lords of Tlaxcala commented, "They got what they deserved as untamed Otomis . . . they attacked the lord [Cortes]" (440-441). "Untamed," or *mal domado*, is a key phrase that immediately evokes the barbarous Indian imaginary associated with Sepúlveda: cruel, irrational, brutal, and resistant. Here, the Otomí working as a contrast tool with which to highlight the accomplishments of Mexica's own structured society may easily be observed. In this way, these passages move as an affirmation of colonial supremacist imagery. The author props up the invented Indians of the colonist's imagination and maneuvers them to the benefit of one Indigenous group, his own, and the detriment of another.

Yet I would like to suggest an additional, more complex reading. Within the mouth of this easily recognizable barbarian—mountain people or *gente serrana*—lay a complicated critique: “Did they beat us in just war?” Such a phrase was not accidental. By picking up the loaded term “just war,” the barbarian’s question went straight to the legitimization of the colonial project—consider the very title of Sepúlveda’s work *Demócrates segundo, sobre las justas causas de la guerra*—and thus called into question the entire colonial project itself. Because it was framed as “barbaric,” the comment passed within a shoring up of the dominant discourse, and yet could it still denaturalize its framework enough to upset a White reader, perhaps without a clear reason as to why? The comment was made by a barbarian. This alone should have invalidated it because, as Acosta might say, what else could be expected from a barbarian other than a lack of reason? At the same time, it wasn’t a completely nonsensical comment; it referenced Sepúlveda and himself and, by correlation, his intellectual forebears in the Western pantheon.

James Scott (1990) uses the term “hidden transcript” to describe moments in which avenues emerge that “insinuate a critique of power” into the public forum “while hiding behind anonymity or behind innocuous understandings of their conduct” (*xiii*). Max Harris (2010) adds that these hidden transcripts always threaten “the moment when the veil is removed and ‘the dissent of the hidden transcript crosses the threshold to open resistance.’” I suggest that in giving voice to the Otomí, Tezozómoc took advantage of a hidden transcript, but I find no evidence that he intended to insinuate the possibility of open resistance to Spanish rule. Rather, there is another threatening dimension of this transcript that is more internal than external—the peril of the colonizer touching the veil itself. By its very definition, supremacist power cannot identify its nature as performance. To do so would be to deny its own supremacy, an impossibility. The hidden transcript of Tezozómoc appeared as threatening not because it could double as a call to open resistance, but

because it speaks to a resistance to the colonizing narrative that is always straining against that narrative's surface because it is a paradoxical part of the narrative itself: the show must go on.

One can imagine Tezozómoc as holding a stack of invented Indians in his hand and choosing to play different cards at different moments. This reading is further supported by the existence of a Nahuatl-language history of the Nahuatl people that Tezozómoc, assisted by other Nahuatl historians, also produced. Just a few examples will suffice to demonstrate how dramatically different these two versions are. In *Crónica mexicáyotl*, the Nahuatl-language work, Huitzilopochtli—a principal Nahuatl deity representing war who is also pinpointed in Mexica history as the founder and first leader of the Mexica people—led the Mexica out of their place of origin, Aztlán, to search for the site of a city that would become Tenochtitlan. They fought and conquered every community they met along the way. In fact, Huitzilopochtli sought to marry the daughter of Achitometl, the chief of Culhuácan, with the explicit purpose of starting a war: “But we will not go uselessly to treat the Culhuácanos in a familiar way, rather we will start the war . . . I command you, then, go and ask Achitometl for his offspring, his maiden daughter, his own beloved daughter” (54).⁹² After Achitometl gave his blessing, the Mexica killed her and dressed a priest in her skin. As a result, her horrified father began a war: “Do you not see that my daughter has been skinned? Those wicked people will not last here: let us kill them, destroy them that they perish here!” (58).⁹³

In the Spanish-language *Crónica mexicana*, the episode was completely different. The Mexica found themselves paying tribute to three different peoples: (“*los de tepanecas*

⁹² “Mas no iremos inútilmente a tratar familiarmente a los culhuácanos, sino que iniciaremos la guerra . . . os lo ordeno, pues, id a pedirle a Achitometl su vástago, su hija doncella, su propia hija amada.”

⁹³ “¿Qué no veis que han desollado a mi hija? No durarán aquí los bellacos: ¡matémosles, destruyámosles y perezcan aquí!”

Azcapulcalco, los otros en Acalhuacan y los otros nuestros señores los de Culhuacan” (79)). Their king Huitzilihuitl—interestingly, not the man-god Huitzilopochtli—asked the king of Azcapulcalco (not Culhuacán) for “the only daughter of the flesh that our king has . . . for this occasion to have a respite from the many [burdens] that we currently have” (80).⁹⁴ The king of Azcapulcalco gave up his daughter, who married Huitzilihuitl and gave birth to a male child, “from whom he received great happiness and joy” (80).⁹⁵ Because Huitzilihuitl had entered the king’s family and, presumably, line of secession, tribute from the Mexica ceased. Eventually, however, the *tepanecas* of Azcapulcalco became divided over whether to welcome Huitzilihuitl as one of their own or only his wife and child, and those who opposed him joined with those from nearby Culhuacán to wage war on the Mexica: “The Mexicans began to take up arms and defend themselves from the Tepanecas . . . the Mexicans suffered great pain and rage from this” (59).⁹⁶ This is how the fighting began, in a completely different—and much less violent—way than in the Nahuatl-language version.

It is also important to note the different styles of governance in each account. In *Crónica mexicáyotl*, Huitzilopochtli—and later his descendants—wielded absolute rule. His *teomamas*, or priests, did his bidding. In *Crónica mexicana*, the Mexica were explicitly governed by both by a ruler and a senate (“[W]ithin a few days the Mexican Senate held a meeting . . . The one began, the oldest elder, to speak first, he spoke to the entire Mexican Senate” (79)⁹⁷), and community members had to approve of the selection of the king: “And thus, with this, the most important

⁹⁴ “su única hija carnal que tiene nuestro rey . . . por esta ocasión tener algún descanso de los muchos [cargos] que de presente tenemos.”

⁹⁵ “de que rresçibió mucho contento y alegría.”

⁹⁶ “Viéndose los mexicanos comenzados de tomar armas y defenderse de los tepanecas . . . rresçibieron gran dolor y coraje los mexicanos con esto.”

⁹⁷ “[D]ende algunos días el senado mexicano hizo junta . . . Començó el uno, el más antiguo biexo, primero en el hablar, dixo a todo el senado mexicano”

elders and priests of the Mexicans . . . all said: ‘Mexicans, Tenuchcas, Chichimecas, who can we claim for our king and lord? . . . if not our grandson, our very dear son, Huitzilohuitl, who, although he is young, he will protect, will he rule the house of Huitzilopochtli and our Mexican homeland?’ And so, all together. . . They responded as one that would be very welcomed, that they wanted him for lord and king” (79).⁹⁸ These scenes, of course, call up Western antiquity, and highlight the comparisons made between the Aztec Empire and the Greeks and Romans by writers such as Torquemada. They stood as evidence of use of reason, pointing toward and refusing Sepúlveda’s four classes of barbarian/four legitimate reasons for denying Indians their natural rights.⁹⁹

José Pantoja Reyes (2018) analyzes Tezozómoc’s work to find “the unveiling of the mechanism through which the gaze of the conqueror was turned into the ‘vision of the vanquished’” (53).¹⁰⁰ He points out that Native chroniclers such as Tezozómoc were not isolated from the hegemonic project at large, and that their works functioned as a method through which they actively participated in the creation of a new social fabric that responded to the needs of the colonizer and supported the colonial project in the Americas. That is, he attributes the perspective of Tezozómoc not to an anarchistic vision of the vanquished, as in Wachtel and Reynold’s (1977) memorable phrase, but to Tezozómoc’s intentional and active contribution to the colonial imaginary. This compelling insight, however, is quickly undercut by the reasoning that Pantoja

⁹⁸ “E así, con esto, los más principales biexos y saçerdotes de los mexicanos . . . y estos todos dixeron: ‘Mexicanos, tenuchcas, chichimecas, ¿a quién podemos demandar por nuestro rrey y señor, . . . si no es a nuestro nieto, hijo muy querido, Huitzilohuitl, que, aunque es mançebo, él guardará, rregirá la casa de Huitzilopochtli y patria mexicana?’ Y así, todos juntos . . . rrespondieron a una que sea mucho de norabuena, que a él quieren por señor y rrey.”

⁹⁹ Sepúlveda, Las Casas, and Vitoria discuss four classes of barbarian. The first class is made up of people who commit terrible acts of violence; the second includes those who do not have written language; the third do not have political institutions, like republics or monarchies, or social institutions, like marriage; the fourth is made up of “*infieles*,” or heathens and heretics who are not part of the Christian religion. Las Casas distinguishes here between those who reject Christianity and those who, by light of natural reason, are arriving to it *potentially* (*Apología*).

¹⁰⁰ “el develamiento del mecanismo a través del cual la mirada del conquistador fue convertida en la ‘visión de los vencidos’”

claims lay behind that intentionality: Tezozómoc's desire to Europeanize the Mexica in order to fit them within a Christian narrative. He argues that “[t]he *Mexicáyotl* and *Mexicana* chronicles, therefore, not only show us the dominance of the Christian cosmivision among the new ‘lettered and leading Indians,’ but rather they allow us to see the place that they wished to occupy in the Christian world” (124).¹⁰¹ According to Pantoja, the Spanish-language version directly drew from the Franciscan version of the docile, proto-Christian Indian—what we have identified as the Indian as potential subject, created before the arrival of Franciscans in Mexico—and the Nahuatl-language version dubbed an Indigenous version of this same fabrication.

I have suggested the intention of Tezozómoc's cannot be distilled down to a one-dimensional desire to exist within a Christian framework. Similarly, his performance extended beyond what Viveros (2017) identifies as a gesture of “re-elaborating Mexican history in the form of a chronicle . . . [as an] evidence of its interrelation with European models”¹⁰² and a symbol of the linkages between Europe and the Native elite. I argue that Tezozómoc operated not in terms of linkages between two separate worlds, but in images elaborated in a limited discourse and then activated in the contradictory terrain of one chaotic world, with unsettling results. The use of multiple invented Indians, their different activations across each version, and the complexities of the language used to animate them—for example, the maybe-but-not-quite critique of the Spanish conquest's validity by the disregarded Indian as barbarian in the form of the Otomí—point to a nuanced and dynamic interaction with the forms that inhabited the colonizer's limited world. Much like a programmer, Tezozómoc chose certain command lines for certain moments, meeting the

¹⁰¹ “[I]as crónicas *Mexicáyotl* y *Mexicana*, por tanto, no sólo nos muestran el lugar dominante de la cosmovisión cristiana entre los nuevos ‘letrados y principales indios’ sino que permiten ver el lugar que deseaban ocupar en el mundo cristiano.”

¹⁰² “re-elaborar la historia mexicana en forma de crónica . . . [como] evidencia de su interrelación con los modelos europeos”

invented Indians of White supremacist imagery with his own versions of those same invented Indians.

We remember that Vizenor (1994) uses the term “postindian” to describe these complex constructions. Postindians are the “the warriors of simulations” (12), or the engagement of simulations by other simulations, and according to Vizenor, they tell stories of survivance: “renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry” (Vizenor 2008: 1). He emphasizes that “[t]he practices of survivance create an active presence, more than the instincts of survival, function, or subsistence” (2008: 11). Using these simulations creates a new manifestation which moves beyond the narrative of loss and lack that the colonizer uses to describe the Native. This presence is seen throughout the work of Tezozómoc, who reorganized and pushed the boundaries of the Indian as barbarian to create a new simulation, one who lingered at the edge of the supposedly Mexica-centric narrative and argued over the notion of “just war,” one whose presence in the Spanish-language narrative may have perturbed a White reader much more than his absence in the Nahuatl-language narrative would have perturbed a Nahua reader, even if the White reader could not have verbalized the reason for his discontent: that the critique lay beyond the limits of his possible.

Viveros indicates that Tezozómoc sought to portray the Mexica as “conquerors and civilizers,”¹⁰³ an image “built and integrated into the horizon of European understanding” (2017: 188).¹⁰⁴ While I agree that the wielding of the conquest-as-pacification and occupation-as-civilization narratives upon barbaric groups of Indians, such as the Otomí, would have been familiar themes to the Spanish-speaking colonial reader, a Native taking up this role would have

¹⁰³ “conquistador y civilizador”

¹⁰⁴ “construida e integrada en el horizonte de comprensión europeo”

been less so. Nonetheless, Cortés—as we have seen—portrayed Moctezuma II and his empire’s control of the Valley of Mexico as important precursors to Spanish domain of the region, so even the idea of a Native proclaiming the Mexica as a pre-civilizing force that “prepared the way” for the Spanish, almost like John the Baptist laying the groundwork for the evangelization undertaken by Jesus, may have been an accepted trope within colonial discourse. The strange double nature of Tezozómoc’s writings, however, both in the literal duplicity of the Spanish and Nahuatl-language versions and in the carefully worded critiques of power found in the mouths of the Mexica’s enemies, show that Tezozómoc created not a European history of the Mexica, but rather inventions of inventions.

Under this reading, I disagree with Adorno’s assertion (1994, “The Indigenous Ethnographer”) that Native chroniclers like Tezozómoc—as well as Chimalpahin and Ixtlilxochitl in Mexico, and Guaman Poma de Ayala and Garcilasco de la Vega in Peru—were “ethnographers” and “historians” of Native culture, functioning as “cultural mediators” between Native and European worlds. Following Adorno, Yannakakis suggests that these actors embodied a relationship between the Native elite and the colonial state that can be summarized as “the concept of a fragile ‘colonial bargain’: a degree of native political and cultural autonomy in exchange for a grudging consent” (2008: 13). Tezozómoc produced his work eight decades after the fall of Tenochtitlan; as opposed to walking a fine line between two discrete audiences in the moments after conquest, his writing emerged from the greyer, ever-widening breach between lived experience and discursive construction. It was exactly because the Native and the White settler formed part of the same chaotic reality that he could deftly wield racialized representations and manipulate what the colonial imaginary articulated about Indians, thereby manipulating what the same imaginary articulated about the colonist himself.

Other scholars, like Viveros, make the general argument for a slow acculturation—ultimately, a cultural whitewashing—as the reason behind which Native chroniclers appear to identify with colonial structures at the expense of supposedly Native ones. Essentially, they suggest that these writers are attempting to reread their own Native history through the colonist’s eyes. Thomas Ward (2011) follows these lines in his analysis of Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, a chronicler employed by the Spanish Crown who was also a direct descendent of one of Moctezuma II’s brothers. Like Tezozómoc, Ixtlilxóchitl wrote nearly a century after the conquest of Mexico, and according to Ward, represented the creation of a transoceanic, acculturated identity that abandoned the Indigenous and turned to a budding Spanish nationhood with his use of phrases like “nuestra nación española,” our Spanish nation (Ward 231)—that is to say, Ward’s argument is that in Ixtlilxóchitl, we see a new Eurocentric hybrid identity overwriting previous Native identities.

Assimilation and claims of cultural whitewashing, however, are too simple and too insufficient an explanation for Tezozómoc’s jolting doses of sameness and difference as he navigates the colonial imaginary’s invented Indians. Indeed, his recourse to and subsequent retraction from these images appear to defy significant theories about the operation of resistance, power, and society, including those proposed by Michel Foucault in his much-adopted and much-adapted conceptualization of biopower and biopolitics. Foucault argues that the state functions via a productive power with a positive influence on human life in that it “endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations” (*History of Sexuality Volume I: The Will to Knowledge* 137), or “to put this life in order” (*History of Sexuality Volume I: The Will to Knowledge* 138). The implications of emphasizing power’s constructive ability—its ability to create and organize—as opposed to its destructive ability, whose “effects take the form of limit and lack” (*History of Sexuality Volume I: The Will to Knowledge*

83), births a new essentialism of power: its search to endlessly incorporate into itself. Forms of interaction with power from a separate and self-contained body, including through criticism and resistance, become impossible to sustain as each new discursive move is subsumed into the state.

Such an understanding of power assumes as a necessary condition that the actors who wield it can both see and know the topography upon which power is exercised, and as its topography expands, they magnify their power's creative purview accordingly in order to generate, codify, and activate new channels through which to absorb an ever-changing landscape. In a racialized colonial system, however, James Baldwin reminds us that the primary characteristic of the unnaturally naturalized supremacist subject is his inescapable ignorance around those he aims to dominate so that he might eternally ignore a crucial truth about himself: "[W]hatever white people do not know about Negroes reveals, precisely and inexorably, what they do not know about themselves" (*The Fire Next Time* 44). Far from denoting an all-knowing subject in power, the selective blindness of the colonial context allows the colonizer to mystify the brutal workings of his own power, a phenomenon Baldwin highlights when recounting his interactions with middle-aged—and White—Norman Mailer: "The world has prepared no place for you, and if the world had its way, no place would ever exist . . . [I]n the case of a Negro, this truth is absolutely naked: if he deludes himself about it, he will die" (*Nobody Knows My Name*, "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy" 279). Power is the ability to delude oneself, while being an object of that power carries the burden of the absence of delusion, because to be deluded—to not understand power and its drive to break bodies in order to hold up its vision of the world—is to die as collateral in a larger battle of world maintenance.

With his sights set on addressing the insufficiency of biopower to explain relationships between the colonizer and the colonized, Achille Mbembe (2004) molds a theory of necropolitics,

or “the power and capacity to dictate who may live and who must die” (11). Commenting on the contemporary case of Palestine, he writes that “[the state’s narrative of legitimacy] is itself underpinned by the idea that the state has a divine right to exist . . . Lying beneath the terror of the sacred is the constant excavation of missing bones; the permanent remembrance of a torn body hewn into a thousand pieces and never self-same; the limits, or better, the impossibility of representing oneself an ‘original crime,’ an unspeakable death” (27). Mbembe’s diagnosis of the creation of zones of civic, social, and biological death outside of the legitimate colonizing narrative of representation nimbly identifies “the limits, or better, the impossibility” of representing oneself, or being known as Self, within these zones. Like Foucault’s understanding of biopower, however, it again refracts the representation of the Othered as a question of the frame of the colonial Self by bestowing an omniscience to power and the powerful that fails to recognize the essential thread of the operation of colonial power: that is, the mystification of these processes on the part of the colonizer and their brutal demystification for the colonized.

Baldwin highlights this dynamic in his conversation with Mailer: “Well, I know how [power] works, it has worked on me, and if I didn’t know how power worked, I would be dead” (279). This power that works *on* him, that breaks and molds him to accommodate his body within narratives of representation, binds together discourse with physicality to make its functioning corporeal to Baldwin while simultaneously remaining unseen and unexamined by the Mailer, the supremacist subject exercising power—intentionally so, for to break the Fourth Wall that so troubles the supremacist (“‘I want to know how power works,’ Norman once said to me, ‘how it really works, in detail’”) would be to come face to face with the manufacturing of his own supremacy. Far from being unable to take on an active role against omniscient and omnipresent power, the colonized body survives this inside-out world by learning the game of representation

and actively incorporating certain elements of that body's own biology and politics into the colonizer's discursive modes, thereby harshly visibilizing particular utterances and shifting them from a zone of necropolitics—that which is literally erased to death—into biopolitics, or the mechanisms for governing life.

It is in this context that Tezózomoc included the conquest of Tenochtitlan in his Spanish-language work and *not* in his Nahuatl-language work. He aimed to communicate something in one context as opposed to the other—in Spanish, the conquest became a narrative to employ new cards of the invented Indian. At one moment, Tezózomoc related, a terrified Moctezuma decided to kill those who tried to warn him of the Spaniards' arrival, and his subjects began to lie about their visions and dreams out of fear for their lives. This plays into a vein of the barbaric Indian—the despotic tyrant—as written by Acosta, who argued that God sent the Spaniards to the Americas out of pity after watching its inhabitants suffer under tyrannical rulers. Yet how can it not also recall the Spaniards themselves, whose inquisitions—as we have seen—tortured and executed Indians, also forcing them into silence? In another moment, Moctezuma ordered his people in every village to surge to the roads and welcome the Spaniards, which throws Gómara's claim of awestruck Indians lining the streets to greet the *conquistadores* in new light. Sure, they did so because they were afraid, but not of the actual *conquistadores* themselves—rather, of their own ruler. Equally, Gómara's image of Indians not understanding horses or guns becomes mirrored in Spaniards not knowing how to drink cacao or eat certain fruits. How (un)civilized are these conquerors, anyway?

It is between these unsettling lines of harmony and dissonance that we must read Tezózomoc's barbarian Indians of the North, his "*gente serrana*" who are "*mal domados*" (440-441). As in the above examples, the author appropriated the comfortingly familiar outlines of

invented Indians and inhabited them with unnervingly unfamiliar voices. How could a colonial reader approach these constructions of their constructions? As Jean Baudrillard says, “Is the simulator sick or not, given that he produces ‘true’ symptoms?” (in Vizenor 1). The invented Indian as barbarian *must* be true, since the projected White fantasy comes to denote and overwrite the Real, but what to do with the strange critique that the Otomí speaker made up by the Nahuatl writer carries in his other fist? The question emerges: is W.E.B. DuBois’ double consciousness—“the sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (in Smith 25)—somehow made contagious?

3.3 Denying the Unthinkable:

Zapotec Leveraging of the White Incapacity for Native Rationality in Oaxaca

As the case of Tezozómoc demonstrates, a Native wielding the image of the Indian as barbarian could threaten the very discursive structure from which this same image radiated by playing both inside and outside of that discourse: using familiar outlines to say something dangerous beneath the guise of the unintelligible and irrational. In 1547 Oaxaca, Native actors mobilized the image of the barbaric Indian in equally effective ways that allow us to observe the on-the-ground and practical workings of manipulating this terrain within the colonial imaginary.

The modern-day Mexican state of Oaxaca is home to Native groups that speak fifteen distinct languages, more than any other state in Mexico. This intense linguistic and cultural diversity equally defined the region’s early colonial period, with Zapotec communities located largely to Oaxaca’s north, Mixtecs to the south, and Mixe along the coastal plain. Dominican missionaries consecrated the city of Oaxaca in 1528 and established its bishopric in 1535. In

describing early colonial Oaxaca, Chance (1991) writes that “[t]he land was poor and the native people were comparatively backward.” The men who colonized it would have no doubt agreed with his flattened and discriminatory perspective. Like Chichimeca territory to the north of Mexico City, Oaxaca—to the capital’s southwest—existed as an isolated periphery of the colonial empire in New Spain. Schmal (2006) estimates that its Indigenous population collapsed from around 1.5 million in 1520 to 150,000 in 1650, but as across the Americas in general, sparse contemporary accounts make it impossible to fix these numbers with certainty.

In any case, the community fragmentation brought by linguistic and ethnic diversity, a disastrous decline in population, and rugged mountainous terrain inspired colonial officials to attempt to centralize Native bodies in *reducciones*, or *congregaciones*. Thomas Aquinas had, after all, looked to Aristotle to draw a line between the animal who lived in solitude and the man who lived in society: “And the Philosopher writes . . . that whoever lives in solitude, is either a beast, in which case he does it out of inhumanity, or a god, and does it in order to contemplate truth” (354).¹⁰⁵ More functionally, we have discussed how bringing dispersed groups together would facilitate their conversion and participation in the forced labor system of *repartimiento*, a strategy that colonists attempted to execute in other remote areas: as we have seen, Chichimeca territory in northern Mexico and Maya lands across the Yucatán. However, the colonial Oaxacan government generally lacked the men and geographical knowledge to force Natives to reside in the towns they invented, and although systems of tribute in the form of goods and labor remained in place, these *congregaciones* largely failed (Pérez Ortiz).

¹⁰⁵ “Y el Filósofo escribe . . . que quien vive en soledad, o es una bestia, en caso de que lo haga por inhumanidad, o es un dios, si lo hace con el fin de contemplar la verdad.”

Such were the circumstances during the first days of June 1547, when Zapotec and Mixtec communities from the central valleys of Oaxaca united in revolt against Spanish rule. Alicia Barabas (2000) argues that the deep-seated impulses behind the uprising were social and economic, “since the Spanish used their *encomendados* [Natives within the *encomienda* system] to perform hard work in the gold mines they had discovered” (132-133).¹⁰⁶ The cause accepted by colonists at the time, however, stemmed from the Zapotec and Mixtec’s declaration that “a new god had appeared to them, whom they had locked up, they said, in a trunk that would be opened in the Plaza de Antequera” (Gay 1881: 371).¹⁰⁷ This new god brought about a new messianic movement, one that answered and played with the messianic message propagated by Christian religious orders. The movement was headed by a Zapotec noble from the town of Titiquipa, and held that three Indigenous leaders—one Mexica, one Mixotec, and one Zapotec—would be reborn from the past to lead an ultimate apocalyptic battle that, with divine support, would end Spanish domain in the Americas and usher in a new era of Native dominance, a sort of twist on Motolinía’s Millennial Kingdom.

The nineteenth-century historian and priest José Antonio Gay wrote that Dominican friars attempted to correct these wayward Indians, attempting to appeal to their reason: “[W]ho endangers his life for what he has not seen, being able to see and this being as easy as opening a trunk? They also promised, in the name of the king, to forgive everyone if they laid down their arms” (371).¹⁰⁸ Although we don’t know if they turned the question back on the Spaniards about

¹⁰⁶ “ya que los españoles utilizaban a sus encomendados para realizar duros trabajos en las minas de oro que habían descubierto.”

¹⁰⁷ les había aparecido un nuevo dios, á quien tenían encerrado, decían, en una petaca que se abriría en la plaza de Antequera

¹⁰⁸ “¿[Q]uién pone á peligro su vida por lo que no ha visto, pudiéndose ver y siendo tan fácil esto como abrir una petaca? Prometieron además, en nombre del rey, perdon á todos si dejaban las armas.”

their own beliefs in the unseen, we do know that two Native captains of the rebellion agreed to the ceasefire, deciding to convince the other leaders to abandon their plan and submit to Spanish overtures of peace. They asked the Dominicans if they could bring a couple of young friars with them to persuade their peers of the Spaniards' sincerity, and the Dominicans acquiesced. However, “[w]hen the other *caciques* understood that they came on a matter of peace and held the two commissioners in their hands, without listening to a single word, they immediately put them to death” (Gay 371).¹⁰⁹ These actions aligned seamlessly with the outlines of the barbarian that we have seen developed through Spanish colonial discourse: not only did the Indians reject peace, but they did so murderously and thoughtlessly, on behest of a god who none of them had seen and was supposedly locked up in a trunk. Unlike the invented Indian as idolater, who always concealed, these barbarians hid nothing—their actions were theatrically visible and garishly violent, as evidenced by the murder of the two young friars. In contrast with the potential subject, the barbarians of Oaxaca could not be convinced by the Dominicans' appeal to their natural reason, because they either had none or, perhaps more along the argument of Sepúlveda, their reason was so corrupted that it was rendered useless. As outlined by Augustine, just war would thus be the only way to defend peace.

The rebellion culminated in Indigenous insurgents attacking the town of Niaguatlan. Immediately afterwards, New Spain's viceroy, Antonio de Mendoza, charged the colonial official Alonso García Bravo with gathering testimony about the events and completing a more thorough determination their cause. García Bravo began his mission with a certain set of telling facts; in the documents he produced about the events, his opening statement holds that the “*indios de Titiquipa*”

¹⁰⁹ “[c]uando los demás caciques entendieron que se trataba de paz y tuvieron á las manos á los dos comisionados, sin escucharles una sola palabra, les dieron inmediatamente la muerte.”

(in Lienhard 54) kidnapped and killed a cleric, and that they burned the town of Niaguatlan to the ground and murdered a Spanish *vecino* named Luís Martín. Niaguatlan, today known as Miahuatlán, lay nestled in mountain valleys along a route that led from the nearly twenty-year-old city of Oaxaca to the sea. Largely isolated, it remains a strategic location in a region that has continued to see Native unrest into the twenty-first century—Mexico maintains a military base there. In 1547, the Spanish Empire sent goods and people to its Central and South American colonies via the Pacific Ocean by way of passing through Niaguatlan.

García Bravo was not present in Niaguatlan at the time of the attack. As he centered on explaining the chain of events that brought about the burning of the town and the murder of a Spaniard, he solicited and copied the testimonies of three Native men who witnessed them. One, identified as a Zapotec named Domingo, explained how before the attack the revolting Indians had come to Niaguatlan to speak about the three reborn lords, or messiahs, who would lead Natives to victory against the Spaniards during a week of great storms, in which “the earth would shake the Spaniards would end up dying, and that they were not to be afraid of the Spaniards” (in Lienhard 56).¹¹⁰ His report confirmed García Bravo’s first sentences pinpointing a heretical messianic movement as the genesis of the unrest. However, he added one additional piece of information that García Bravo *did not* emphasize, or indeed, comment on at all: “The Indians were saying . . . that they were to kill all the Christians when those who were going to Peru passed by” (56).¹¹¹ Alongside verifying the existence of the messianic movement, then, Domingo also indicated that the Zapotec and Mixtec soldiers knew about a shipment of supplies and men passing through the town on its way to aid in the territorial conquest of Peru. It piques the reader’s curiosity that

¹¹⁰ “había que temblar la tierra y acabarse de morir los españoles, y que no hubiesen miedo de los españoles.”

¹¹¹ “[D]ecían los indios . . . que habían de matar todos los cristianos cuando pasaren por allá de los que iban al Perú.”

Spanish colonial officials did not further explore this seemingly obvious motive. Instead, it appears that García Bravo's interrogations revolved around a particular set of themes: every statement that he collected focused on the Spaniard's death, the burning of buildings, and the destruction of property.

Of course, attacking an enemy's shipment is not irrational behavior at all, but a practical military tactic. Why did García Bravo, told to investigate the events that led to the attack, not devote any time or energy to unpacking its clearest motive? Why did he choose instead to doggedly explore the burning and ransacking of buildings and the killing of Spaniard Luís Martín as isolated and groundless incidents? Equally as telling—why did Domingo choose to bring the attack of the supply shipment to the forefront, even though he was questioned specifically about how Luís Martín was killed?

It is perhaps due to García Bravo's inability to identify the rational element behind the attack that his attempt to outline its impetus failed so miserably. The testimonies that he recorded are contradictory and confusing. Pedro, another Native local of Niaguatlan, identified a man named Vitipaci as the noble from Titiquipa who began the messianic movement and subsequent uprising alongside his messenger, another man named Pece. Alonso, a third witness, said that the leader's name was Pece and the messenger was actually Vitipaci. Domingo testified that Luís Martín was killed by an arrow as he attempted to gallop away on his horse, but Alonso said that he had been burned alive. Pedro said that the church survived the attack, while Domingo swore he had seen it burn to the ground. All three men, however, mentioned that Native forces sought to attack Spaniards and supplies that were meant to pass through Niaguatlan to the coast before continuing onward to Peru.

Of course, it is possible that in the chaos of the uprising, names and events were confused. It is also possible that, for Pedro, Domingo, and Alonso, the messianic prophecy and the death of a Spanish *vecino* local to the area did not make up the principal organizing framework through which they saw the attack. Instead, they saw these developments as interesting but less-than-vital asides to a more central cause. García Bravo still made sure that they provided him with what he was searching for—Alonso even said that the messianic leader’s messenger had told him personally how black robes had appeared before the rebellion’s leaders upon which they knew they were to put the Spaniards’ flesh as offerings to their new god. The reports emerged as chaotic and inconsistent exactly because García Bravo’s lens of focus did not match that of the three men. For García Bravo and his colleagues, the equivalency necessary to accept the attack as an adversarial military move was impossible beneath their conceptualization of resistance as barbaric—even animalistic. How could they reconceptualize Zapotec and Mixtec insurgents as an organized adversary group?

A few days after the attack, García Bravo noted that Spanish colonial officials decided to send a party of Natives to Niaguatlan with the goal of assessing damage done: “[T]hen . . . the *señor alcalde* [head town official] said that, because he wanted to inform the most illustrious Viceroy of this New Spain of the truth, and to find out what happened there, he called Mateo de la Cruz, *alcalde* of the Oaxaca Indians, whom he ordered to look for ten Indians to go to the said town of Niaguatlan and see with their own eyes if the church and houses were burned, and if it was true that the said Spaniard was dead, and to declare what happened” (58).¹¹² Ten men were

¹¹² “[L]uego el . . . señor alcalde dijo que, porque quiere informar al ilustrísimo señor virrey de esta Nueva España de la verdad, y para saberlo si pasa ansí, hizo llamar a Mateo de la Cruz, *alcalde* de los indios de Guaxaca, al cual le mandó que busque diez indios que vayan al dicho pueblo de Niaguatlan y vean por vista de ojos si está quemada la iglesia y casas, y si es verdad que está muerto el dicho español, y declaren lo que pasa.”

ultimately selected to carry out this task, but the next day, they appeared before the same *señor alcalde* without completing their mission. Their explanation as to why reads as such:

They declare that they went on their way until they reached Ixutla, and that there they were so afraid that they would not proceed, and because they were ten Indians and without weapons, they did not dare to advance more knowing that the town of Niaguatlan was depopulated and that the *cacique* of Ixutla had gone to Guaxolotitlan, and that along the road there was an Indian woman sacrificed next to the outskirts of Niaguatlan so that all would know that no one was to pass through there. And knowing this they agreed to turn back. (58)¹¹³

In short, they came across the *rumor* of a sacrificed Indian woman. This woman, the men said, served as some sort of universal and well-known symbol between all Natives—Zapotecs and Mixtecs alike—that no one should continue down a particular road, and in this case the road just happened to lead to Niaguatlan. While they had not seen her themselves, they told colonial officials, a chief from Ixutla had come across her. This, they insisted, is why they turned back.

What exactly made up the agreed-upon Indian sign that no one should continue along a certain road? Was it any sacrifice? A human sacrifice? A human female sacrifice? Was she marked in a particular way? The men did not say. Nonetheless, they had other reasons to not want to continue to Niaguatlan. Recommended for the mission and singled out by name in the notes of García Bravo, it seems that they were at least on friendly terms with Spanish colonial officials, and they would undoubtedly not be welcomed by the groups that sought to throw the colonizers

¹¹³ “[D]eclaran que ellos fueron por su camino hasta llegar a Ixutla, y que allí les pusieron tanto temor que no pasaran adelante, y por ser ellos diez indios y sin armas, no osaron pasar adelante más de saber que estaba despoblado el pueblo de Niaguatlan y que el cacique de Ixutla se había ido a Guaxolotitlan, y que en el camino estaba una india sacrificada junto a los términos de Niaguatlan porque supiesen que no habían de pasar nadie de allí. Y sabido esto acordaron de se volver.”

out of Oaxaca. Each man interviewed by García Bravo testified to having fled Niaguatlan out of fear for his life and could not have been particularly eager to return only a handful of days after escaping. Indeed, one can only imagine the conversation they had once away from the *señor alcalde*. How would only ten men successfully enter Niaguatlan, presumably now governed by rebel forces, in order to nonchalantly take an inventory of burned buildings and discover the fate of Luís Martín? Such a trivial errand may have foolish, and even deadly, consequences. The officials, on the other hand, appear to have done the erroneous calculus that any Indian would be able to enter the space of any other Indian. I suggest that, to circumvent their ignorance, the ten men sent to Niaguatlan mobilized the most trafficked image of Indian savagery: human sacrifice, and above all, human sacrifice of a *woman*.

Within the discursive representation through which they operated, colonial officials would have identified, coded, and processed the image of a sacrificed woman in the same way they did the murder of a Spaniard and the invention of a new god locked in a trunk: as what senseless and chaotic barbarians *did*, without even the possibility of an explanation as to why. This stands in stark contrast to the strategic military reasoning behind the attack, which they did not know how to approach, recognize, or answer. To do so would have been to read reality differently: to see themselves not as the legitimate claimants to territory, but rather as—at least in the eyes of Natives—an occupying force. This would have implied recognizing the ability of Indians to analyze, interpret, and participate in experience, and the unifying hallmark of all invented Indians was their absolute inability to do so. Under these conditions, perhaps the ten men sent to Niaguatlan understood that the image of a particularly grisly human sacrifice would answer all the officials' questions and preclude any additional ones.

Interestingly, García Bravo never explicitly linked the attack to other uprisings that had occurred earlier the same year, both to the south and closer to the coast. Barabas (2000) states that the burning of Niaguatlan was the result of an expansion of these insurrections (132). Nearly three decades later, the Augustinian missionary Guillermo de Santa María (1575) would write of the Chichimeca to the north that they killed humans “as a pleasure and a pastime, as if they killed a hare or deer” (in Jackson 208), with Jackson (30) noting that Santa María attributed the Chichimeca’s constant attacks on White settlers to their inherent cruelty and bloodlust as cultivated in them by the devil, not to their response to invaders and occupiers of their communities. The wars fought against resistant Natives were often framed this way—they were wars waged against devils and demons, with Indians serving as the vessels through which these diabolical actors incarnated their deeds and doings. This explains why García Bravo spent so much of his time interrogating Natives about the messianic movement of Titiquipa as opposed to tracing the broad climate of revolt in the region.

The men who produced the testimonies gathered by García Bravo recognized his objective and answered it by describing the messianic movement he sought, albeit—as we have seen—inconsistently. They provided barbaric Indians who conjured gods, sacrificed humans, and, according to Domingo and Pedro, believed that the Spaniards would die during “ocho días de temblor de tierra y grande oscuridad” (in Lienhard 55). However, alongside gods, demons, and human flesh, they also spoke of a much more mundane plane: the strategic. They repeatedly maintained that the insurgents aimed to attack a military shipment and refused to pay taxes and tribute to colonial officials: “[E]ra burlería dar tributo al rey” (56). At the same time, it is impossible to deny that they also forcefully highlighted the opposing Natives’ cruelty and senselessness, pointedly dividing themselves from the attackers and plumbing deep into the

colonial imaginary to avoid being sent back to their volatile hometown. Due to the force of their testimonies, the colonial system reasoned itself to a just war—the following month, Mendoza sent a division of troops to Oaxaca to crush the rebellion (Barabas 2000: 132).

Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995) devised the concept of the “unthinkable” to express those aspects of the real that a conditioned mind cannot hold: “When reality does not coincide with deeply held beliefs, human beings tend to phrase interpretations that force reality within the scope of these beliefs. They devise formulas to repress the unthinkable and to bring it back within the realm of accepted discourse” (72). The barbaric Indian in 1547 Oaxaca, reduced over and over again until Zapotec and Mixtec insurgent became one indistinguishable bloodthirsty Indian following an absurd heretical cult, functioned as a signifier in which to inject and digest the unthinkable: a reality in which Spanish dominion was unconsummated and colonial forces remained locked in a territorial battle against strategic and intelligent people. It is this same unthinkable that lurked invisibly beside the colonial officials tasked with understanding the attack on Niaguatlan, while also shining clear to the Natives given the burden of equipping them to understand it on their invented terms. By luridly elaborating the colonizer’s own barbaric Indian with tales of human sacrifice that may or may not have been true, Zapotec and Mixtec witnesses manipulated this same unthinkable in order to exist within the colonial imaginary while also navigating the real. “I know how power works,” James Baldwin claims—and so did these men, in a visceral and intimate way inaccessible to their colonist counterparts.

4.0 Conclusions

We cannot be free until they are free.

—James Baldwin, “A Letter to My Nephew”

4.1 Freeplay:

Possible Paths Forward

The prevailing historical and intellectual view of the conquest of Mexico and Mexico’s subsequent early colonial period has been of cultural clash, Spanish dominance, and Native acculturation or resistance. These modes do not preclude Native agency and action—and indeed, such agency has been traced throughout a rich body of academic work. Nonetheless, these approaches do not sufficiently interrogate colonial categorization to examine the conditions and composition of agency/action. They interpret the human encounters and possibilities of this era through racialized signifiers accepted as *a priori* sets with fixed values. As a result, they risk leaving intact the same fabrications with which colonizing agents made sense of their world, and therefore may both repeat and fail to critically examine the paradox at the center of colonial power itself: the knower’s incapacity for self-sight.

Identifying Native agency beyond the passive reception of colonizing acts is an essential piece of reinscribing colonial theory and practice, but it is an incomplete one. Further steps must be taken not only to decentralize colonial categorizations, but to denaturalize them by studying how they were created and what they were created to do. Such work gives a fuller picture of what

we know—and even more essentially, of what we don't—about agency in Mexico's colonial era. Was the sacrificed female body on the road to Niaguatlan invented or real? Did it matter? In arguing that it did not, since the chimerical effect in the colonizing consciousness was the same, I invite us to broaden our colonial map of creative possibility and rethink our long-held convictions of power and situational determinism. Who determined the conditions of Spanish colonization in Mexico? By what means? For whom?

Following analyses of their history, emergence, and use, we can begin to strip away the categories of White-colonist and Indian-colonized, potentializing our examination of their processes of form and function. That is, colonial discourse cultivated each image within these categories to possess a certain set of characteristics, which then bestowed the form of both that image and, equally as vital, that of its colonizer's constructed opposite. The Indian as potential subject, a child-like figure primed for Christian instruction, revealed the White supremacist as a paternal educator with preordained access to the path toward salvation. The Indian as idolater, an image defined by its characteristic deception and trickery, necessitated an oppositional White supremacist as the exclusive decoder of truth. The Indian as barbarian, the shadow who moved against nature itself by resisting God's will, defined the White supremacist as defender of Christian progress and pacifier of the unnatural.

Upon examining the forms of these simulations, we find ourselves equipped to elucidate their function. Within the structures of early colonial Mexico, a colonizer who sought to maintain himself universally dominant as God's chosen vessel and supreme earthly representative invented Indians to contain human excesses that threatened to destabilize the supremacist narrative. Native individuals were fixed to the imaginary beneath these one-dimensional sketches who, by the inherent value attributed to their minutely circumscribed natures, were delimited from taking part

in colonial cultural and political institutions. They functioned as malleable objects, each incomplete without the active presence, context, and interpretation of Spanish superiority. As we have seen, however, the fantasy required Native participation to operate, even though it determined Native individuals to be incapable of such participation. It was this blatant contradiction that clearly demonstrated how the creation of the colonial condition was a much more fluid process than the academic literature has often allowed.

When Native actors took up the three constructions we have outlined within the colonial fantasy, they used the forms of these strictly policed images *outside* of their function, or divorced form from function. They leveraged fabricated representations as entrance points into a supremacist discourse that denied the very possibility of an aware, negotiating, acting Native. The resulting shocks of sameness and difference—shoring up the supremacist map of things, but in the very same act negating it—created a contradicting double current that allowed the regular occurrence of what was, for the colonizer, the unthinkable: a Chalca historian taking ownership of the narrative of conquest, Maya nobles writing to the emperor of Spain and the Holy Roman Empire to explain how their idolatry was faked at the behest of the Spaniards, another Mexica historian questioning the legitimacy of the Spanish conquest and subsequent occupation in the colonizer’s own language, and Zapotec villagers playing up a fringe religious movement to satisfy the colonizer’s thirst for the barbaric while also preserving their own lives. Such negations are Vizenor’s postindians (*Fugitive Poses*, 1998): “The *indian* is a simulation, the absence of natives; the *indian* transposes the real, and the simulation of the real has no referent, memory, or native stories. The postindian must waver over the aesthetic ruins of *indian* simulations” (67). Microhistories demonstrate that by creating their own simulations of inventions made in the discourse of dominance, Native individuals—from intellectuals writing over the span of decades,

like Chimalpahin and Tezozómoc, to the microscale of countless people navigating the daily violence, confusion, and promise of colonial interaction, like caciques Diego Uz and Francisco de Montejo Xiu of Maní and the Zapotec Pedro, Domingo, y Alonso of Niaguanatlan—activated versions of invented Indians that fulfilled the colonizers’ need for Native participation while also refuting these inventions’ most basic premises.

As a result, colonizers could not clearly see these events, the Natives behind them, or centrally, themselves and their own role in creating them: they attributed Gómara’s writing to Chimalpahin, they accepted as supposedly genuine idols from a known circulating market of false ones, they obsessively attributed uprisings to a shadowy and strange messianic religion despite Native individuals’ sustained focus on a much more strategic foundation to widespread revolt. Indeed, by “playing Indian,” Native individuals exceeded the limits of colonial power: they surpassed the liminal boundaries of the colonial imagination through both discourse and daily practice. Very interesting work has emerged around the authenticity of the Indian image and the mechanics of its creation, including Paige Raibmon’s *Authentic Indians* (2005), which argues that White and Native people collaborated to create the codes of authenticity that came to inscribe the codes of Indian images. Furthering the vein of these studies within the context of colonial Latin America, I hope to have demonstrated that a key characteristic—the key characteristic—of these processes was the White incapacity for self-knowledge. The colonized, in the words of James Baldwin, “[knew] how power [worked],” and as a result, their creative interactions with a power that both demanded their participation and excluded its possibility shaped colonial terrain in ways that the colonizer could not recognize, and that we must begin to recognize now.

We have learned that the colonial imaginary of the Indian shapeshifted depending on the changing needs of the colonizer. Each invented Indian corresponded not to Native bodies in

practice, but to particular challenges to the White supremacist narrative of Self. The Indian as potential subject enjoined the climate that defined the First Evangelization of Mexico: an urgency to locate a so-called “New World” and its inhabitants within a universal narrative of historical and spatial dominance. The Indian as idolater worked as a reply to a fluid situation in which two simultaneous developments threatened that location: the frustration of the evangelization project and the swift and staggering decline in Native populations. The Indian as barbarian met the challenge of the unthinkable: rational, organized Native resistance to conquest and colonization.

It is tempting to view questions of interpersonal interactions, identity, power, and self-delusion within sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Mexico as elements of the past, even a distant past. As the reader may be able to surmise, however, I argue that the past never speaks only to the past, and that these considerations are just as salient in our contemporary life. This is not only because of the need to revisit and reinterpret the past as we recognize scholarly, political, and individual shortcomings and mirages over decades and centuries, but because this past has shaped our present. Its patterns continue to make up the grid through which power exercises itself today. Coloniality, as Anibal Quijano defines it, describes how the categorizations of the colonial world have proven more stable than and outlived colonialism itself, so that “the model of power that is globally hegemonic today presupposes an element of coloniality” (533). Quijano signals how Europeans came to feel not only superior to all other humans, but naturally superior through a mental operation in which “intersubjective and cultural relations between Western Europe and the rest of the world were codified in a strong play of new categories: East-West, primitive-civilized, magic/mythic-scientific, irrational-rational, traditional-modern—Europe and not Europe” (542). As an inevitable consequence of this condition, investigations of contemporary political, social,

and cultural phenomena—and even truth, if we may speak of it—continue to be distorted by what supremacist power does not see as it always speaks to itself about itself.

Vizenor directs his analysis to the present: his postindians are built by Native presence among the simulations that continue to populate our courtrooms, headlines, entertainment specials, schools, and stories. The author suggests that by inquiring into the supremacist racialized Indian formations of the present, we can identify and deconstruct not only fantastic narratives of power that have been naturalized in how we talk about our world, but also our interpretations of agency and passivity within our own ecosystems, allowing for new understandings of creativity and action. When critiquing structuralism, Jacques Derrida referred to these actions as examining “the structurality of the structure” (224), or those processes that give the structure “a center or [refer] it to a point of presence, a fixed origin” (224). He argued for identifying discourse’s inevitable reliance on an organizing principle, or a metaphysics of presence. Within an event termed “the rupture,” this metaphysics of presence suddenly becomes known, allowing for a decentering that makes possible the concept of infinite freeplay—a state in which all pieces of a system are in constant motion, and any attempt to grasp them results in a reflection only of their positioning relative to one specific moment in time. By adding ruptures at ever-increasing amounts of specific moments in time, we continue to decenter supremacy and grow alternative possibilities of meaning-making. In the last pages of this work, I will focus on offering some thoughts about a path forward toward “freeplay” by examining an invented Indian that took its place on the national and international stage during Mexico’s 2018 presidential elections.

4.2 Marichuy, Invented Indians, and the Mental Gymnastics of the Multicultural State

On February 7, 2018, María de Jesús Patricio Martínez— the Congreso Nacional Indígena candidate for the 2018 Mexican presidential elections who is known to admirers and detractors alike as Marichuy—visited the Mexican city of Tlaxcala with her campaign team. Less than three weeks after receiving star-studded endorsements from actor Diego Luna and the like, she paid homage to Xicotencatl, a Tlaxcalan prince and military leader who waged war against the invading forces of Hernán Cortés. Then, she announced that she would most likely not succeed in collecting the more than 866,000 signatures needed to appear as an independent candidate on the Mexican presidential ballot in July. “Precisely our proposal in participating in this electoral process,” she stated, “is to visualize, to sensitize the real problematic that we share below, with fieldworkers, with Indigenous peoples, in neighborhoods . . . and there is someone above who is the government, and they are the ones who have money and design forms of exploitation that disguise [the problem]” (Sánchez 1).¹¹⁴ This moment culminated a candidacy that included many such calls for the unity of “those below” against “someone above.” By nominating Marichuy to the Mexican presidency, the Congreso Nacional Indígena (CNI)—established by the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN)—directly entered organized politics, a marked difference from its previous calls for the rejection of Mexico’s constitutional system.

Invented Indians, the colonizing demand they satisfy, and the second-sighted possibilities Natives fashion through them continue their uncomfortable thriving today, where capitalist

¹¹⁴ “Justamente nuestra propuesta de participar en este proceso electoral es para visualizar, sensibilizar la problemática real que se tiene abajo, con los trabajadores del campo, en los pueblos indígenas, en los barrios, . . . y hay alguien desde arriba que es el gobierno, y son los que tienen el dinero y diseñan formas de explotación que disfrazan.”

neoliberalism has created and fetishized the Indian as multicultural commodity. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for example, praises Mexico as a leading example of Indigenous political inclusion in the Americas: “Mexico . . . is perfecting the coexistence of the Normative Systems of different Indigenous peoples and communities with the National System.”¹¹⁵ The UNDP appears to be referencing the second paragraph of the first section of second article of the Mexican constitution, which affirms the rights of Native peoples to “[a]pply their own normative systems in the regulation and solution of their internal conflicts, subject to the general principles of this constitution.”¹¹⁶ For the UNDP, Mexico’s laudable inclusion of Indigenous communities in its national project is rooted in this collaboration between the *sistemas normativas indígenas* and the broader *sistema nacional*.

Of course, such collaboration is designed for one-way flow—the *sistemas normativos* operate only as understood by the Constitution, and never vice-versa. Subsequent paragraphs of Artículo 2, added after the arrival of Vicente Fox Quezada to the Mexican presidency in 2000, cover the preservation of Indigenous languages, cultures, and “*conocimientos*,” the naming of internal authorities by Indigenous communities, and the election of indigenous representatives to municipal councils “with the purpose of strengthening political participation and representation in accordance with their traditions and internal norms” (2.1.7).¹¹⁷¹¹⁸ Artículo 2, then, is noteworthy for the expansiveness of its inclusivity. It accounts for both the internal and external management of Indigenous communities, and by zealously codifying elements of difference—including

¹¹⁵ “México . . . está perfeccionando la coexistencia de los Sistemas Normativos de los diferentes pueblos y comunidades indígenas con el Sistema Nacional.”

¹¹⁶ “[a]plicar sus propios sistemas normativos en la regulación y solución de sus conflictos internos, sujetándose a los principios generales de esta constitución.”

¹¹⁷ “con el propósito de fortalecer la participación y representación política de conformidad con sus tradiciones y normas internas.”

¹¹⁸ Artículo 2, Sección 1, Párrafo 7 of the Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos

language and ever-vague notions of *cultura* and *conocimiento*—it collapses them all into a state-sponsored policy of tolerance. Its careful regulation of what is understood to be Indigenous beneath the qualifying statement that “federative entities will establish . . . the norms for the recognition of indigenous communities as entities of public interest”¹¹⁹ is equally striking.

If we accept Sara Ahmed’s hypothesis that institutions “refer to what is already stabilized” (2012: 20), the tolerance systemized in Mexico’s constitutional text may be seen as a reflection of broader discourse. Indeed, celebration of “the Indigenous cultural richness in Mexico”¹²⁰ (Suárez) can be found across politics, academics, art, business, and daily life.

Excélsior, the second-oldest newspaper in the country after *El Universal*, ran a September 2017 article beneath the title, “Indigenous peoples paint Mexico with diversity and plurality”¹²¹ whose subtitle reads, “Because of their culture, history and language, Indigenous peoples give Mexico a sense of belonging and identity” (*Excélsior*).¹²² According to the article, the marketable cultural elements of the Indian are what give Mexico *identidad* as an organized state, rendering it unthinkable without its Indigenous reference point. Native-style clothing, artwork, and jewelry sell in boutiques and online stores both in Mexico and beyond. These developments, among many others, evidence a methodical consumption of a certain type of Indian that has permeated both popular and institutional culture in relation to Native languages, modes of dress, and other visible markers of consumable cultural difference. The theorist bell hooks has explored this phenomenon in her essay “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance,” where she writes, “Certainly from the standpoint of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, the hope is that desires for the ‘primitive’ or

¹¹⁹ “las entidades federativas establecerán . . . las normas para el reconocimiento de las comunidades indígenas como entidades de interés público”

¹²⁰ “la riqueza cultural indígena en México”

¹²¹ “Tienen pueblos indígenas de diversidad y pluralidad a México”

¹²² “Por su cultura, historia y lengua, los pueblos indígenas dan sentido de pertenencia e identidad a México”

fantasies about the Other can be continually exploited, and that such exploitation will occur in a manner that reinscribes and maintains the *status quo*” (22). In short, the shift toward a neoliberal appropriation of the Other does not evidence liberation or a reorganization of power, but only reinforces colonial objectives within a neocolonial context.

It is useful to think about the *status quo* in bell hooks’s sense of the term when analyzing why Muñoz specifically praises Mexico’s ability to perfect “*la coexistencia de los Sistemas Normativos de los diferentes pueblos y comunidades indígenas con el Sistema Nacional.*” In the same UNDP article, he reminds us that “[m]any times these different forms of representation and participation of Indigenous peoples at the local and national level, just like in conflict resolution, are in constant tension” (1).¹²³ The Mexican government’s success, then, lies in navigating the relationship between Native communities and the nation via smoothing over a fundamental opposition, or “*constante tensión.*” Rebecca Overmyer-Velázquez argues that the government does so by strictly controlling the concept of indigeneity itself: “[U]nder neoliberalism indigenous peoples have attracted the [Mexican] state’s attention as never before, but only to the extent that they do the state’s work . . . and remain bound to a restricted notion of indigenesness and community that effectively keeps indigenous demands at a safe distance” (30). In order to be declared “Indigenous” and thus access public life as such—or, in the language of Mexico’s constitution, “[f]ully access the jurisdiction of the State” (2.1.8)¹²⁴—Native communities and individuals must fit into this invented Indian as multicultural commodity that allows for the smooth negotiation of any tensions between being Indigenous and what Sara Ahmed terms “the white

¹²³ “[m]uchas veces estas diferentes maneras de representación y participación de los pueblos indígenas a nivel local y nacional, así como de la resolución de controversias, se encuentran en una constante tensión.”

¹²⁴ “[a]cceder plenamente a la jurisdicción del Estado”

situation” (2012: 5), that hegemonic and diffuse discourse of power we have examined which seeks to mystify its own creation in order to preserve its falsely naturalized supremacy.

When the Constitution guarantees the rights of Indigenous peoples to access the state, it does so by affirming that “Indigenous people have at all times the right to be assisted by interpreters and defenders who have knowledge of their language and culture” (2.1.8).¹²⁵ This is the performance required by the law: the tension between the Othered body and the “White situation” is reduced to one of “*lengua and cultura*,” effectively neutralizing additional frictions that result from the paradoxical naturalization of a constructed normal operating against a constructed difference. The goal, as we remember that the constitutional language maintains, is to “*fortalecer la participación y representación política de conformidad con sus tradiciones y normas internas*” (2.1.7), or to foment participation in the political system. But under what terms? Recognition, of course, does not mean the end to essentialism, and here essentialism forms the very base of recognition.

Close consideration reveals that a key strategy of fabricating this invented Indian as multicultural commodity involves defining the boundaries of the Indigenous via things to be commodified—as a language to be saved, legal practice to be translated, right to be defended, or, more broadly, culture to be preserved. When examining representations of third-world women, Chandra Mohanty claims that “[t]his mode of defining women primarily in terms of their *object status* (the way in which they are affected or not affected by certain institutions and systems) is what characterizes this particular form of the use of ‘women’ as a category of analysis” (66). Such object status is exactly where we find Stuart Hall’s “something about race left unsaid,” the “the

¹²⁵ “[L]os indígenas tienen en todo tiempo el derecho a ser asistidos por intérpretes y defensores que tengan conocimiento de su lengua y cultura.”

constitutive outside, whose very existence the identity of race depends on” (8). The unsaid thing is the imaginary nature of multiculturalism, and it is exactly what María de Jesús Patricio Martínez used to move within the hegemonic national discourse of Mexico. Like Chimalpahin, Tezozómoc, the Maya of Maní, and the Zapotec of Niaguatlan, she strategically shored up the multicultural Indian to enunciate within a discourse that held her as speechless—consumable—object.

Marichuy was born into a Nahua family in Tuxpán, Jalisco, in 1963. After studying traditional native medicine, she founded the Casa de Salud Calli Tecolhuacateca Tochan Clinic in 1992, which identifies itself as a “space dedicated to traditional Indigenous medicine”¹²⁶ whose “sole objective. . . is to help with health issues using traditional Indigenous medicinal ancestral knowledge inherited by generations” (Casa de Salud Calli Tecolhuacateca Tochan).¹²⁷ In 1994, she was selected to represent her community at a national forum held by the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, and she served as a founding member of the Congreso Nacional Indígena (CNI), whose 840 delegates elected her as organizational spokeswoman on May 28, 2017. The CNI also announced that she would be its candidate for the 2018 presidential general election, making her both the first candidate fronted by the organization and the first identified Indigenous woman to run for the Mexican presidency. After not collecting the 866,593 signatures needed to obtain a spot on the July ballot after 120 days, Marichuy’s candidacy officially ended in February 2018. According to Fortino Domínguez, a Zoque representative for the CNI, the campaign itself was never actually the point. “We are not going to create a campaign, but we are going to take advantage of it to organize ourselves to dismantle

¹²⁶ “espacio dedicado a la medicina tradicional indígena”

¹²⁷ “único objetivo . . . es ayudar en cuestiones de salud utilizando la medicina tradicional indígena conocimiento ancestral heredado por generaciones”

power. It is a collective path . . . Make no mistake: this is no vulgar struggle for power, but a civilizing struggle” (SinEmbargo).¹²⁸

This image of a “*lucha civilizadora*” is a provocative one exactly because it is unthinkable under the neoliberal system of multiculturalism. Within such a system, the Indian is an object defined by carefully catalogued differences and the institutional interventions that such differences necessitate—not a civilizing agent, just as in 1566, Pablo Nazareo could not have been considered a “pacifier” of barbarians, although he named himself and argued for himself as such. Marichuy herself further contributed to this paradox during a speech she gave in Texcoco on November 27, 2018. After denouncing several government projects that threaten to disrupt natural water systems and endanger the livelihood of Indigenous farmers in the region, she continued, “Just as those above have shared everything among themselves . . . we below also weave an organization to stop the death that they impose upon us, to resist, to create new forms of organization born from each collective, to decide our destiny in the small and large things and to exercise our government from below” (CNI, “Palabra de Marichuy en Texcoco”).¹²⁹ The Indian outlined in the Mexican Constitution is incapable of creating “*nuevas formas de organización,*” only accepting state intervention to preserve those forms of organization declared—by the state itself and its own organizing logic—to be worthy of saving. There is no creativity permissible, or even conceivable, here. It follows that the constitutionally designed Indian should not be able to “*tejer*” anything, let alone “*decidir nuestro destino en lo pequeño y en lo grande.*” The government Marichuy referred to is not only a government authorized by the state, but also a government that threatens to consume

¹²⁸ “No vamos a hacer una campaña, sino vamos a aprovechar esto para organizarnos para desmontar el poder. Es un camino colectivo . . . No se confundan: no es una vulgar lucha por el poder, sino una lucha civilizadora.”

¹²⁹ “Así como los de arriba se repartieron todo . . . nosotras y nosotros también tejamos abajo la organización para detener la muerte que nos imponen, para resistir, para crear nuevas formas de organización nacidas de cada colectivo, decidir nuestro destino en lo pequeño y en lo grande y ejercer nuestro gobierno de abajo.”

the state—and yet it is being imagined within the boundaries of state operation as part of a presidential campaign.

Marichuy made these movements via the loops of affirmation and negation of the multicultural imaginary. An evolution of its colonial counterpart, multiculturalism undertakes an endless parsing of difference to create imaginary identities beneath which to introduce such difference into public spaces, thereby creating straight lines that exercise power over bodies: to be Indigenous is to live apart in a separate community with a separate language and culture. “*Indígena*” thus becomes the sliding signifier for these set forms of divergence from an unstated-but-ever-present White situation, or a starting point of national identity that has been constructed as natural in its supremacy. These are the conditions set for entering the social sphere as an “*indígena*,” that is, the invented Indian as multicultural commodity forms the basis for knowing and recognizing any Native person. To recall Chisu Teresa Ko, “bodily performance of race is a prerequisite for multicultural inclusion” (2534).

Marichuy met the conditions for this performance in body, action, and language. As a specialist in Indigenous medicine, she was the physical model of the alternative “*conocimientos*” referenced by the Mexican Constitution. She was also elected as a representative first for her local community in Jalisco and then for the indigenous coalition of Mexico, converting her into an embodiment of the “*sistemas normativos*” that the Constitution recognizes and seeks to regulate through institutionalization. Beyond her background, however, Marichuy affirms “the bodily performance of race” by acting it out on a public stage. As I mentioned, she opened one of the last addresses of her campaign by performing a ceremony in honor of the Tlaxcallan prince Xicotencatl. Such ceremonies were a common feature of Marichuy’s discourse. In some cases, her supporters prefaced her arrival with drum circles and offerings to Mother Earth (Conniff), which

included elements such as copal incense—a staple of Native religious ceremonies since before the arrival of the Spaniards. She often appeared with a crown of flowers on her head or a flower necklace draped around her neck and wore traditional embroidered dresses. In addition to these visuals displays, Marichuy’s language itself reinforced the straight lines of multiculturalism’s fever dream, at least in some ways. She often referred to Indigenous communities as grounded in a unified Indigenous identity whose boundaries are defined by traditional elements like land and natural resources:

We are Wixaritari, Purépechas, Triquis, Mazahuas, Choles, Mixtec Otomis, Zoques, Zapotecs and Nahuas, who with effort sustain and weave organization and autonomy with identity and tradition. With these women and these men, we are the Indigenous Government Council and the National Indigenous Congress.

We ask you that we all turn to see the struggle of Indigenous peoples who, from the north to the south of the nation, defend their lands, natural resources, and their way of organizing. Let us turn to see the expansion of the Surface that they defend and the strength of their governments, their ways of doing justice, of healing, of feeding themselves, of fighting. To be what they are collectively in the middle of the dark, where they are lights that illuminate hope (“Palabra de Marichuy en Guadalajara”).¹³⁰

Such a move maps to many of the defining characteristics of Indigenous identity as understood in multicultural discourse and infuses these terms with the colonial Indian-land imagery that has

¹³⁰ [S]omos wixaritari, purépechas, triquis, mazahuas, choles, otomís mixtecos, zoques, zapotecos y nahuas, que con esfuerzo van sosteniendo y tejiendo su organización y autonomía con identidad y tradición. Con ellas y ellos somos el Concejo Indígena de Gobierno y el Congreso Nacional Indígena.

Les pedimos que volteemos a ver la lucha de los pueblos indígenas que del norte al sur del estado defienden sus tierras, recursos naturales y su forma de organizarse. Volteemos a ver la extensión de la superficie que defienden y la fuerza de sus gobiernos, sus formas de hacer justicia, de curarse, de alimentarse, de luchar. De ser lo que son en colectivo en medio de la oscuridad, donde son luces que iluminan la esperanza

morphed into its neocolonial Indian-cultural patrimony counterpart. As Iyko Day notes, “land establishes the relationship Indigenous peoples have with the colonizer” (26).

Like Native individuals in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Mexico, Marichuy drew from and mobilized components from the (neo)colonial organization of things. According to Overmyer-Velázquez, “[T]he full force of the *indigenista* image of the Indian is brought to bear upon indigenous groups and individuals who simultaneously speak for and beyond the local community . . . Thus, only Mexico’s ‘real’ Indians, embodying the nation’s cultural patrimony, [deserve] ‘to feel and be real Mexicans.’ In this assumption, cultural identity and political legitimacy are inextricably linked” (44). A version of Ko’s “bodily performance of race,” the embodiment of the image of the Indian as cultural patrimony is a prerequisite for Indigenous speech in the public forum. In that sense, Marichuy was propelled to the national stage exactly because she acts out the carefully defined role of the Indian in her body, actions, and language. This is not to say that she did not personally identify with these elements, or that she falsifies them to any extent. My point is simply that without them, and without their prominent role in both her public representation and campaign more broadly, there would be no space for her within the national narrative.

The necessity of Marichuy’s “*indigenista*” performance is clear enough, but it would be a mistake to leave the story of her campaign here. On its surface, a candidate fronted by the CNI could look like a key triumph of neoliberal multiculturalism—the EZLN moved from seizing towns and cities in Chiapas to entering the civil processes of the very government that it declared illegitimate. Yet such an estimation negates the words of Fortino Domínguez that I cited earlier: “*No se confundan: no es una vulgar lucha por el poder, sino una lucha civilizadora*” (SinEmbargo). During her campaign, Marichuy did not just take on the form of the invented

Indian—she became an invented Indian commenting on the act of its own invention. By embodying the multicultural discourse of the Indian while also criticizing and speaking back to the same discourse, Marichuy too serves as a postindian warrior: “warriors of simulations, then and now, [who] uncover the absence of the real and undermine the comparative poses of tribal traditions” (12). The campaign mobilized by el Congreso Nacional Indígena used language to strategically negate the very multicultural framework that made it possible. It did so on three levels: first, body, space, and territory; second, knowledge and language; and third, legal organization and governance. These three levels worked together to call into question the act of categorization itself. Such questioning unmasks the construction of multiculturalism as discourse, thereby threatening the neoliberal national project with the same monster it has obsessively regulated difference to avoid: its invention of itself.

“Being a Westerner is not simple,” Vizenor writes, “it’s an act of ‘make-believe’” (8). As we have seen, constituting an Other that, in turn, constitutes the Self was a driving need of colonial power, and neocolonial power repeats this deeply contradictory act. While Marichuy performed that Other through enacting elements of the imagined Indian, she also relentlessly exceeded its boundaries. Her use of language employed elements essential to the multicultural understanding of the Indigenous—a connection to the land, a claim to cultural patrimony, a call for cultural preservation—but also made purposeful and clear external connections of solidarity beyond those straight lines, as seen during her speech at la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México in Mexico City in November 2017:

To all our brothers and sisters in this great city, today deeply torn apart, trapped in networks of violence and organized crime, torn to pieces at every moment by the ambitions of the great real-estate capital, to whose decisions all public powers and all

colors of the politics from above are subject, we want to tell you that it is time to rebuild this city and this country, from below and to the left, rebirthing the solidarity of all. (CNI, “Palabra de Marichuy en Ciudad Universitaria de la UNAM”)¹³¹

Moments like these contradicted the ceaseless parsing of difference—the “Indian” woman in an embroidered skirt with a crown of flowers negated the limitations of the very image she represented. She spoke specifically to those in the cities, placing herself outside of the romanticized relationship between the Indian and the land that defined her indigeneity, and she offered her public not an idyllic “return to nature,” but rather a moment to “*reconstruir esta ciudad y este país, desde abajo y a la izquierda.*” Of course, the imagined Indian should not be able to place herself/himself anywhere along the political spectrum because the Indian always functions in isolation as an element to be preserved. By locating herself and her Indigenous community in direct relationship with urban elements and political factions, Marichuy brought components meant to be disparate into intimate contact.

This reorganization of bodies and space was ever-present in her discourse. In December 2017 in Guadalajara, she stated, “We Native peoples are also part of this city,”¹³² and continued, “Our path is also with you, those who fight every day to weave communities and territories in cities, who organize to defend parks, urban forests and rivers . . . who in El Salto and Juanacatlán must survive the river of death that capitalists have made of the Santiago River, sacred to several of our cultures as Native peoples and which we defend in geographies to which we owe

¹³¹ “A todos nuestros hermanos y hermanas de esta gran ciudad, hoy profundamente desgarrada, atrapada en las redes de la violencia y el crimen organizado, despedazada a cada momento por las ambiciones de los grandes capitales inmobiliarios, a cuyas decisiones se encuentran sometidos todos los poderes públicos y todos los colores de la política de arriba, queremos decirles que es el tiempo de reconstruir esta ciudad y este país, desde abajo y a la izquierda, renaciendo la solidaridad de todos y de todas.”

¹³² “Los pueblos originarios también somos parte de esta ciudad”

ourselves” (CNI, “Palabra de Marichuy en Guadalajara”).¹³³ Here, the candidate again juxtaposed an invented Indian imaginary of the preservation of nature against the incongruency of a claim to urbanity. Crucially, she also reshaped the racial identity marker of “Indian” into a political-economic one—she specifically criticized “*capitalistas*.” The two moves were related; it is exactly by exceeding the boundaries of the invented Indian to reorganize body and space that she made a claim to political and economic unity.

This same complex mechanism of affirmation and negation was at work in her language around knowledge creation. According to the limits imposed by multiculturalism, Indians preserve knowledge and knowledge is made about them—they do not create knowledge or project their knowledge outward. Artículo 2 states the right of Indigenous communities to “[p]reserve and enrich their languages, knowledge and all the elements that make up their culture and identity” (2.1.5),¹³⁴ while also, we recall, guaranteeing that “Indigenous people have at all times the right to be assisted by interpreters and defenders who have knowledge of their language and culture” (2.1.8). Basically, they may protect their knowledges and others may learn their knowledges. Under this framework, it is interesting to note that at the beginning of the majority of her campaign addresses, Marichuy specifically recognized the media. Her opening to her speech at UNAM, for examples, reads, “Brothers and sisters of Mexico City. Brothers and sisters of the University Community in this house of studies. The media. Brothers and sisters of the Mexican people” (CNI, “Palabra de Marichuy en Ciudad Universitaria de la UNAM”).¹³⁵

¹³³ “Nuestro camino es también con ustedes, los que luchan cada día por tejer comunidades y territorios en las ciudades, que se organizan para defender sus parques, bosques urbanos y ríos . . . quienes en el Salto y Juanacatlán deben sobrevivir al río de muerte en lo que los capitalistas convierten al río Santiago, sagrado para varias de nuestras culturas como pueblos originarios y que defendemos en las geografías a las que nos debemos.”

¹³⁴ “[p]reservar y enriquecer sus lenguas, conocimientos y todos los elementos que constituyan su cultura e identidad”

¹³⁵ “Hermanos y hermanas de esta ciudad de México. Hermanos y hermanas de la Comunidad Universitaria en esta casa de estudios. Medios de comunicación. Hermanos y hermanas del pueblo de México.”

Her awareness of the media fed into the media-oriented nature of the CNI in general. Decades after Subcomandante Marcos hosted an eclectic set of foreign visitors in the mountains of Chiapas, media attention remained a key feature of the Congreso's work. The CNI began to live-tweet its events under the handle @CNI_Mexico, operate an active Facebook account, and maintain a mobile-friendly website. Their focus on the media produced two effects: first, it evidenced a conscious move to create and diffuse knowledges about the CNI itself through widespread visibility. Second, it demonstrated an awareness of the performative nature of the CNI's work through one of the most utilized tools of the modern stage: public relations. Marichuy also frequently commented on education itself. Standing in front of an audience at UNAM composed mainly of young adult students and their educators, she stated, "Today more than ever, we need education to be critical, scientific and in line with the reality of this multicultural nation in which Native cultures have always been denied; so that education ceases to be . . . the seedbed of alienation for Native peoples in our communities and cities" (CNI, "Palabra de Marichuy en Ciudad Universitaria de la UNAM).¹³⁶ Declarations such as these mirror Chimalpahin's Native claim to universal—as opposed to cultural—knowledge, and even more, they work to create a new understanding of what universal knowledge is and should be. Here, Marichuy specifically used the language of multiculturalism to critique its own approach to knowledge, or "*la realidad de esta nación multicultural en la que las culturas originarias siempre han sido negadas.*" Some of the most powerful words within multicultural discourse— "*educación,*" "*crítica,*" "*científica,*" "*realidad*"—were reflected back into a criticism of the

¹³⁶ "Hoy más que nunca, necesitamos que la educación sea crítica, científica y acorde a la realidad de esta nación multicultural en la que las culturas originarias siempre han sido negadas; lo anterior para que deje de ser . . . la educación el semillero de la enajenación de los pueblos en nuestras comunidades y en las ciudades."

multicultural through this image of the invented Indian as she participated in representative democracy, which should be one of neoliberalism's greatest achievements.

Marichuy and the CNI also made incursions into the very composition of language itself. She often reversed Spanish's conventional gender rules and introduced feminine nouns either first or as a substitution for their typically masculinized counterpart: "Sisters and brothers in this city of Huajuapán de León" (CNI, "Palabra de nuestra vocera Marichuy en Huajuapán de León, Oaxaca");¹³⁷ "Our path is with the struggle of the mothers and fathers of the [female] disappeared and [male] disappeared" (CNI, "Palabra de Marichuy en Guadalajara");¹³⁸ "This that we have heard, what they have told us . . . all these problems that we hear from the [female] compatriots here" (CNI, "Palabras de nuestra Vocera Marichuy en el encuentro con la Red de Apoyo al CIG y con la sociedad civil en Mazatlán, Sinaloa");¹³⁹ "With [these women] we dream of rebellion together, that is, the new world in which communities work every day to build from below" (CNI, Palabra de la vocera Marichuy en Tehuacan, Puebla).¹⁴⁰ These interventions were on a structural level, and as such, they echoed back onto the structure of the system which rendered them necessary. Why could it be somewhat uncomfortable to hear an Indian woman alter Spanish in this way? Perhaps because "todas y todos" says something which "todos" doesn't but claims to—a rebuke of a framework modeling itself on inclusive participation. Or was Marichuy's re-gendered speech a doubled appropriation of a language that has become ever-

¹³⁷ "Hermanas y hermanos de esta ciudad de Huajuapán de León"

¹³⁸ "Nuestro camino es con la lucha de las madres y padres de desaparecidas y desaparecidos"

¹³⁹ "Esto que hemos escuchado, lo que nos han comentado . . . todos estos problemas que escuchamos de las compañeras de aquí"

¹⁴⁰ "Con ellas soñamos juntos la rebeldía, o sea, el nuevo mundo en el que trabajamos los pueblos todos los días para construir desde abajo."

more obsessed with the very act of *theoretical* representation—today, today—without the emergence of any embodied changes in *practice*?

Another strategic loop of affirmation and negation emerges from the candidate's postures toward legal organization and governance. As mentioned previously, Marichuy was elected twice—both as a representative of her community within the CNI and as a representative of the CNI on the national stage during the 2018 presidential elections. Her approach toward the legal governance of Native communities unveiled how invented Indians as Otherized categories are essential to the logic of even a modern national project. The CNI's involvement in nation-wide elections would appear to shore up such logic—if, of course, their candidate had not said such unsettling things.

In Puebla, Marichuy announced, “The Indigenous Government Council [an arm of the Indigenous National Council] is the call to govern ourselves in our territories, decide together the destiny of our peoples and territories, and build from there the country we want for all women destiny of our peoples and territories, and build from there the country we want for all women of “building from below” functioned as central to Marichuy's campaign and remained the focus of her public discourse after her campaign's official end. In December 2017 in Zacatecas, she urged, “Let us all seek and make other forms of government, one that is born of organized dignity, made by all those below who resist in many different ways . . . Those who rebel in many different ways; who are making their own security and justice” (CNI, “Palabra de Marichuy en Zacatecas”).¹⁴² If we remember Mexican constitutional language, Indigenous communities are

¹⁴¹ “El Concejo Indígena de Gobierno es el llamado para gobernarnos en nuestros territorios, decidir todos juntos el destino de nuestros pueblos y territorios, construir desde ahí el país que queremos para todas y para todos.”

¹⁴² “Entre todos busquemos y hagamos otras formas de hacer gobierno, uno que nazca de la dignidad organizada, hecho por todas y todos los de abajo que resisten de muchas formas diferentes . . . Los que se rebelan de muchas formas diferentes; que están haciendo su propia seguridad y justicia.”

given the right to exercise their own systems of governance only under the sanction of the sistema nacional—they may “[a]pply their own normative systems in the regulation and solution of their internal conflicts, subject to the general principles of this constitution” (2.1.2).¹⁴³ This is the system whose success the UNDP praises, the system which holds that “[t]he constitutions and laws of federative entities will establish the characteristics of self-determination and autonomy that best express the situations and aspirations of the Indigenous peoples in each entity, as well as the norms for the recognition of Indigenous communities as entities of public interest” (2.1.8).¹⁴⁴ Within such clear boundaries, the CNI’s call to govern from the sistemas normativos could emerge as not just uncomfortable, but impossible. It is the invented Indian that receives institutional recognition; the Native cannot “decidir todos juntos el destino de nuestros pueblos y territorios, construir desde ahí el país que queremos para todas y para todos.” The invented Indian’s agency, as I understand it, is limited to thanking the state for the recognition it bestows.

This points to one of the intentions fundamental to Marichuy’s campaign. On January 1, 2018, 24 years after the armed uprisings that launched the modern Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Comandante Moisés en el Caracol de Oventik of the Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena urged, “Let’s organize ourselves so that Compañera Marichuy can give her tour throughout the country . . . even if she doesn’t reach the number of signatures necessary to become a candidate, since the signature is not what fights, it is not what is going to organize us, it is us women and us men who have to listen to each other, get to know each other and our

¹⁴³ “[a]plicar sus propios sistemas normativos en la regulación y solución de sus conflictos internos, sujetándose a los principios generales de esta constitución.”

¹⁴⁴ “[l]as constituciones y leyes de las entidades federativas establecerán las características de libre determinación y autonomía que mejor expresen las situaciones y aspiraciones de los pueblos indígenas en cada entidad, así como las normas para el reconocimiento de las comunidades indígenas como entidades de interés público.”

thinking can depart from there, feeling as we do, about how to organize ourselves better and which path to follow” (quoted in Gómez).¹⁴⁵ According to the CNI and its affiliations, the campaign itself and the presidency has never been their focus. Instead, Marichuy’s publicity serves as an invitation:

This Mexico is being monopolized by a few who have money and power . . . And then what they think is to get us out of the way, to exterminate us, to hold onto this country. And we think, the Native peoples of this Mexico, we have journeyed, and we have said that we have been here for more than 500 years and everything that has been designed has been against Indigenous peoples, and that is why we believe that this proposal, that arises from this journey of these peoples, it is not only for Indigenous peoples.

So that's the idea, [male] compatriots, [female] compatriots, brothers and sisters. We need to build a strong organization from below. We need to agree on what we are going to do, how we are going to do it, how we can agree. . .

So the invitation is for us to think about what Mexico we want, what Mexico we want to exist. (“Words from our Spokesperson Marichuy at the meeting with the CIG Support Network and with civil society in Mazatlán, Sinaloa”)¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ “Organicémonos para que pueda dar su gira en el país la Compañera Marichuy . . . aunque no alcance las firmas para candidata, porque la firma no es la que lucha, no es la que nos va a organizar, somos nosotras y nosotros las que tenemos que escucharnos, conocernos y de ahí, al sentirnos como estamos, ahí puede partir nuestro pensamiento de cómo organizarnos más mejor y qué camino seguir.”

¹⁴⁶ “Este México lo están acaparando unos cuantos que tienen el dinero y el poder . . . Y entonces lo que piensan es quitarnos de en medio, exterminarnos, para quedarse con este país. Y nosotros pensamos, los pueblos originarios de este México, hemos caminado y hemos dicho que nosotros hemos estado por más de 500 años y todo lo que se ha diseñado ha sido en contra de estos pueblos originarios, y por eso consideramos que esta propuesta, que surge desde este caminar de estos pueblos, no es solamente para los pueblos indígenas.

This invitation is articulated from within a performance of the multicultural Indian, but moves beyond such performance—not just to the outside, as in Stuart Hall’s “constitutive outside,” but to exteriority in Walter Dignolo’s use of the term: “the space where tensions emerge once capitalism becomes the dominant economic system and eliminates all the possibilities of anything outside it” (2002: 75), or a location of knowledge production that is not encompassed by the neoliberal nation-state. Through the affirmation and negation of the imagined Indian as multicultural good, the CNI and its representative, Marichuy, strategically moved within a multicultural context to open a door to this exterior.

4.3 A Final Note:

Avoiding the Repetition of Colonial Make-Believe

Analyzing the masked invention of supremacist imagery and Native moments of entrance into and mobilization of this imagery offers us a path forward when examining discourses of power and their relationships to lived experiences. Instead of repeating the supremacist’s own false naturalization of racialized images, the deconstruction of these images and focus on Native agency and creativity opens new paths forward. The question shifts from a focus on Native action stemming from colonial violence through assimilation or resistance to an investigation of the

Entonces esa es la idea, compañeros, compañeras, hermanos y hermanas. Urge construir una organización fuerte desde abajo. Urge ponernos de acuerdo qué vamos a hacer, cómo lo vamos a hacer, cómo nos ponemos de acuerdo . . .

Entonces la invitación es a que pensemos en qué México queremos, qué México queremos que exista.”

paradoxical fragility at the heart of the very notion of identity itself in a colonial context—Native agency in using the veiled origins of that imagery and White reaction to what it cannot see. Microhistories demonstrate how the inability of White colonial actors to look at and understand themselves has profoundly shaped colonial power's development, leading both to new possibilities of enunciation and survival and a deepening of colonial contradictions of Self and Other. By examining these changes over time, from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century, we better understand the fabrication of dominance, undo a false colonial map of things, identify creativity and agency, and use alternative paths to better know both the make-believe and the reality in which we live. In a world in which identities are invented as fixed, recognizing the jolts made by Native shoring up this invention and pulling away from or revealing it in one action demanded by the colonizer allows us rethink ideas of power and weakness and denaturalize limiting constructions of knowledge and voice. It is not enough to simply insert Native voices into a pre-existing structure of coloniality past and present—the structure itself must be traced and knocked down over and over again, story by story, era by era, invention by invention.

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