

FROM JUNO TO THE VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE:
GENDER AND RACE IN COLONIAL MEXICO

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This thesis examines the changes Spain was forced to make toward their colonial patterns due to Nahua resistance. Each chapter assesses different periods during the colonial era, tracing how the Virgin of Guadalupe's meaning changed according to Spanish colonial needs.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines three different moments in Mexico's colonial period when the Spanish had to redefine their methods of colonization. While the Spaniards had clear patterns created from the seven hundred years of the Reconquista, the New World forced them to redefine their colonial strategies. My work specifically focuses on the Spaniards' attempts to convert the Nahuas of what is now central Mexico to Catholicism. Early in the conquest, the Spaniards looked to create parallels between the Nahua pantheon of gods and that of the Greco-Romans. The comparisons made by European friars of the Nahua gods and the Greco-Roman ones were not able to fully encompass the broad religious patterns of the Nahuas. As a result, the Spaniards had to adapt their conversion strategies. One of these strategies was the introduction of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Gender played a vital role in the Nahuas' religion and culture, forcing the Spanish conversion effort to seek a female deity to serve as a religious bridge between the Nahuas and the Spaniards. The success of the legend of Guadalupe also presented issues for the Spaniards, as the legend promoted racial equality through religious devotion. Considering the caste system in the Spanish Empire, the Spaniards were again forced to modify their methods of colonialization when the *casta* paintings redefined race throughout the Spanish Empire.

Each chapter examines a different cultural redefinition of Spanish colonial methods. Chapter 1 tries to expand one's understanding of the intellectual history of early colonial Mexico. While some agents of the Church were the elites and intellectuals such as Bernardino de Sahagún, evidence shows that they were still exposed to, and consumers of, the cultural history of Greco-Roman literature and culture, which was popular in Spain in the sixteenth century. Spanish friars' exposure to classical Greco-Roman works such as Herodotus resulted in the friars finding exactly what they were looking for to explain what they saw in the New World. Historian

Fernando Cervantes writes: “The power of myth over the imagination was compelling enough to make Europeans see exactly those very things they had gone out to find: giants and wild men, pygmies, cannibals and Amazons, women whose bodies never aged and cities paved with gold.”¹ Taking Cervantes’ analysis of what early Spaniards saw in the New World seriously, chapter 1 introduces the works of Greco-Roman literature available to Spanish friars. Chapter 1 also shows that these Greco-Roman works of literature played a vital role in defining the Nahua pantheon for Spanish Catholics. The comparisons used to familiarize the European world with the gods of the New World were faulty. But these comparisons allowed Catholics to impose European ideas of religion and gender on to the newly conquered Nahuas. Crucially, the work of classist Andrew Laird shows that friars coming to the New World were well read in Greco-Roman literature, which in turn influenced how friars interacted with the Nahua religion.² By analyzing the cultural history of the Old World, chapter 1 looks to bridge the dissonance between the intellectual history of the period, and the often-neglected works of intellectualism that the friars consumed before, during, and shortly after the conquest of the New World.

Chapter 2 studies the cultural history of the Virgin of Guadalupe, and emphasizes her role in introducing and maintaining European gender norms following the Spanish conquest of Meso-America. Although the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe started off as a folk legend, it became part of religious intellectualism in the mid-colonial period. Outside of the initial contact with a young Nahua peasant, Juan Diego, the Virgin of Guadalupe’s impact in the New World greatly depended on the Catholic Church to gain traction. Using the intellectual history of the Church, chapter 2 aims to bridge the cultural history of the indigenous population by placing

¹ Cervantes, Fernando. *The Devil in the New World: The Impact of Diabolism in New Spain*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994. p. 6

² See, Pohl, John M. D., and Claire L. Lyons. *Altera Roma: Art and Empire from Mérida to México*. 2016.

newer scholarship of Nahua society in direct contact with the myth of the Marian apparition. Due to the growing scholarship of the Nahuas, and the greater accessibility to their language, the works of historians Camila Townsend and Elizabeth Hill Boone have opened the door for a new generation of Nahua scholars.³ These newer works of scholarship allow scholars to look at Nahua culture in a light not previously accessible to intellectual historians of the Virgin of Guadalupe. These works reveal that gender and sexuality played a central role in Nahua religion. In short, the success of conversion would greatly increase if the New World Catholicism had a female deity to venerate. The myth and the painting left behind in Juan Diego's clothes as 'proof' of the Marian apparition are full of both Catholic and Nahua imagery, suggesting that both cultures were considered in the creation of the myth. The chapter analyzes the myth of the Virgin Mary using the new scholarship concerning Nahua gender and sexuality.

Lastly, chapter 3 looks to analyze the lasting legacy of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Colonial Mexico by looking at the *castas* system. One of the most striking elements of the legend of the Virgin of Guadalupe was her skin tone (brown) and chosen language (Nahuatl). As chapters 2 and 3 explore, the Virgin appeared to an indigenous peasant in 1531, instructed him in Nahuatl, and even appeared to share the same skin tone as Juan Diego. In an empire with a caste system like that of Spain, the implications of the Virgin Mary choosing to appear under these circumstances shows the vital importance that race played in the mythmaking. However, chapter 3 grapples with the concept of whiteness, and its creation during the early colonial period. Scholarship on ethnicity in the Spanish Empire would suggest that whiteness was a flexible

³ See the works of Boone, Elizabeth Hill. *Stories in Red and Black: Pictorial Histories of the Aztecs and Mixtecs*. ACLS Humanities E-Book. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000. And Townsend, Camilla. *Annals of Native America: How the Nahuas of Colonial Mexico Kept Their History Alive*. 2019.

concept that considered social standing, wealth, and ethnicity before deciding one's *casta*.⁴ Considering that social mobility within the Spanish Empire was largely dictated by one's *casta*, the presence of the Virgin of Guadalupe in the *casta* paintings suggest that her image was used by Creoles as an image of racial and religious equality. The Virgin's appearance leveled the race-obsessed Spanish Empire to show that even those at the bottom of the caste system were considered for divine intervention and salvation. Taking the eventual Mexican Wars of Independence into consideration, the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe would eventually serve as a flag of the revolution. The Third Chapter also looks at the lasting implications of race on Spanish the frontier, arguing that the historiography of the Spanish Borderlands remained deeply affected by the Spanish concept of whiteness, even if the *castas* were less carefully monitored hundreds of miles away from Spanish officials based in Mexico City.

One of the most studied aspects of early colonial Mexico is the spread of Catholicism in the New World. For generations, scholars have sought to explain how Spanish priests converted natives to Catholicism. One of the strategies that the Spaniards used when converting natives was the popularization of the Virgin of Guadalupe. While the worship of this Marian apparition was mainly seen as a cult in the early colonial period, by the mid colonial period, her popularity would grow to represent a religious symbol that justified the foundations of the Mexican Church.⁵ This brown-skinned virgin eventually gained much acceptance among the population of colonial Mexico nearly a century after her alleged apparition. Despite the central role that the Virgin of Guadalupe played in converting the people of colonial Mexico to Catholicism, her story often takes a marginal role in the historiography. Although there are many possible

⁴ See, Twinam, Ann. *Purchasing Whiteness: Pardos, Mulattos, and the Quest for Social Mobility in the Spanish Indies*. 2015.

⁵ Brading D.A. *Mexican Phoenix: Our Lady of Guadalupe: Image and Tradition Across Five Centuries*. 2003. p.5

explanations for this marginalization, one of the clearest reasons is the knowledge required to understand the Virgin's role in the centuries-long spiritual conquest of Mexico.

A major obstacle that the current scholarship has recently addressed is the centuries-long myths that came out of the Spanish conquest, such as the belief that the Aztecs thought the Spaniards were gods. Recently, historian Camilla Townsend challenged this commonly held belief that the Aztecs thought of Hernan Cortes as a godly figure in her article, "No One Said it was Quetzalcoatl."⁶ Townsend is not alone. Historian Matthew Restall also tackled some of these myths in his work *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*.⁷ Core to the propagation of these myths is a historiography that accepted Spanish exceptionalism as the only way to explain how "no more than a handful of men" were able to conquer one of the greatest human civilizations.⁸ However successful the Spanish were in conquering the Aztecs, the conquest was a long and multifaceted event that had just as much indigenous agency as that of the Spanish.

One of the earliest scholars that Restall identifies in proliferating the myth of Spanish exceptionalism is William Prescott. Writing *The Conquest of Mexico* in 1843, Prescott became one of the first pioneers in writing a history of the Spanish conquest.⁹ While Prescott's work has been the source of many criticisms such as Restall's, his work was a valuable early contribution to the budding field of early Mexican history. Well in to the 1960s, University of North Texas' Donald E. Chipman, for example, saw Prescott's work as valuable despite its flaws.¹⁰ Prescott's

⁶ Townsend, Camilla. "No One Said it was Quetzalcoatl: Listening to the Indians in the Conquest of Mexico." *History Compass* 1.1 (2003).

⁷ Restall, Matthew. *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

⁸ Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, p.3.

⁹ Prescott, William H. *History of the Conquest of Mexico: With a Preliminary View of the Ancient Mexican Civilization, and the Life of the Conqueror, Hernando Cortes*. New York: J.B. Alden, 1886.

¹⁰ Chipman, D. E. (1967). *The History of the Conquest of Mexico*, by W. H. Prescott & C. H. Gardiner. *The Americas*, 24(1), 99–100.

work was also praised by his contemporaries for his contributions to the field, even though his primary-based scholarship of the New World was lacking. Historian William Gilmore Simms celebrated Prescott, yet cautioned against its scholarly merit. Simms writes that Prescott's work: "Never was history, in itself, more thoroughly like romance; never was the narrow boundary between the possible and certain more vague, shadowy, and subtle."¹¹ While Prescott's work was crucial in moving the historiography of colonial Mexico forward, this work instilled lasting biases to stories of romance, and less on historical facts.

Unfortunately, Prescott's foundational work created a lasting perspective of Aztecs being so blinded by the superiority of the Spaniards that they allowed their civilization to collapse. By exaggerating the role of a few exceptional Spanish men, Prescott created scholarly fallacies that modern historians are still looking to stamp out.¹² While Prescott had contemporary critics, his work of prioritizing romance was not unique to him during this period. Historian Herbert E. Bolton for example, took a similar approach to history in the early years of the 1900s.¹³ Bolton similarly greatly contributed to the study of the Spanish frontier, although his romanticism of the Spanish would cause problems for the historiography of colonial Mexico. Bolton regularly celebrated the Spanish for their colonial achievements. Bolton also emphasized Spaniards' whiteness while expressing disgust for their *mestizo* descendants.¹⁴ As helpful as Bolton's work towards the intellectual history of Colonial Mexico, his insistence on race would eventually lead scholars to reject much of his work and look to focus on the neglected ethnohistory of Spanish

¹¹ Ernest, John. "Reading the Romantic Past: William H. Prescott's History of the Conquest of Mexico." *American Literary History* 5, no. 2 (1993): 231-49.

¹² Prescott's work is still found on the shelves of Barnes and Noble.

¹³ Bolton, Herbert Eugene. *Spanish Exploration in the Southwest, 1542-1706*. New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1916.

¹⁴ See, Kessell, John L. "Bolton's Coronado." *Journal of the Southwest* 32, no. 1" (1990),

colonialism.¹⁵

With all their weaknesses, Prescott and Bolton were combating “The Black Legend.” The Black Legend that Bolton looked to dispel asserted that Spain was a fanatical and brutal ruler that looked to commit atrocities on their indigenous subjects. Although the Black Legend is not completely without historical merit, the double standards it presented when looking at the Spanish colonial effort distorted or greatly exaggerated the reality of the Spanish colonial effort.¹⁶ In many ways, The Black Legend endured for so long due to the racial hierarchy it promoted. Such biases would often create a rejection of Mexican or Spanish sources and thus allowed the Black Legend myth to flourish in the early Spanish scholarship produced in the Anglo-speaking world. Bolton, however, was instrumental in shaping the scholarship. According to Charles Wilson Hackett, the *autos* found in the Mexican archives helped Bolton change the way historians see and illustrate the Spanish in a new light.¹⁷ Rather than simply using new sources, Bolton looked to correct some of the distortion created from the Black Legend by praising the intentional Spanish colonial effort rather than the series of circumstances that led to the eventual conquest and assimilation of the various indigenous groups in the new world.

In the latter half of 1960’s, James Lockhart’s influential work started a new approach on the ethnohistory of the Nahuas.¹⁸ Lockhart’s works look at the Nahuas on their own terms and in

¹⁵ See, Hurtado, Albert L. “Herbert E. Bolton, Racism, and American History.” *Pacific Historical Review* 62, no. 2 (1993): 127-42.

¹⁶ Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America*

¹⁷ Hackett, “The Revolt of the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico in 1680.” *The Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association* 15, no. 2 (1911): 93.

¹⁸ See, Karttunen, Frances, and James Lockhart. *Nahuatl in the Middle Years Language Contact Phenomena in Texts of the Colonial Period*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988., Anderson, Arthur J.O., Frances Mary Frei Berdan, James Lockhart, and Ronald W. Langacker. *Beyond the codices: the Nahua view of colonial Mexico*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976., and Lockhart, James. *Letters and People of the Spanish Indies, Sixteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

their own language, pushing out the romantic intellectual history of Prescott and Bolton. While Prescott and Bolton's work would remain influential thanks to their focus on Spanish archives, Lockhart would do the same with previously neglected sources. This focus on ethnohistory would open up a new world of sources, from pictograms of the Aztec Empire to the annals of the Nahuas that survived the conquest.¹⁹ These sources casted even more doubt on the romantic views of Prescott and Bolton, leaving Lockhart as one of the most influential historians of Colonial Mexico. Lockhart also mentored some of the leading experts on the ethnohistory of Colonial Mexico such as Matthew Restall and Stephanie Wood.²⁰

With the growing popularity of ethnohistory in the study of colonial Mexico and the access to previously inaccessible primary sources, historians have made the patterns of Spanish Colonialism clearer than ever. Historian Fernando Cervantes, who has worked on diabolism, intended to situate his work as a bridge between intellectual and cultural histories.²¹ Cervantes describes these two approaches as “both sides of the same coin and basing their arguments very much on the same premise,” yet both are crucial to understanding diabolism as well as the legend of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The coin that Cervantes describes in the previous quote is that of sources. The early scholarship of the religious conversion of indigenous people was dominated by the top-down approach of intellectual historians. The more recent and growing cultural history has also studied the conquest of colonial Mexico. This recent wave of cultural historians “see those groups once classed as ‘vulgar’ as the bearers of a genuine and authentic culture.”²²

¹⁹ See, Townsend, Camilla. *Annals of Native America: How the Nahuas of Colonial Mexico Kept Their History Alive*. 2019.

²⁰ Wood, Stephanie Gail. *Transcending Conquest: Nahua Views of Spanish Colonial Mexico*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003.

²¹ Cervantes, Fernando. *The Devil in the New World: The Impact of Diabolism in New Spain*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994. p.3

²² Cervantes, *The Devil in the New World*. p.3

They have looked to analyze the culture, religion, and identity of the Nahuas, and judge them on their own terms, rather than under the terms of the Spanish clergy and intellectuals. Naturally, each provides a valuable contribution to the historiography of Colonial Mexico, and thus the approaches of cultural and intellectual histories should be considered when analyzing the legend of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

The myth of the Virgin of Guadalupe almost perfectly captures the importance of both intellectual history and ethnohistory. Naturally, much of our understanding of the Marian apparitions comes from the clergy, with some theologians revering the apparition and painting it as a clear divine intervention.²³ Others, however, dismiss the legend as a work of pagans looking to syncretize the Nahua gods with Christian imagery.²⁴ Although the Virgin of Guadalupe would eventually be canonized by the church, these conflicting perspectives are important to note. The Virgin, according to legend, appeared to Juan Diego in 1531, just a decade after the fall of Tenochtitlan. Despite her early existence, the full implementation of her legend would not be a popular method of conversion until 1648 when Miguel Sánchez, a Franciscan Friar born in New Spain, published the *Imagen de la Virgen María*.²⁵ According to Brading, Sánchez was responsible for “providing the theological rationale for the cult to the Virgin of Guadalupe.”²⁶ Naturally, this publication would be a hallmark of the intellectual history of Colonial Mexico. The legend at its core is a popular history that requires a firm understanding of the local cultures that created it. Marian apparitions, after all, were not new to the Spanish world, and each

²³ See, Sanchez, Miguel. *Relación de la milagrosa aparición de la santa imagen de la Virgen de Guadalupe de Mexico, sacada de la historia que compuso el Br. Miguel Sanchez*. Mexico: Felipe de Zuniga y Ontiveros, 1781.

²⁴ See Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: Introduction and Indices*.

²⁵ Sánchez, Miguel, and Bernardo Calderón. *Imagen de la Virgen Maria Madre de Dios de Guadalupe, Milagrosamente aparecida en la ciudad de Mexico*. En Mexico: en la imprenta de la viuda de Bernardo Calderon, vendese en su tienda, 1648.

²⁶ Brading *Mexican Phoenix* p.6

iteration served as an important catalyst to solidifying converts.²⁷ My work, inspired by Cervantes's, looks to bridge the gaps between intellectual and recent cultural histories.

This thesis is also informed by the work of other cultural historians. Pete Sigal in *The Flower and the Scorpion*, for example, shows that Nahua sexuality could not be fully understood with the existing top-down approach of some intellectual historians.²⁸ Instead, Sigal's work examines various legal documents and Nahua glyphs to create a new understanding of Nahua sexuality. Similarly, Caroline Dobbs Pennock's *Bonds of Blood* examines Nahua concepts of gender by analyzing Nahua rituals and customs. Dobbs Pennock argues that gender played a vital role in the Nahua world by defining one's role in society according to their chosen gender. Similarly, Lisa Sousa's *The Woman Who Turned into a Jaguar*, examines the lasting implications of Nahua's understanding of gender throughout the colonial period.²⁹ While gender remained a fluid concept in the Nahua world, people's gender was crucial to the operations of Nahua society, and thus a crucial component to capture in the conversion of the Nahuas. These deep pillars of Nahua society meant that the Spanish colonial effort was forced to modify their conversion methods to include Nahua views on gender and sexuality, which included the introduction of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

This thesis seeks to illustrate that the Virgin of Guadalupe's origins have a complicated history of imagery that draws on from the Greco-Roman and Nahua pantheons. This can be most clearly seen from the sixteenth-century Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagun's *Florentine*

²⁷ See, Boyer, Marie-France. *The Cult of the Virgin: Offerings, Ornaments, and Festivals*. (London): Thames & Hudson, 2000.

²⁸ Sigal, Peter Herman. *The Flower and the Scorpion: Sexuality and Ritual in Early Nahua Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.

²⁹ Sousa, Lisa. *The Woman Who Turned into a Jaguar, and Other Narratives of Native Women in Archives of Colonial Mexico*. 2017.

Codex in which he compares the Nahua pantheon to Greco-Roman counterparts. While de Sahagun's work was published after the Marian apparition, his work shows that Catholic friars were well-exposed to legends of Greece and Rome before setting out to convert the New World. Considering that Sahagun's work continues to be one of the most foundational work on the history of the Nahua people, it is important to look at any distortion with a careful eye. The growing scholarship in Nahua gender identity, such as the one of Pete Sigal and Caroline Dobbs Pennock emphasize the importance of Nahua sexuality in their religion.³⁰ This new scholarship suggests that Sahagun's insistence on prioritizing gender when comparing both Nahua and Greco- Roman gods would have deeper implications that previously thought.³¹

A firm understanding of race also plays a role in bridging the gaps created by intellectual and ethnohistory. Rebecca Earle's *The Body of the Conquistador* for example, emphasizes the role of humoralism in defining the science concerning race in the colonial period.³² Humoralism meant that anyone could lose their whiteness, and thus their social standing within society simply by eating indigenous foods, long-term exposure to the climate of the New World, and speaking indigenous languages. This understanding of race meant that the Spanish had to yet again modify their colonial efforts to encompass race in the late colonial period. By inventing the concept of whiteness, the Spanish were no longer held to differentiating people based on their religion, and instead could institute new forms of colonial control through race.³³

³⁰ See, Sigal, Peter H. *The Flower and the Scorpion: Sexuality and Ritual in Early Nahua Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012. And Pennock, Caroline Dobbs. "Women of Discord: Female Power in Aztec Thought." *The Historical Journal*, vol. 61, no. 2, 2018, pp. 275–299.

³¹ Considering the enormous differences between Greco-Roman and Nahua cultures, only a few scholars such as Andrew Laird have looked to connect the two.³¹

³² Earle, Rebecca. *The Body of the Conquistador: Food, Race and the Colonial Experience in Spanish America, 1492-1700*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

³³ Earle, *The Body of the Conquistador*, p.3

In short, the recent historiography of colonial Mexico suggests that scholars gain new insights when focusing on the Nahua experience, which creates a more complete picture of the spiritual conquest of Mexico and the colonization process. By looking at three moments of the centuries-long spiritual conquest, this work suggests that the unique obstacles the Spanish faced in the New World required them to adjust and adapt their colonial methods in order to more successfully convert the indigenous population. The early encounters revolved around creating similarities between the Nahua religion and the successfully conquered Greco-Roman religion. While this pattern may have helped Romans to spiritually conquer Rome, the New World would pose its own challenges to the colonial method. A focus on gender led to the revival of the legend of the Virgin of Guadalupe, a Marian apparition seemingly designed to convert the Nahuas by speaking to them in their own language and presenting herself as a brown-skinned virgin who resembled them. The introduction of the Virgin of Guadalupe would serve the Spanish well in converting the Nahuas. Ironically, as this thesis shows, the image of the Virgin helped weaken the Spanish *casta* system toward the end of the colonial period.

CHAPTER 1

GRECO-ROMAN GODS THROUGH AN OBSIDIAN MIRROR: RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM IN EARLY COLONIAL MEXICO

In 1519, Hernán Cortés entered the great city of the Aztecs, Tenochtitlan.³⁴ Cortés and his fellow conquistadors were blown away by this artificially-made island in the center of a lake connected by three bridges.³⁵ As they got closer, the emperor of this great city, Montezuma, greeted them as his guest into the marvelous city. Tenochtitlan was like nothing the conquistadors had ever seen. Although the beauty of the city had captivated the conquistadors, they also soon faced the chilling reality of their hosts' religion. As Montezuma took Cortés to the top of the great pyramid of Huitzilopochtli, they faced a shrine caked in human blood. Cortés was forced to look away as he saw many idols covered in old and fresh blood. It was at that moment that Cortés allegedly pleaded with Montezuma to reject these “devils” and to divide the shrine to make place for “Our Lady.”³⁶ By erecting a shrine to the Virgin Mary, Cortés argued, Montezuma would see his gods cower and understand that his religion had been a great deception. Montezuma replied coldly, “begging” the conquistador to not say another word of insult towards his gods. Cortes took his leave down the one hundred fourteen steps of the pyramid likely knowing that war would be the only solution.³⁷

The devils Cortés described had complex names and even more complex roles in the Aztec universe. Polytheistic religions were not new to the Christian conquistadors. By the

³⁴ I use “Aztec” here and throughout the work to refer to the Nahuatl speakers of central Mexico and not to exclusively to refer to the people of Tenochtitlan or the Mexica.

³⁵ Historians have agreed that Cortés fellow conquistadors included African men and thousands of indigenous natives. See *M. Restall, Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003.

³⁶ Castillo, Bernal Diaz Del. *Memoirs, of the Conquistador Bernal Diaz Del Castillo Written by Himself*. Nabu Press, 2010. p. 240

³⁷ Restall, Matthew. *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*. New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2021, p.77

sixteenth century, the Christian war against polytheistic pantheons must have seemed like an ancient struggle long past. The spread of Catholicism was a crucial component to the Spanish method of conquest because it allowed the unification of the fundamental ideals of the religion.³⁸ Central to this unification of ideals was the Virgin Mary, later known as the Virgin of Guadalupe, an icon that served as a liminal bridge between both Spanish and Nahua cultures.

Catholicism was essential to the Spanish as it provided a moral compass to its believers while also establishing control mechanisms such as the threat of sin to the natives, a concept that was foreign to them. As part of the “spiritual conquest,” the institution of control brought by Catholicism was through the threat of sin, and its repercussions. The first Franciscans, in charge of converting natives, arrived at the behest of Cortés in Mexico in 1524, just three years after the sacking of Tenochtitlan. When the Franciscans arrived, they encountered a culture completely alien to them, a culture of many gods that served different functions in Aztec society. Moreover, they witnessed rituals such as human sacrifices, polygamy, and the use of unknown herbs. While the Franciscans were tasked to provide religious salvation for the native Mexicans, they were also simultaneously (advertently or not) obliterating the Aztec way of life.³⁹

Although there existed no shortages of similarities between the Aztec religion and that of the Spaniards, both religions clashed at a time where both religions had proved themselves to be the superior religion. Both religions’ worshipers had overcome their surrounding powers to become the dominant culture in their respective regions. For the Spanish, their belief in

³⁸ Levy, Buddy. *Conquistador: Hernán Cortés, King Montezuma, and the Last Stand of the Aztecs*. New York: Bantam Books, 2008. p. 324.

³⁹ Historians have agreed on the intention of Spanish friars to destroy Nahuatl culture. See, M. León Portilla. *The Broken Spears; the Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1962., S. Wood, *Transcending Conquest: Nahua Views of Spanish Colonial Mexico*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003., R. Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico: An Essay on the Apostolate and the Evangelizing Methods of the Mendicant Orders in New Spain, 1523-1572*. California U.P., 1966.

Catholicism united various kingdoms to cast out 700 years of Muslim occupation known as *La Reconquista*. For the Aztecs, their god Huitzilopochtli guided them out of the caves of Aztlan to find their new promised land and allowed them to become a superpower in central Mexico in less than 200 years. The Spanish and Aztecs held firm convictions in the supremacy of their deities, which they validated with the success each found in consolidating their power, in Spain and Mesoamerica. Furthermore, it provided a possibility for the Spanish and Aztec rejection of religious assimilation when they encountered one another. The human sacrifice of Jesus Christ would have made perfect sense to the Aztecs, as they did not sacrifice for sport or entertainment but rather out of religious necessity. Cortés, however, chose to present Montezuma with an image of the Virgin Mary, the mother of a god they did not yet understand.

In many ways, Christianity rose out of overcoming the Greco-Roman religion as a revivalist cult that stood against the religion and customs of Rome.⁴⁰ From Nero's attempts to persecute Christians in 64 A.D. to its eventual acceptance as the Roman state religion by Constantine in the fourth century, Christianity was able to endure due to its relevance to the Roman state. The early Christians that lost their lives to persecution became martyrs, important historical figures that fueled Christianity in Rome. Historian Robert Bartlett writes: "From at least the second century AD some Christians were regarded as higher, exceptional, in a class of their own. These were martyrs, a word of Greek origin meaning "witnesses," those who died for their faith, tortured and killed in the elaborate public way typical of imperial Roman civilization."⁴¹ The remains of the martyrs would slowly take over the shrines of the old gods, whether by imperial support or as acts of religious defiance. In the case of the Christian ruler

⁴⁰ Bartlett, Robert. *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things?: Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation*. 2015. p.7

⁴¹ Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things?* p.3

Gallus for example, Bartlett writes: “[Gallus] was inspired to harness the energy of a martyr saint to challenge the pagan cult and the wicked practices at Daphne.”⁴² These challenges would eventually lead to the deicide of the Greco-Roman pantheon, ushering in a new age of Christianity across the Roman Empire.

If the early Christians thought that they had successfully killed the Greco-Roman gods, they were sadly mistaken. While the Christians may have severed the religious importance of the Greco-Roman pantheon, the presence of the Greco-Roman gods in Roman culture continued to live well beyond the last temple to Jupiter was abandoned. Greco-Roman gods remained dormant in the art and literature of western culture only to be resurrected a thousand years later during the Italian Renaissance and subsequently influenced Spanish friars’ views when confronting new polytheistic religions.⁴³ The rebirth of classicism in large part is due to the rediscovery of Cicero, Apuleius, Plato, and other Greco-Roman writers, which caused a boom in art and literature that depicted the Greco-Roman gods in a new splendor not seen since the conversion of the Roman Empire. The popularity of these works was so significant in the fourteenth and fifteenth century that four out of twelve most popular books in Europe dealt with classical Greco-Roman monsters.⁴⁴ From Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy* to Sandro Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus*, the Italian Renaissance saw Roman-inspired art dominate much of the Renaissance’s cultural contributions to the world. By analyzing how Franciscans related Nahua gods to Greco-Roman gods, scholars can gain deeper insight into how the people of sixteenth century Spain perceived and interacted with polytheistic religions. This analysis of the Greco-Roman religion also

⁴² Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things?* p.11

⁴³ Cervantes, Fernando. *The Devil in the New World: The Impact of Diabolism in New Spain*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994. p. 6

⁴⁴ Cervantes, *The Devil in the New World* p.6

provides insights into the role the Greco-Roman religion lingered in western society. This analysis shows that the previous models of Spanish colonization developed during the Spanish Reconquista were largely ineffective when applied to the Nahua world. These previous methods of religious conversions required a foundation in the Abrahamic faiths, something completely foreign to the New World. This chapter shows that Spanish friars intentionally modified their approach to religious conversion by attempting to find parallels between the Nahua and Greco-Roman pantheon in order to more effectively gain religious converts.

In many ways, religion in antiquity served as science does in modern times. Plagues acted as the wrath of the gods or god, floods wiped the wicked from the earth, and victors reveled in the generosity of the gods. In polytheistic religions, the gods acted independently and motivated by their own agendas. Although those very gods often interacted with humans, they were hardly bothered with day-to-day human activities. Veneration to polytheistic gods often entailed a person sacrificing something of value to an altar and pleading the god to answer their prayers. Sacrifices did not ensure favor, but certainly swayed the gods in one's favor. The better the sacrifice, the more likely one was to get a response from the god. The acknowledgement of a god (or gods) was necessary in explaining why forces that exceeded human power existed, and where they came from. Similarly, for hundreds of years, the Spanish justified the relentless destruction of colonized cultures by claiming that those they colonized were on the wrong side of science. Even modern writers such as Michael Harner or Marvin Harris wrote on the bad science that led the Aztecs to their belief system.⁴⁵ Historian Caroline Dobbs Pennock writes: "These modern anti-intellectual positivists are successors to the positivist of the early twentieth century who

⁴⁵ Dobbs Pennock, Caroline. *Bonds of Blood: Gender, Lifecycle and Sacrifice in Aztec Culture*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire (England): Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. p.35

attributed the Aztec tradition to the ‘error’ in their science, which led them to believe that blood was necessary for the sun to rise.”⁴⁶ While the current historiography has moved away from such interpretations of “science” and its role in allowing Spanish conquest, its existence continues to affect the foundations of scholarship in the study of the Spanish conquest.

Although most religious influence from antiquity had lost its scientific role, the Greek and Roman interpretations of science continued to linger in the minds of the Franciscans. Greek writing on humoralism for example, continue to dominate the friars’ interpretation of the body and medicine. Humoralism was an ancient theory that maintained that illness and diseases came from an imbalance in the four humors, described blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile.⁴⁷ Such reverence for the Greeks likely constructed a similar perception of a great civilization that was a victim to the “bad science” of their religion. Regardless, both Hippocrates and Galen were considered the fathers of humoralism and maintained an important role as providers of medical knowledge. The ancient Greek and Romans then had a liminal role in the world of the Spanish, as they were the source of pagan religion while also being a source of high art and medical understanding. This dichotomy put the Greco-Roman pantheon in an awkward position among the Franciscans, as they continued to capture the imagination of the Christian world.

With the Greco-Roman pantheon no longer serving as a scientific explanation for the universe, even friars continued to indulge in the stories of the past. In a world before the invention of the printing press, many friars served as scribes in addition to their divine duties. This meant that friars were at times exposed to the classic works of polytheistic antiquity. During the 16th century, various Greek classics were being translated to languages accessible to the

⁴⁶ Dobbs Pennock Bonds, p.35.

⁴⁷ See Earle, Rebecca. *The Body of the Conquistador: Food, Race and the Colonial Experience in Spanish America, 1492-1700*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

clergy. In 1474 for example, the Catholic priest Lorenzo Valla translated the work of Herodotus into Latin.⁴⁸ While Herodotus' work remained a staple of the Greco-Roman origin myth, other classic works would introduce the Spanish friars to later interpretations of the Greco-Roman pantheon. Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, for example, had been "well-known in its Castilian translation, *Lucio Apuleyo del Asno de oro*, and was published in 1513 by Diego López de Cortegana."⁴⁹ More than just being a staple of late second century Roman literature, Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* also provided interesting insights into the Greco-Roman gods. While most saw them as unique entities, Apuleius suggests a far more pantheistic understanding of the gods:

I, mother of the universe, mistress of all the elements, first-born of the ages, highest of the gods, queen of the shades, first of those who dwell in heaven, representing in one shape all gods and goddesses. My will controls the shining heights of heaven, the health-giving-sea-winds, and the mournful silences of hell; the entire world worships my single godhead in a thousand shapes, with divers rites, and under many a different name. The Phrygians, first-born of mankind, call me the Pessinuntian Mother of the gods; the native Athenians the Cecropian Minerva; the island-dwelling Cypriots Paphian Venus; the archer Cretans Dictynnan Diana; the triple-tongue Sicilians Stygian Proserpine; the ancient Eleusinians Actaeon Ceres; some call me Juno some Bellona, other Hecate, others Rhamnusia; but both races of Ethiopians, those on whom the rising and those whom the setting sun shines, and the Egyptians who excel in ancient learning, honour me with the worship which is truly mine and call me by my true name: Queen Isis.⁵⁰

Interestingly, Apuleius' work would later be added to General Inquisitor of Spain, Gaspar de Quiroga's *Index et Catalogus Librorum prohibitorum*, 1583, where it became forbidden to read among the clergy.⁵¹ By 1583 however, it would seem that the popularity of *The Golden Ass* had already permeated Spanish thought and understanding of polytheism.⁵² With the work of

⁴⁸ Cervantes, Fernando. *The Devil in the New World: The Impact of Diabolism in New Spain*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994. p.6

⁴⁹ Pohl, John M. D., and Claire L. Lyons. *Altera Roma: Art and Empire from Mérida to México*. Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press, 2016. p.168

⁵⁰ Apuleius, and E.J. Kenny. *The Golden Ass, or, Metamorphoses*. London: Penguin Books, 2004. p.11.5

⁵¹ Quiroga, Gaspar. *[Index et catalogvs librorum prohibitorum]*. Madrid: apud Alphonsum Gomezium regiũ typographum, 1583.

⁵² Laird, *Altera Roma*, p.168

Herodotus and Apuleius fresh on the mind, Spain set its sights on its new discoveries in the Americas. As these legends of civilizations long passed echoed in the mind of the friars, it is at times difficult to separate what they saw in the New World as opposed to what they wanted to see. Historian Fernando Cervantes writes: “It is perhaps understandable that such a deep-rooted tradition should have remained apparently unshaken by the discovery of a and remote continent, patently populated by beings who did not fit into its ancient and confident classifications.”⁵³ This discovery demanded a new colonial pattern from the Spanish friars, an adaptation of their colonial strategy that acknowledged the polytheistic religion of the Nahuas in order to more effectively convert them.

While many friars were intolerant of the Nahua’s religion and culture, some Spanish Franciscans sought to understand and protect Aztec language and culture. Bernardino de Sahagún was one of those Franciscan friars, who learned Nahuatl and is even considered by some to be the first anthropologist.⁵⁴ Sahagún’s journey started in 1529, where he traveled to New Spain in the hopes of converting the Nahuatl people. Learning Nahuatl not only allowed Sahagún to communicate with the natives but also granted him the ability to understand their traditions. Historian Robert Ricard writes: “His [Sahagún] profound knowledge of the Nahuatl tongue is attested by his own work and by many witnesses”.⁵⁵ Sahagún was able to visit various Aztec groups and write his *Historia general de las cosas de la nueva España*, commonly referred to as the *Florentine Codex*. Sahagún’s motivation to record Aztec language and culture stemmed

⁵³ Cervantes, Fernando. *The Devil in the New World: The Impact of Diabolism in New Spain*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005. 6

⁵⁴ León Portilla, Miguel. *Bernardino De Sahagun: First Anthropologist*. Norman, Okla: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2002.

⁵⁵ Ricard, Robert. *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico: An Essay on the Apostolate and the Evangelizing Methods of the Mendicant Orders in New Spain, 1523-1572*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982, p. 45

from the belief that in order to most effectively convert the natives and cut off devotion to their gods, he had to understand the people of Mexico. Sahagún's book was intended to record as much of the Aztec history and way of life as possible, and its twelve volumes are the most complete historians have. Although Sahagún's *Florentine Codex* provides some of the most complete recording of Nahua history, it was still the subject of Spanish censoring and includes Christian undertones that were injected into the Nahua lore and history.⁵⁶ Historian Walden Browne, for example, argues that Sahagún was not a selfless humanist that chose to study the Nahuas and instead was far more of a European humanist studying the classical cultures of the Old World.⁵⁷

Beyond the Christian undertones that were injected by the friars into the Nahua history, the Roman gods also started to show themselves in how the Spanish friars understood the Nahua pantheon. In book one of the *Florentine Codex*, Sahagún himself makes the comparisons of the Nahua gods to the Roman gods. Sahagún compared the patron god of the Aztec pantheon, Huitzilopochtli (Vitzilubuchtli) and Paynal (who he describes as the delegate of Huitzilopochtli) to the Greco-Roman demigod Hercules. He describes Tezcatlipoca, the omnipresent god of the night sky and chaos, as the Roman patron god Jupiter. Chicomecoalt, the goddess of nourishment was compared to Ceres, goddess of agriculture. The goddess of water and patroness of childbirth Chachiuhtli, to the Roman matron goddess Juno. Tlaculteutli, the goddess (or monster) of earth to the Roman god of love and beauty, Venus. Sahagún compared the god of fire Xiuhtecuhtli, to the Roman god of fire and metalworking, Vulcan. Lastly he compares the

⁵⁶ Sahagún, Bernardino de, Arthur J. O. Anderson, and Charles E. Dibble. *General history of the things of New Spain*. Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah Press, 2012.

⁵⁷ Browne, Walden. *Sahagún and the Transition to Modernity*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000. p. 80

Nahua god of pulque, Tezcatzoncatl to Bacchus, the god of wine.⁵⁸ While some of the comparisons the friar made are more accurate than others, each comparison provides insight into what Sahagún thought of both pantheons.

Past the straightforward comparisons Sahagún made in his *Florentine Codex*, it is paramount to understand the binary nature of Greco-Roman religion, which aligns with the multiple meanings of Aztec gods. But, the Greco-Roman gods were dominated by gender norms of the time, perpetuating ideals of Roman masculinity and femininity. In the Greco-Roman creation story, the god Chaos came to be and started the Greco-Roman pantheon when he conceived with Gaia, the earth.⁵⁹ As Gaia and Chaos continued to bear children, she started to notice his sinful nature and called upon her children to punish their father. Cronos answered his mother's request and castrated his father giving birth to the goddess of love, Venus. Cronos took his sister Rhea as a wife and bore him Hestia, Ceres, Juno, Pluto, and Jupiter.⁶⁰ In order to maintain his control of the heavens, Cronos swallowed his children to ensure none would overthrow his rule. Eventually, Rhea is able to trick Cronos into swallowing a rock rather than his son Jupiter, giving him a chance to eventually defeat his father and free his siblings. The origin myth of the Roman gods creates a stark divide between men and women from the very creation of the first gods. Both Gaia and Rhea are at the mercy of their husbands, and cannot challenge their power until they raise a son who can.

In the Aztec world, women had no such origin story. The Bible also refers to God with male pronouns while the Aztec god of creation Ometeotl, was both male and female. More than

⁵⁸ Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, vol. 1 p. 31-36

⁵⁹ Hesiod, Glenn W. Most, and Glenn W. Most. *Hesiod*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018.p 116

⁶⁰ Hesiod, *Theogony*, 453

simply being male and female, Omeyteotl was also good and evil, bringer of order and chaos, and known as the Lord of Duality. Any concept of original sin in the Aztec world weighs on humanity as a whole, rather than a gender or one person. Modern humans, according to Aztec beliefs are the fifth iteration of humanity with their predecessors all being wiped out under different suns. To form humans, the goddess Chuacoatl ground up bones of the previous iterations of humans into dough, while the god Quetzalcoatl moistened dough with blood from his penis. Quetzalcoatl's sacrifice set up a debt that was often paid back to the gods by Aztec men piercing their penises and tongues in ritual sacrifices. Rather than create original sin then, the Aztecs believed in original debt, paying the gods back for their creation with blood. This debt meant that both men and women were both equally in debt to the gods, and thus equal in their creation. Unlike the story of Adam and Eve, the Aztec creation story gives both men and women equal footing in the eyes of their religion.⁶¹

Similarly, when an Aztec warrior took a war captive, a key bond of father and son was created. This was one of the most thorough expressions of masculinity, as every Aztec man had a blood debt to the gods. The captor would walk his "son" to the altar and wish him a brave death as a priest cut out his beating heart. There was no celebration for the gruesome death for the captor, but rather a warrior's understanding that one day, he too may have to face the same death with divine stoicism. As Caroline Dobbs Pennock so brilliantly illustrated:

This ritual exchange, which took place following the capture, emphasizes the importance of mutual respect and acceptance in the process of sacrifice. In standing apart, the captor gave honour to the victim by refusing to eat the flesh of his metaphorical 'son' and also provided a constant reminder to his family and to himself that such a poignant end was also very probably his own faith.⁶²

⁶¹ Dobbs Pennock, Caroline. *Bonds of Blood: Gender, Lifecycle, and Sacrifice in Aztec Culture*. p 29

⁶² Dobbs Pennock, Caroline. *Bonds of Blood: Gender, Lifecycle, and Sacrifice in Aztec Culture*. p.17

One of the main reasons for Christians' binary interpretation of the world can be found in the first book of the Bible, Genesis. In Genesis, Eve has her husband Adam and herself casted out of paradise for eating from the tree of knowledge.⁶³ Unable to resist temptation, the story of Adam and Eve sets up women as subservient to men while also introducing original sin to humanity. Eve did not pick the forbidden fruit for any other reason than her innate predisposition to disobey God, and thus men. Eve's actions then are not a mistake committed by a woman but rather served as a cautionary story of the nature of all women. Women had many different mythological origins and stories but few so clearly damning as that of the story of Adam and Eve. "Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor."⁶⁴ Through the mistake was made by Eve, men were then forced to toil over their fields while women would feel great pain during birth. These punishments given out by God created resentment towards women whenever men struggled to provide a livelihood, while also creating a lack of sympathy for women during childbirth.⁶⁵

The Greco-Roman origin story of women is also fairly damning for women. As a punishment for giving men fire, Zeus vowed to punish Prometheus with a "great woe for you yourself and for men to come" in the form of the first woman, Pandora.⁶⁶ Zeus found this punishment funny, as the source of chaos he introduced into the world would also bring about delight.⁶⁷ With the help of Hephaestus, Athena, Aphrodite, and Hermes, Zeus created Pandora as a seductress to punish men. Similar to the story of Eve, the story of Pandora explains the

⁶³ Genesis 3:12-3:24

⁶⁴ Timothy 2:13-14

⁶⁵ Dobbs Pennock, Caroline. "Women of Discord: Female Power in Aztec Thought" *The Historical Journal*, vol. 61, no.2, 2018, 275-299. p.2

⁶⁶ Bartlett, Robert C. "An Introduction to Hesiod's "Works and Days"." *The Review of Politics* 68, no. 2 (2006): 183

⁶⁷ Bartlett,"An Introduction to Hesiod's "Works and Days", p. 183

stereotypes held by the Greco-Roman world against women and “explains why we were and are condemned to work for our sustenance.”⁶⁸ More than just an explanation for the origin of women in the Greco-Roman world, the story of Pandora also shows the immense power Zeus held within the Greco-Roman pantheon. Historian Robert Bartlett writes: “Pandora’s very name, then, reminds us that all the Olympians took it upon themselves to do what Zeus had instructed only four of them to do!”⁶⁹ Rather than taking an equal role in creation, women were introduced in Greco-Roman myth as a divine creation to be the bane of men. With women having a similar role in Christianity, the comparisons that Sahagún made were careful to maintain gender equivalents, in some cases ignoring the obvious comparison to maintain the gender norms of the Greco-Roman pantheon.

To the Mexica people, their patron god Huitzilopochtli was the sun. To protect his mother, it chased his brothers and sisters, the stars and the moon in a continuous battle.⁷⁰ Many of the infamous human sacrifices occurred at Huitzilopochtli’s altar atop his pyramid in Tenochtitlan. The Aztecs believed that the *teyolia* (divine fire) of their victims fueled their god in his fight against his brothers and sisters, which ultimately kept their god’s mother and the universe whole. To the Nahua people, legends like the one of Huitzilopochtli, was the way in which they understood the physical universe and, therefore, was their “scientific” interpretation. As described by Jan Assmann, in polytheism “The fundamental plurality of the divine world in its cosmic manifestation was never questioned. The cosmic process was viewed as an interplay

⁶⁸ Bartlett, “An Introduction to Hesiod’s “Works and Days”, p.183

⁶⁹ Bartlett, “An Introduction to Hesiod’s “Works and Days” p. 184

⁷⁰ Read, Kay Almere, and Jason J. González. *Mesoamerican Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs of Mexico and Central America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. p. 193.

of convergent and divergent powers.”⁷¹ While Huitzilopochtli was the sun god in the Aztecs’ religious pantheon, he was also the god of war. To the Aztecs, the human sacrifices kept the sun rising, and their victories at war demonstrated clear favor from their god, Huitzilopochtli. Huitzilopochtli is very much an outsider, a bastard that was able to become the patron gods of the Aztecs through his martial prowess and love for his mother. He challenges the Nahua pantheon’s hierarchy while establishing himself as the new sun, likely referencing the Aztecs’ challenge (and success) to the hierarchy of Mesoamerica. Considering Huitzilopochtli’s prominent role in the Aztec pantheon and his birth challenging the existing gods, it’s a wonder why Sahagún did not relate Huitzilopochtli to the Roman Jupiter.

The mythology of the birth of Huitzilopochtli played a bigger role within the Aztec world than simply explaining the solar cycle. His birth story also gave women agency in passing on status within Aztec society.

Women endowed the succeeding kings with the right to rule, a woman who thereby merged with her counterparts before and after her, to whom she was structurally identical. She was one woman and many women at once, a means of achieving union but representative of opposition, a source of power yet also of chaos, a threat to the orderly progression of the world but absolutely necessary to its maintenance.⁷²

The myth surrounding Cihuacoatl’s conception of Huitzilopochtli then gave women a seemingly unquestionable authority in deciding legitimacy of the child rather than the man. Legitimacy through myth allowed the Aztecs to exercise their own version of *mater semper certa est*, the Roman principle of the mother is always certain, while the father is not. In the case of Huitzilopochtli however, the father played no role in his destiny, (as there was none) whereas the

⁷¹ Assmann, Jan. “Monotheism and Polytheism”. *Ancient Religions*, edited by Stara Iles Johnson, Cambridge, Ma and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2021, p. 18.

⁷² Gillespie, Susan D. *The Aztec Kings: The Construction of Rulership in Mexica History*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992. p. 24

role of the father was a defining factor to Hercules throughout his life. Meanwhile, the Roman demigod Hercules can be seen as a story of struggle between those on earth and the gods. In reference to Hercules, Classical Numismatist, Charles McNelis writes: “Heroic characters often share crucial attributes with particular divinities and these overlapping traits create thematically important relationships (which may be either supportive or antagonistic) among gods and humans.”⁷³ Although both Hercules and Huitzilopochtli can certainly play the role of heroic characters, there is far more ambiguity that Sahagún may be suggesting. Hercules is the son of the Roman patron god Jupiter, and the mortal Alcmena. Due to Jupiter’s extramarital affair, his wife Juno, hates Hercules as he is a manifestation of her husband’s infidelity. Hercules’ blood tie to the rest of the Roman pantheon serves as a benefit as he takes on his twelve labors and his blood ties are also what led his stepmother to act against him at every turn. Both Huitzilopochtli and Hercules highlight their respective cultural views on illegitimate birth while offering a degree of optimism, as both were able to overcome the circumstances of their birth to become widely worshipped characters.

To even the casual Mesoamerican or Roman scholar, Sahagún’s comparison of Huitzilopochtli to Hercules is hardly an accurate one. While it may seem natural to conclude Sahagún’s comparisons as a work of Spanish ignorance, the evidence suggests far more at play.⁷⁴ Huitzilopochtli could have easily been compared to the Roman god of war Mars or the god of the sun Sol. Even more obvious than Mars or Sol is the comparison of Huitzilopochtli to Jupiter, as they both were born to protect their mothers. Although both Huitzilopochtli and Hercules were born under non-conventional circumstances each represents a different struggle. Huitzilopochtli

⁷³ McNelis, Charles. “Bacchus, Hercules and Literary History in Statius’ *Achilleid*.” *The Classical Journal* 115, no. 3-4 (2020): 442

⁷⁴ Laird, *Altera Roma*, p. 174

represents a battle between the divine to explain why the sun moves away from the stars. Hercules on the other hand represents the struggle between humanity and the gods. The surrounding gods constantly affect Hercules, and his story acts more as a story of redemption once he is ultimately allowed into enter the pantheon of the Roman gods. Hercules represents the good of humanity, as their hard work and striving for redemption can connect them with the divine. His story also shows the folly of man, as he is prone to fits of violent rage and those who he aids always look to discredit his great achievements. Although the comparison between both gods may be lacking in accuracy, it certainly provides insight into what Spanish writers valued of each individual Roman god.

The next comparison that Sahagún made was the Nahua god Tezcatlipoca and the Roman god Jupiter. Through this comparison it seems that Sahagún looks to compare both gods as the most powerful in each respective pantheon. Sahagún seems to introduce Tezcatlipoca as a “true god”, an invisible god that is omnipresent in heaven, earth, and hell.⁷⁵ Tezcatlipoca’s comparison to Jupiter seems to be one of the weakest, as Sahagún spends little time justifying why the comparison is made. It is likely that de Sahagún’s comparison is only in regards to Tezcatlipoca’s supremacy (in his eyes) over the rest of the Nahua pantheon. As Tezcatlipoca’s omnipresence served far more similarities to Sahagún’s own god, it is likely that the friar identified Tezcatlipoca as the patron god. One interesting comparison to note about both gods is that Sahagún describes Tezcatlipoca as an agent of discord when he manifests himself to earth. Although the comparison in other factors may seem like a stretch on behalf of the friar, comparing both Jupiter and Tezcatlipoca as agents of earthly discord is an interesting insight into the Roman god. Jupiter often represents justice and order as the patriarch of Roman religion, yet

⁷⁵ Florentine Codex, p. 37

his interactions with men often sets discord in motion. The story of Hercules for example, shows a mischievous side of Jupiter that creates discord among the royal lineage of humans. In some of the work that the friars like Sahagún had access to, both Jupiter and Tezcatlipoca could be seen as agents of chaos, as their divine plans and interventions hardly adhere to (and usually goes against) the interests of humanity. In this regard, the friar provides a valuable insight into Jupiter by reflecting him off the Nahua god of obsidian mirrors.

The Nahua goddess Chicomecoatl is the goddess of female labor in maize production and wife of Tezcatlipoca.⁷⁶ Sahagún compares Chicomecoatl to the Roman goddess of agriculture Ceres. Although Chicomecoatl was often perceived as the goddess of harvests, she, like her Roman counterpart, can also represent the poor aspects of a harvest. Chicomecoatl was also tied to poverty, as a poor harvest could wreak havoc on her worshippers.⁷⁷ In comparing the goddesses, Sahagún seems to emphasize both Chicomecoatl and Ceres' control over human livelihood rather than focusing on their qualities of plenty. Another connection between the goddesses is that of child sacrifice. According to Diego Duran, a Dominican friar who wrote *The History of the Indies of New Spain* in the sixteenth century, Chicomecoatl often required the sacrifice of children to ensure good harvests.⁷⁸ Although the Romans did not necessarily commit children to sacrifices to gain favor with Ceres, Ceres sacrificed her child Proserpina to the god of the underworld Pluto. In order to explain the seasons, the Roman myth tells that four months out of the year Proserpina is forced to live in the underworld with Pluto. The return of Proserpina to her mother Ceres marks spring, where Ceres' power of agriculture is at its peak.

Another comparison Sahagún makes is that of the water goddess Chalchiuitlicue

⁷⁶ Florentine Codex, p.39.

⁷⁷ Florentine Codex, p.39.

⁷⁸ Olivier, *Altera Roma*, p.195

compared to the queen-goddess Juno. Although Juno has very little direct connection to water, the comparison to the goddess Chalchiuhtlicue offers more insight into what Juno represented in the mind of the friars. Sahagún writes that Chalchiuhtlicue married her brother Tlaloc, and they both acted as water gods.⁷⁹ Chalchiuhtlicue was the goddess of sea and river water while Tlaloc was that of storms. Although Sahagún does not provide any real reason as to why he compares Chalchiuhtlicue, professor of Classics and Hispanic Studies, Andrew Laird, provides insight into the comparison.

One would rather expect Chalchiuhtlicue, as an aquatic deity that could whip up storms, to be compared to *Neptune*- and that was exactly the comparison Sahagún *had* made in the *Memoriales*, the original five-book version of the history produced in 1563-1565. Sahagún's substitution of Juno for Neptune in the first revision make sense only in terms of Juno's unique role in Virgil's *Aeneid*. There she instructs Aeolus to stir up a storm at sea with the aim of preventing the Trojans from safely reaching the coast of Italy. In fact, Neptune's role in the epic was to pacify the tempest that Juno had caused.⁸⁰

In this case, Sahagún's changes are far more concerned with promoting gender norms rather than creating the most meaningful comparison between the two pantheons. While the selections may seem clumsy at times, the fact that Sahagún changed his stance on which gods to compare shows a careful and developing understanding of the pantheon as time went by.

The introduction of European gender roles required a complete upheaval of the Aztecs' understanding of the world. Nahua historians had recorded a complex history where both virtue and *tlazolli* (filth/sin) played a vital role in the formation of the Aztec state and culture. *Tlazolli* however, did not just serve as a controllable act of evil but rather served more as an unfortunate byproduct of humanity. Similar to Pandora's human curiosity, *tlazolli* was something that all humans resisted, although indulgence in moderation was understood as something innately

⁷⁹ Fr. Bernardino de Sahagún, p. 44

⁸⁰ Laird, *Altera Roma*, p.173

human. Comparing Roman gods to Nahua gods imposed European gender norms on a group of people who had a different conception of gender, and its importance in determining the divine role of the respective deity. Farming, for example, was a punishment placed on Adam by god for eating the forbidden fruit, and was subsequently seen as a masculine duty.⁸¹ With no such origin story to dictate men's role in society, the Nahua pantheon was free to apply different genders to their gods according to their own societal norms and mythology.

Sahagún, for example, equated the Nahua goddess, Tlazolteotl, to Venus, the Roman goddess of love that failed to capture Tlazolteotl in an accurate way.⁸² One of the issues when comparing both goddesses is the concept of sexuality itself. Historian Pete Sigal writes: "Two main principles organized Nahua thoughts about sexuality. First, sexual behavior related directly to the fertility rituals, ceremonies large and small, in the many realms described above, promoting the notion that everything and everybody must exude fertility in order for the community to survive. Second, an individual's sexual possibilities divide between those acts deemed moderate and those deemed excessive. Nahuas considering moderation in sexual activity as a virtue, excess a vice."⁸³ Although Tlazolteotl did have connections to sexuality, her role in the Aztec pantheon was tied far more to the concept of *tlazolli* or filth. Tlazolteotl represented sexual excess, the "filth" associated with sex and not the love inducing powers of Venus. Lust was a key example of too much *tlazolli* and was frowned upon. With Jupiter's frequent affairs with mortal women due to lust, it is worth wondering if the Nahuas would have understood why the Greco-Romans would worship such a filthy god. However, considering the fact that the Sahagún was a friar, one should wonder if he saw any difference between the Nahua and Greco-

⁸¹ Genesis 3:19

⁸² Fr. Bernardino de Sahagún, p. 48

⁸³ Sigal, Peter Herman. *The Flower and the Scorpion: Sexuality and Ritual in Early Nahua Culture*. 2012. p.12

Roman interpretations of sexuality.

In the thirteenth chapter of the first book of the Florentine Codex, Sahagún compares the Nahua Xiuhtecuhtli to the Roman god Vulcan. Although both gods are gods of fire, the aspect of fire they embody is fairly different. Xiuhtecuhtli represents the warmth of fire, and the day. Vulcan on the other hand, represents the potential of fire as a source of metalworking. One of the most glaring differences between the two gods comes when one considers that the people of Mesoamerica were still a Stone Age culture. With metal work limited within the Aztec world to jewelry, any god representing fire had little to no connection to war like the Roman Vulcan. In many ways Vulcan represents an auxiliary of the Roman gods, as he provides them with their weapons and armor. Vulcan also played a key role in the creation of Pandora at the behest of Jupiter.⁸⁴ Xiuhtecuhtli, on the other hand is one of the most important gods in the Nahua pantheon, as he also is the god time. Xiuhtecuhtli then is far more comparable to Prometheus, as his gift of fire started recorded time for Nahuas. The Franciscan friars, familiar with blacksmithing and metal weaponry, projected their perceptions on to the Nahua pantheon, which resulted in a shallow interpretation of Xiuhtecuhtli.

The last gods Sahagún compares are the gods Tezatzoncatl and Bacchus. Although both are gods of intoxication, both played a very different role in their respective worlds. To start with the obvious, each had their own respective alcoholic beverages. Tezatzoncatl was the god of *pulque*, while Bacchus was the god of wine. *Pulque* was a highly nutritious alcoholic beverage made from the fermented sap of the maguey cactus.⁸⁵ Similar to Chalchiutlicue's connection to

⁸⁴ The story of Pandora's creation I chose to maintain the Greek Zeus and Hephaestus instead of the Roman Jupiter and Vulcan mentioned in this paragraph.

⁸⁵ Pilcher, Jeffrey M. *¡Que Viva Los Tamales!: Food and the Making of Mexican Identity*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008. p.12

Neptune, Tezatzoncatl's comparison to Bacchus only lasts in the original 1563 version, being compared to "the god of wine" in later versions.⁸⁶ *Pulque*, Sahagún writes, "was only used for evil" likely attempting to separate the consumption from the religious wine meant to resemble the blood of Christ.⁸⁷ Sahagún also writes that all of the negative attributes of *pulque* were attributed to the god Tezatzoncatl rather than the substance itself. Intoxication, however, was not something that the Nahuas took lightly. Being drunk was tied to being possessed by a god, and as such was a sacred ritual. Drinking was meant only during festivals, and public intoxication outside of festivals was punished. Sahagún writes that even the Nahuas "recognized the devil inside of the *pulque*".⁸⁸ As described by Historian David Carrasco:

The gods gave, in mythic time, alcoholic drinks to humans to bring them happiness. Humans were required to consume this happiness in moderation because drunkenness meant one was possessed by the god of *pulque*; he who drinks *pulque* imbibes the god into the body, of which the god then takes possession.⁸⁹

An important aspect to consider with the comparison of Tezatzoncatl to Bacchus is the origin of the Roman god. While Bacchus was widely worshipped in the Greco-Roman world, his origins are often tied to foreign gods that merged with the Roman god Liber and Greek Dionysus.⁹⁰ With Rome's empire covering a huge number of cultures and religions, syncretism of gods could serve to solidify bonds between Rome and its subjects. Similarly, the Aztecs traditionally accepted the gods of their subjects, often taking religious icons of a newly

⁸⁶ Laird, *Altera Roma* p.174

⁸⁷ Fr. De Sahagún, p. 80

⁸⁸ Fr. De Sahagún, 82

⁸⁹ Carrasco, David. *City of Sacrifice: The Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1999. p. 223

⁹⁰ Laird, *Altera Roma*, p.171

conquered region back to their city, Tenochtitlan.⁹¹ They did, however, resist the claims of exclusivity of a foreign god that had no place in their understanding of the world. Another issue was the false equivalencies given to the Aztec pantheon that often led to confusion among both the Nahuas and the Spaniards. As a tributary state, the Aztecs often collected heavy taxes from those they conquered.

Although Sahagún's work remains the most complete history of the Nahua people, it is all too likely that even Sahagún knew that there still remained much to be explained. Despite his inability to record all of Nahua history in culture, it is important to consider that his omissions can be just as telling as his comparisons. "The pairings, which were confined to the opening sentences of only some Spanish chapters without being given in then Nahuatl version, were reviewed or abandoned in successive drafts."⁹² Chalchiuhtlicue's neglected comparison to Neptune did not then cause Sahagún to look for a suitable Neptune comparison but rather to omit Neptune in general. Oddly, one of the main gods in the Aztec pantheon was Tlaloc, god of rain and storms that would have seemed like an obvious comparison to Neptune. As Cortés walked down the steps of the Templo Mayor, he was walking down the steps of a pyramid that shared two shires at the top of them, that of Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc. Another obvious comparison would have been that of Tezcatlipoca to the Christian god rather than Jupiter.⁹³

Whether or not Sahagún intended to make a deep analysis of the Roman gods by comparing them may never be known with full confidence. However, his revisions offer his readers valuable insight in showing that some degree of accuracy was important to the friar

⁹¹ Poole, Stafford. *Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Origins and Sources of a Mexican National Symbol, 1531-1797*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2017. p. 22

⁹² Laird, Altera Roma, p.173

⁹³ Laird, Altera Roma, p.175

regardless of his motivations. By prioritizing gender in his comparisons over accuracy, the friar revealed the importance of gender in his worldview and that of the Romans. By intentionally editing his work to align Nahua and the Greco-Roman pantheons according to gender norms, Sahagún showed that the Spanish pattern of religious colonization was forced to adapt to the unique obstacles the New World presented. His omissions also offered insights into which gods he, and likely his fellow Spaniards found the most important to record in his codex. His comparisons, however accurate, offer a mirror to both pantheons and their lasting legacy in their respective cultures. In his comparison of Tezcatlipoca to Jupiter, Sahagún proved the importance of using an obsidian mirror to understand the Roman pantheon.

CHAPTER 2

THE TREE OF THE HEARTH: GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN THE LEGEND OF OUR HOLY MOTHER OF GUADALUPE

Once the native language was mastered, a singularly delicate problem came up: how to explain the dogma in it. The question was to translate into the native languages notions that had never been expressed in them, notions for which they had no words, such as Trinity, Holy Ghost, Redemption and so on. The problem arose everywhere.⁹⁴

As mentioned in chapter 1, crucial to the so-called spiritual conquest of the Nahua people was the Mexican-created myth of the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe in 1531. The legend of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which was popularized by the Franciscan Order in the 16th century, targeted Nahuas through a hybrid of Nahua and Spanish symbolism that imposed a Spanish sense of morality and relied on the already established role of female deities in the Aztec pantheon. Furthermore, the iconography (a painting) left behind by the Virgin's apparition served as a testament of her legitimacy and stood as a powerful symbol to the people of the New World.⁹⁵ The sudden rise in the popularity of the myth of the Virgin of Guadalupe during the mid-Colonial Period (one hundred seventeen years after the apparition) shows that the Spanish modified their colonial methods in response to their inability to effectively convert the Nahuas.

In Catholics' beliefs, the alleged apparition of the Virgin Mary in the New World offered the Nahuas religious salvation through an icon that spoke their language and had their skin tone. Beyond speaking Nahuatl, the Virgin of Guadalupe also confirmed to the Nahua people that the new gods imposed on them by the Spanish were not abstract concepts from a world far away but omnipresent gods willing to provide salvation for all. Although Catholicism defines itself as a

⁹⁴ Ricard, Robert. *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico: An Essay on the Apostolate and the Evangelizing Methods of the Mendicant Orders in New Spain, 1523-1572*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982, p.55

⁹⁵ Father Miguel Hidalgo used her image in his call for rebellion against Spaniards in 1810.

monotheistic religion, the introduction of the Virgin of Guadalupe served as the bridge between the monotheistic Spaniards and polytheistic Nahuas. By analyzing the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe's apparitions, one can directly and indirectly see how much of her legend created acceptance among the Nahuas and their descendants particularly as it reintroduced a female deity to worship.⁹⁶

In order to understand the importance of the Spanish and Mexican clerics' introduction of the Virgin of Guadalupe to the Nahuas, it is paramount to emphasize once again the binary nature of Christian religion. Christianity operated in good and evil, man and woman, concepts that were not foreign to the Aztecs, but understood with far more ambiguity as we have seen in chapter 1.⁹⁷ As explored in the previous chapter, the first book in the Bible, Genesis, sets up women as natural transgressors while men are punished for simply being bystanders. This narrative immediately implicates women as the guilty parties and men as encumbered with Eve's original sin. In the Bible, God punishes both Adam and Eve with what would serve as gender specific punishments. These punishments would continue to define gender roles in the western Abrahamic world, while making little sense to those raised in the New World.

As explored in chapter 1, the introduction of sin and subsequent punishment of sin resulted in a complete upheaval of the Nahua's understanding of human nature. With no concept of original sin instill from the book of Genesis, the Nahua world treated sin and punishment far differently than their Spanish counterparts. This dissonance created by not sharing a central

⁹⁶ See, D. A. Brading. *Mexican Phoenix: Our Lady of Guadalupe: Image and Tradition Across Five Centuries*. 2003., Poole, Stafford. *Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Origins and Sources of a Mexican National Symbol, 1531-1797*. 2017., Castillo, Ana. *Goddess of the Americas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1997.

⁹⁷ Fr. Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*; Book 10 -- The People, No. 14, Part 11, eds. and transl. Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble Santa Fe and Salt Lake City: School of American Research and the University of Utah, 1961. p. 171

cultural understanding of sin required a conceptional bridge to allow them to understand divine salvation as well as divine damnation. The concept of the devil, for example, itself is a religious creation that stood as an amalgamation of European thought, culture, and custom. Without the larger European concepts then, it is easy to see why European religious thought was so difficult to impress on the Nahuas. This can be clearly seen in Fernando Cervantes' work, *The Devil in the New World*. He writes: "At best, the devil appears as a quaint appropriation of a dominant idea that provides good material for anecdote. At worst the concept is seen as an imposition of a hegemonic idea masterfully deployed by the elites to keep the subordinate groups under their grip."⁹⁸ Regardless of the school of thought, it is clear that the Spanish introduced good and evil, or in this case, the Virgin of Guadalupe and the devil. After all, the concepts of European virtue and vice were equally foreign to the Nahuas, and thus natural to assume that their personifications would face similar obstacles in their translation.

One major obstacle to overcome in the historiography is the nearly exclusive focus on the religious aspects of colonization. While it may seem natural to assume that a Marian apparition is exclusively tied to religion, the reality is far more complex. Robert Ricard's *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico* for example, notes that the role that the Virgin Mary had in the conversion seems to be a small one.⁹⁹ Ricard writes that de Sahagun had early linguistic concerns over the Nahuatl used to refer to the Virgin Mary as *Dios etnantzin* instead of *Tonantzin*. The friar's insistence on maintaining linguistic differences between the two names shows that Sahagun understood the growing confusion over the Marian apparition in the New World. Sahagun was

⁹⁸ Cervantes, Fernando. *The Devil in the New World: The Impact of Diabolism in New Spain*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994. p.3

⁹⁹ Ricard, Robert, and Lesley Byrd Simpson. *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico; An Essay on the Apostolate and the Evangelizing Methods of the Mendicant Orders in New Spain, 1523-1572*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966. p. 56.

also concerned that this linguistic error was “an invention of Satan for the purpose of concealing idolatry under the cloak of ambiguity, in the word Tonantzin.”¹⁰⁰ Although de Sahagun’s perspective is well recorded in his work, and that of Ricard, their concerns surrounding the complexities of these linguistic discrepancies would take centuries of scholarship to fully understand.

These conceptual obstacles are amplified when one considers how openly the Aztecs seemed to welcome ideals of duality throughout their world. In fact, the glyph used to represent the Aztecs (more accurately the Mexica) is *alt tlachinolli* or water burnt/ burning. Despite this definition, according to 16th century *vocabulario en lengua castellana y 39exicana*, *alt tlachinolli* could also mean war if used as a metaphor.¹⁰¹ The Spanish were faced with understanding a world of duality while also learning the metaphors or dual meanings of words to fully understand the Nahua people. Duality was then likely seen as a spectrum, rather than an operation of a binary system. Filth, in the Aztec world for example, could not exist without cleanliness. However, a filthy person was not intrinsically filthy, and was simply a bath away from being clean. Men and women could and would not exist without each other, rather than women existing from men. With no source material like the Bible to introduce the permanence of sin, the Aztec world was free to create dualistic concepts and beliefs structures that would not easily welcome the deities of Europe. Due to this spectrum, the Spanish introduction of a female deity (the Virgin of Guadalupe) to worship was necessary to fully convert the Nahua people.

The role of duality can be seen throughout Aztec culture and religion. As recorded in the

¹⁰⁰ Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico*, p.56

¹⁰¹ De Molina, Alonso. *Vocabulario en lengua castellana y mexicana, 1571*, part 2, Nahuatl to Spanish, f. 117v. col. 1.

Florentine Codex, the highest level of heaven was Omeyocan or the place of duality.¹⁰² Due to this deep permeation of duality in the Nahua worldview, even the most basic Christian concepts were difficult to initially introduce. The introduction of the devil for example, required an introduction of sin. The introduction of heaven required the introduction of hell, purgatory, and limbo. Although the Aztecs had an understanding of good and bad, bad did not necessarily immediately become a sin.

Rather than viewing negative behaviors in terms of ‘sin’, the Nahua thought in terms of *tlazolli* (‘filth or ‘trash’): the concept that something is bad when it is out of place or there is too much of it. A degree of *tlazolli* was necessary (for procreation for example) but too much could be dangerous.¹⁰³

Much of the difficulty that came from the introduction of Christianity to the Nahuas came from a fundamental misunderstanding of the Nahua culture. The Aztecs traditionally accepted the gods of their subjects and thus did not necessarily resist the introduction of Christianity in a syncretistic sense.¹⁰⁴ They did, however, resist the claims of exclusivity of a foreign god that had no place in their understanding of the world. Another issue was the false equivalencies given to the Aztec pantheon that often led to confusion among both the Nahuas and the Spaniards. This can be clearly seen in the previous chapter, as false equivalences made by Bernardino de Sahagún started to create layers of dissonance for both European and Nahuas’ understandings of each respective cultures. Sahagún was eager to make false comparisons, but was appalled when Nahuas made their own comparisons.¹⁰⁵ As misunderstandings of each respective culture

¹⁰² Sahagún, p. 171

¹⁰³ Dobbs Pennock, Caroline. 2018. “Women of Discord: Female Power in Aztec Thought”. *Historical Journal*. 61, no. 2: 278.

¹⁰⁴ Poole, Stafford. *Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Origins and Sources of a Mexican National Symbol, 1531-1797*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995. p. 22

¹⁰⁵ Ricard, Robert, and Lesley Byrd Simpson. *The spiritual conquest of Mexico; an essay on the apostolate and the evangelizing methods of the mendicant orders in New Spain, 1523-1572*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966. p. 56.

continued, so too did the need for a unifying idol. On these many understandings, Matthew Restall writes: “Historically, the myth of communication was constructed by the conquistadors and predominated during Conquest and colonial times. The myth was convenient to Spaniards in that claims of communication with native peoples bolster claims that natives were subjected, coopted, and converted.” He continues, “In other words, the invaders are either disinterested in communication, or they are so good at it that their skill defeats the natives.”¹⁰⁶

Before the introduction of Christianity, the Aztecs had their own myths and legends to reduce the dissonance created by everyday contradictions. Furthermore, Aztec religion also played a vital role in justifying the world of ambiguity that the Aztecs lived in, with deep mythologies explaining many of the contradictions of their beliefs. On this complexity, the historian Camilla Townsend writes:

The world of these [Aztec] historians was one of evident paradoxes, of survival and loss, persistence and erosion. This is true of the world in which all humans must live but this book’s protagonists lived with these paradoxes in a particular stark form, and they negotiated them with dignity and even style. Perhaps it was for this reason that they seemed to comprehend the notion of truth as inherently multiple, or of perspective as necessarily variable, when Europeans did not.¹⁰⁷

Without a doubt, when the Spanish introduced the Virgin of Guadalupe, Catholics were able to circumvent some of the binary nature of their religion and use some of the flexibility of polytheistic religions. This was not an unfamiliar terrain. chapter 1 shows how Franciscans and others continued to be informed by the Greco-Roman pantheon and in the New World, they put theory into practice.

One relationship that seems to be consistent across cultures is the role of a mother.

¹⁰⁶ Restall, Matthew. *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*. New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2021, p.85

¹⁰⁷ Townsend, Camilla. *Annals of Native America: How the Nahuas of Colonial Mexico Kept Their History Alive*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. p. 15

Although different cultures have different expectations for their mothers and women as a whole, some form of motherhood is universal if nothing less by necessity. The patron god of the Aztecs, Huitzilopochtli, represented the importance of mothers in the Aztec worldview. Huitzilopochtli's mother, Coatlicue conceived him from a ball of feathers that came from the sky. Due to his unorthodox, asexual, and extramarital conception, Huitzilopochtli's siblings decided to kill him. One of his siblings, the moon goddess Coyolaxauhqui, who along with her brother Centzonitxnaua, the "Four Hundred" southern stars, led an attack on their illegitimate brother. This contentious relationship between siblings is the mythology explaining why the sun rises and falls. According to their beliefs the sun god Huitzilopochtli, was raised into position by Aztec warriors who died with honor on the battlefield or through ritualistic sacrifice. To Aztecs, the daily cycle of the sun served as a reminder of the importance of motherhood and childhood to their patron god.

Outside of the mythology, parental roles in Aztec society were strictly defined. Societal expectations expected a woman to avoid pregnancy when nursing their child, and even a widow was expected to not remarry until their child was weaned.¹⁰⁸ While close relationships between a mother and child were not unique to the Aztecs, the relationship between father and child were. As soon as the child was weaned, the father was expected to take an active role in the life of the child regardless of gender. Aztec fathers served as constant advisors to their daughters while assuming responsibility for their sons.¹⁰⁹ "Aztec women were thus relieved, at least partially, of the positions of permanent primary child-care, one of the issues most commonly blamed, even today, for women's social subordination and restriction."¹¹⁰ The relationships between child and

¹⁰⁸ Dobbs Pennock, *Bonds of Blood*, p. 66

¹⁰⁹ Dobbs Pennock, *Bonds of Blood*, p. 66

¹¹⁰ Dobbs Pennock, *Bonds of Blood*, p. 67

parent in Aztec society then were fairly unique, and a son would have a very different relationship with their mother than their European counterpart. Research in the field suggests that a boy that displayed a female inclination could adopt the female role within Aztec society.¹¹¹ This research is bolstered by modern day Muxes, a third gender recognized in some places of modern Mexico with strong indigenous ties. These parental relationships not only shaped gender roles within Aztec society but also created a flexibility that was nonexistent within Spanish society. It was this flexibility granted by a mother that likely lead to the wide success of conversion with the introduction Virgin of Guadalupe into the rigid Catholic structure.

As briefly mentioned in chapter 1, parental relationships also extended on to the battlefield in the form of human sacrifice. While human sacrifice seemed like a total disregard for human life to the Spanish, the Aztecs saw Spanish warfare in a similar light. Despite Spanish warriors fighting valiantly, many of them were left to die on the battlefield instead of being taken to be sacrificed to their gods and receive their final glory. Taking a sacrificial victim was a sacred duty on behalf of the warrior, as was being a sacrificial victim. The captor was to be the captive's metaphorical father and was addressed as such. Similarly, the captor referred to his captive as his son, and closely mimicked this relationship up until the priest tore out the captive's heart. The prestige of the sacrifice relied heavily on the captive's valor, making the relationship an intimate one.¹¹² Even after the sacrifice ritual was completed, the captor did not partake in the ritualistic cannibalism that followed. To do so would be to eat one's own child, but also metaphorically eat one's self as the death of a warrior was one of the highest honors achievable. Communion must have been a strange experience to a Nahua, as they were encouraged to eat the

¹¹¹ Trexler, R.C. *Sex and Conquest*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1999. p. 85

¹¹² Dobbs Pennock, *Bonds of Blood*, p. 17

flesh of a sacrificial child they were told to love.

As men found glory on the battlefield, women found the same esteem in giving birth. While Christian narratives painted childbirth as an avenue of to absolve women for Eve's original sin,¹¹³ Aztecs saw childbirth as an opportunity for women to express their connection to the divine. In Aztec religion, the spirit of brave warriors raised the sun, while women who died during childbirth carefully helped the sun down to set. "War or sacrifice and childbirth were the respective foals of men and women, apparently possessing equal honour and privilege."¹¹⁴ During childbirth, Aztecs believed that the earth goddess Cihuacoatl would possess the woman giving birth. It was with this divine strength, that women could bring life into the world. "Women's ability to access such awesome power for both creation and destruction made them a formidable and ominous presence."¹¹⁵ Death during childbirth meant that the woman would be preserved in her divine manifestation, and would take her role among the Aztec sunset. These explanations not only show the complexity of the Aztec religion, but also display the importance of gender in the Aztec world and religion. Women always held religious reverence for their ability to channel the power of a god in creating life, demanding the same respect as warriors or at times even gods. Such veneration of women would be unthinkable in many different Christian narratives. In the book of Timothy for example, "Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent."¹¹⁶

Christianity leaves little doubt in the legitimacy of the father and humility of the mother. In the Christian narrative, Mary is chosen by god and has little choice in the conception. "How

¹¹³ Timothy 2:15

¹¹⁴ Dobbs Pennock, *Bonds of Blood*, p. 36

¹¹⁵ Dobbs Pennock, *Bonds of Blood*, p. 37

¹¹⁶ Timothy 1 2:11-13

can this be, since I am a virgin? The angel said to her “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called the Son of God.”¹¹⁷ Although both religions worship a child from an unorthodox conception, only one (the Mesoamerican) worships the femininity of the mother while the other worships the servitude and purity of the mother. Through conquest however, these distinctions can easily be blurred. Such ambiguities seem to have left a society with a long-standing worship of a divine mother ripe for conversion through the Virgin of Guadalupe.

The apparitions of the Virgin of Guadalupe in 1531, told the story of divine salvation for the polytheistic Nahuas by showing herself ethnically as a Nahua and speaking Nahuatl. The main source for the legend comes from the *Huei tlamahuicoltica omonexiti in ilhuicac tlatocacihuapilli Santa Maria totlaconantzin Guadalupe in nican huei altepenahuac Mexico itocayocan Tepeyacac*, considered to be one of the greatest surviving Nahuatl texts. The second section of this work, the *Nican Mopohua* records the interactions between the peasant Juan Diego and the Virgin of Guadalupe as she instructs him to build her a chapel on top of Tepeyac Hill. The *Nican Mopohua* challenged many aspects of Spanish life from the complex caste system along with religious authority throughout colonial Mexico by presenting the Virgin Mary as an ethnic Nahua while also speaking the language Nahuatl. While the apparition would allegedly appear in 1531, the legend would not be popularized until Miguel Sánchez’s *Imagen de la Virgen María* publication in 1648. This rediscovery of the myth shows that the Spanish adapted their approach to religious colonialization, by reintroducing a controversial legend of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

According to the legend, the first of these apparitions was the Virgin of Guadalupe came

¹¹⁷ Luke 1:34-1:36

to the Juan Diego on December 12, 1531, just ten years after the fall of Tenochtitlan in the form of song coming from Tepeyac hill.¹¹⁸ It is in this instance that one can see the ineffectual spiritual conquest of the Nahuas. “Is it possible that I am in the place our ancient ancestors, our grandparents told about, in the land of the flowers, in the land of corn, of our flesh, of our sustenance, possibly in the land of heaven?”¹¹⁹ It seems that Juan Diego both contemplated that his beautiful experience could equally be from an Aztec paradise or that of the new Catholic religion. Juan Diego’s uncertainty about which religion could cause beautiful music highlights the importance in the Virgin Mary’s apparition to cement the Nahuas’ conversion to Catholicism.

It is then not surprising that Juan Diego questioned whether he was in the land of his ancient ancestors. For a religious Aztec, nearly every aspect of life had a detailed religious component. Religious blood-letting and other complex rituals reminded the Aztecs that the gods were very real and regularly present in daily affairs. The sun rose and set due to an explanation deep in Aztec mythology. Any disturbance to the world’s normalcy would have naturally led Juan Diego to question the source of the supernatural power. Catholicism on the other hand, played a far more passive role in direct intervention in the daily life of its believers. Even for a well-read convert, finding any consistency in divine apparitions would have been difficult if not impossible to establish. Juan Diego’s uncertainty over which religious power could produce such a beautiful sight perfectly illustrates the ambiguity of the Spanish spiritual conquest. Although Juan Diego would go on to accept that the apparition is the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus, it seems he would equally be likely to accept it came from one of the gods of his ancestors.

¹¹⁸ Andino, Jean. “The Huei Tlamahuiçoltica and the Nican Mopohua.” *St. Frances and the Americas*. Accessed November 1, 2020. https://dev-st-francis-the-americas.ws.asu.edu/sites/default/files/nican_mopohua_italian_nahuatl_spanish_english.pdf p. 8

¹¹⁹ Nican Mopohua, p. 10

As Juan Diego approached the source of music, the music changed to a woman calling his name in Nahuatl. The apparition was described as “perfect grandeur that exceeded all imagination” and presented herself as the “Perfect Ever Virgin Holy Mary, mother of the one great God.”¹²⁰ One of the most striking features of the Virgin Mary’s apparition was her skin tone. The Virgin Mary did not appear with white skin representative of a Spaniard, but rather with darker skin tone like that of the indigenous Nahuatl. Although the Virgin of Guadalupe had a darker skin color, her ability to operate as an icon of worship to both the Nahuatl and the Spanish reflects the importance of the father’s role in the conception of children rather than the mother’s. This can be seen clearly in Luke 1:27-49 where Mary’s role as the mother of Jesus is reduced to a vessel for the Lord. The angel Gabriel informs Mary that her child will be the “Son of the Most High and the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David”.¹²¹ Despite not playing a role in the conception of Jesus, Joseph’s ancestral ties to the house of David gave Jesus an added layer of divine validity, while Mary and her familial ties remained a passive actor in the conception of Jesus. As explained in chapter 1, in the Aztec world, their kings and deities gained their legitimacy from their mother’s family, not the father’s.¹²² The Virgin’s skin color also carried the implications that indigenous Mexicans had the same right to salvation as their Spanish counterparts despite the complex Spanish caste system while also enforcing the new gender roles of Christianity to the converts.

On the other hand, the Virgin’s apparition also spoke to the importance of the female character in the pre-Columbian world. Unlike the strict patriarchal confinement of women in

¹²⁰ Nican Mopohua, p. 16-26

¹²¹ Luke 1:32

¹²² Gillespie, Susan D. *The Aztec Kings: The Construction of Rulership in Mexica History*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992. p. 24

Spanish culture, Nahua women enjoyed relative freedom. Echoing the work of several scholars, historian Edward W. Osowski writes, Nahua men and women kept “social threads of gender parallelism.”¹²³ Parallelism was maintained by also maintaining a mutual respect between the roles, seeing them as a necessary element of the social structure. The language in the *Florentine Codex* provides a fluid understanding of gender roles throughout the Nahua world and included ethical metaphors related to gender. Bernardino de Sahagún described the first Nahua leaders metaphorically as a cypress tree and a silk cotton tree.¹²⁴ The trees in this account signified stability and shelter, similar to the role of women and their role in the household. Like the tree, women played a stationary role in the home while also sheltering her children. An additional story in the *Florentine Codex* includes an account of a mother telling a female child of her upcoming role in the world: “You will be the heart of the house, you will go nowhere... you become the banked fire, the hearthstone. Here our lord plants you, buries you,” demonstrating the emphasis on women’s connection to the home.¹²⁵

The fluid language found across Nahua sources illustrates admiration for each gender role. Rather than simply using the feminine and masculine to refer to gender, the Nahuatl language, in some cases, used feminine and masculine to refer to ruler and subjects.¹²⁶ Rulers in the Nahua world often regarded their subjects as their children, defining their leadership in both the masculine and feminine aspects. The masculine aspect spoke to protecting and sheltering their metaphorical young, while the feminine aspect spoke to being a caring mother that carries

¹²³ Osowski, Edward W. *Indigenous Miracles: Nahua Authority in Colonial Mexico*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2010. p.112.

¹²⁴ Osowski, *Indigenous Miracles*, p.113.

¹²⁵ Osowski, *Indigenous Miracles*, p.113.

¹²⁶ Osowski, *Indigenous Miracles*, p.113.

and nurtures their child.¹²⁷ The introduction of the Catholic god, and his son Jesus Christ, presented in the masculine, created a religious feminine void to the polytheistic Nahua people. The Virgin of Guadalupe filled the religious void of femininity, not only because she represented a woman and mother, but also because she provided the female religious component that returned the newly converted Nahua people back to the centrality of the hearth. The Virgin of Guadalupe's stationary appearances in Mexico provided the lost religious "tree" back to the Nahua people, promising religious sheltering where the Lord planted her, and buried the Nahua people.

In her first apparition, the Virgin Mary instructed Juan Diego *in Nahua* to go to the Franciscan church and to have a cathedral built on the hill where she appeared to him. This apparition was similar to the first sighting of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which instructed a peasant in Spain to build her a cathedral and gave life to the Spanish Reconquista in the early 14th century. In this apparition the Virgin too had dark skin resembling the Moors that occupied Spain at the time. It was these very similarities in apparitions that would eventually lead to this New World apparition to be declared the Virgin of Guadalupe. Juan Diego did as he was told by the Virgin of Guadalupe, and went to the bishop of the area, Juan de Zumarraga. Although the archbishop listened to Juan Diego's story kindly, he hardly seemed to believe Juan Diego.¹²⁸ Naturally, in the Spanish world obsessed with race and class, Juan Diego was dismissed by the Spanish bishop.

On his way back to his home after facing the rejection of Zumarraga, a second apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe came to Juan Diego. Overcome with the feeling of failure, Juan

¹²⁷ Osowski, *Indigenous Miracles*, p.113.

¹²⁸ Nican Mopohua, p. 51.

Diego pleaded the Virgin to send “One of the nobles who are held in esteem, one who is known, respected, honored.”¹²⁹ Juan Diego continued, telling the Virgin Mary that he was a man of no importance. In this second appearance, the Virgin of Guadalupe instructed Juan Diego to return to the archbishop the next day and insist to have a cathedral built on Tepeyac Hill in her honor. As instructed, Juan Diego returned to the archbishop the next day to tell him of the second apparition and insistence of the Virgin Mary.

The second apparition seems to be a confirmation of Juan Diego’s faith to the Virgin of Guadalupe, a practice similar to the Catholic confirmation where one does an intensive study of a saint and confirms his faith for the rest of their lives. Whether or not the myth was crafted with the idea of confirmation in mind, the story seems to set up parallel narratives with existing Catholic traditions. As proof of his belief, Juan Diego returned to the archbishop the next day. When delivering the wishes of the Virgin Mary to the bishop for the second time, Juan Diego was thoroughly interrogated by the Archbishop about his experience. Unbelieving, the Archbishop instructed Juan Diego to produce proof of the Marian apparition and dismissed him till such proof was received. Seeing that Juan Diego was undeterred by this task, the Archbishop had Juan Diego followed by a trusted household staff.¹³⁰ Before reaching Tepeyac, the Archbishop’s source lost Juan Diego, and returned to report that the boy was feeding the Archbishop lies over his experiences concerning the Virgin Mary. After hearing this news, the bishop decided that if Juan Diego returned, he would be severely punished for spreading lies concerning the Virgin Mary.

When Juan Diego returned to the Virgin Mary, he informed her of the Archbishop’s

¹²⁹ Nican Mopohua, p. 54.

¹³⁰ Nican Mopohua, p. 82.

request to produce proof of her presence. The Virgin Mary agreed to produce undisputable proof for the bishop and instructed Juan Diego to return the next day in order to collect her token.

When arriving home however, Juan Diego found his uncle, Juan Bernardino gravely ill.

According to the legend, Juan Diego went to a “native healer” who treated his uncle, but arrived too late to save him.¹³¹ As night set in, Juan Bernardino begged his nephew to go to Tlatelolco in order to bring a priest that would grant him his last confession. On his way to do as his uncle told him, Juan Diego faced a literal crossroads. “If I go ahead on the road, I don’t want this Lady to see me, because for sure, just like before, she’ll stop me so I can take the sign to the church governor for her, as she ordered me to; because first our tribulation must leave us; first I must quickly call the priest; my uncle is anxiously waiting for him.”¹³² As an omnipresent being, the Virgin Mary had little issue reaching Juan Diego, however this instance illustrates an important tool of conversion.

The Christian god’s omnipresence is a reoccurring theme throughout the Bible, and a key highlight of his extraordinary power. In the book of Genesis for example, God knows that Sarah laughs at his suggestion that she will become pregnant even at her old age.¹³³ Omnipresence played a crucial role in maintaining order when priests and later the inquisition could not. Nahuas were no strangers to using private spaces in order to escape their conqueror’s societal norms. The *temazcal*, or bathhouse, for example represented a space where Nahuas could express their sexuality and spiritual (and literal) cleansing. “The Nahuas did not distinguish between the metaphorical and literal cleaning, because when one is cleaned oneself, one also kept at bay all

¹³¹ Nican Mopohua, p. 96.

¹³² Nican Mopohua, p. 100-102.

¹³³ Genesis 18:15

of the other things that signified by the term *tlazolli*.¹³⁴ On the door of these *temazcal*(s) was the image of Tlazolteotl, a goddess of filth and sexuality.¹³⁵ Introducing the Virgin of Guadalupe as an omnipresent being would have served as an important deterrent to any converts that still looked to express their pre-Columbian sexuality in private spaces. Furthermore, the Virgin's omnipresence would have served to replace Aztec goddesses like Tlazolteotl, as her image could no longer maintain the privacy of the *temazcal*.

When the Virgin of Guadalupe realized that Juan Diego would try to avoid her to get to the priest, she easily intercepted him. "Where are you going, my youngest-and-dearest son? Where are you headed for?"¹³⁶ As Juan Diego realized he was caught, he broke down and cried. He explained that he had every intention to carry out the Virgin Mary's task, but due to his uncle being sick, he chose to get the priest for his uncle first. "Let nothing else worry you, disturb you. Do not let your uncle's illness pressure you with grief, because he will not die of it now. You may be certain that he is already well."¹³⁷ With the news that his uncle was cured, Juan Diego anxiously looked to fulfill the Archbishop's task of providing proof of the Virgin Mary's apparition.

As a conversion tool, this part of the legend served to discredit the power of the Nahua healers while establishing the vast array of powers of the Virgin Mary. Although healing was not exclusively the role of women in the Nahua world, the parallelism of a Christian female healing

¹³⁴ Sigal, Pete. *The Flower and the Scorpion*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011, p.1-2

¹³⁵ *Codex Magliabechiano*. Published as *The Book of the Life of the Ancient Mexicans*, edited by Zelia Nuttall. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1903.

¹³⁶ Nican Mopohua, p. 107.

¹³⁷ Nican Mopohua, p. 120.

someone that an indigenous healer could not is difficult to ignore.¹³⁸ *Ticitl*, the Nahuatl word for healer, also translates to midwife, a pillar of Aztec society.¹³⁹ On the role of a *ticitl*, the Florentine Codex says: “The physician [is] a knower of herbs, of roots, of trees of stones; she is experienced in these. [She is] one who has [the results of] examinations; she is a woman of experience, of trust, of professional skill: a counselor.¹⁴⁰ By healing Juan Diego’s uncle, the Virgin of Guadalupe directly undermined the power of one of the most prestigious roles within Nahua society for a woman to hold. More than simply undermine, the Virgin of Guadalupe’s ability to heal terminally sick people served to replace a key institution within the Nahua worldview and opened a new reason to worship her image.

In order to provide evidence of her legitimacy, Virgin Mary instructed Juan Diego to return to Tepeyac Hill and pick the many flowers he would find there. After Juan Diego was done picking the different types of flowers, he was instructed to bring them back to the Virgin Mary. As Juan Diego reached the top of the hill, he was astonished to see flowers of every kind in full bloom despite there being harsh frost in December.¹⁴¹ More specifically, the hill was covered in Castilian roses, flowers not indigenous to the area. According to the *Nican Mopohua*, the hill was no place for flowers to grow, and would usually only be covered in thorns and prickly pears.¹⁴² Most importantly it says, that in the cold of December, even those few plants that would typically grow there would be destroyed by the frost of winter.

Producing flowers at such a time was certainly a miracle, but also symbolically played an

¹³⁸ *The Mexican Treasury: The Writings of Dr. Francisco Hernández*, ed. Simon Varey, transl. Rafael Chabrán, Cynthia L. Chamberlin, and Simon Varey Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 77.

¹³⁹ Frances Karttunen. *An Analytical Dictionary of Nahuatl*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992. p. 240.

¹⁴⁰ Fr. Bernardino de Sahagún, p. 53.

¹⁴¹ *Nican Mopohua*, p. 128-129.

¹⁴² *Nican Mopohua*, p. 132.

important role in conversion. Flowers in the Nahua world were often representations of sexuality. “The flower held central importance to Nahua constructions of their world, so much so that the great Nahuatl scholar of the twentieth century, Miguel León-Portilla, made the flower the primary metaphor for all life forces.”¹⁴³ Flowers can also be found across Aztec imagery. In the Codex Borgia for example, *Tlazolteotl* (goddess of filth and sexuality) can be seen naked, giving birth to a flower.¹⁴⁴ The blossoming of flowers also played an important role in Aztec society. Flowers in bloom signified birth, while also representing the start of the season of war.¹⁴⁵ Symbolically then, there seems to be little mistake with replacing the religious importance of flowers to a virgin. Increasingly, the legend of the Virgin of Guadalupe appears to be designed to override important gender norms and religious symbols of the Nahua world.

As instructed, Juan Diego returned to the hill where he originally saw the Virgin, picked the flowers and placed them into his *tilma*, a traditional garment worn by Aztec and Nahua men. When Juan Diego returned to the Virgin Mary, she allegedly took the flowers in her hands and returned them to his *tilma*. The flowers that Juan Diego picked, the Virgin Mary explained, were to be presented to the local bishop Zumárraga as physical proof of her apparition. She told Juan Diego, “You will tell him from me that he is to see in them my desire, and that therefore is to carry out my wish, my will.”¹⁴⁶ The Virgin Mary also told Juan Diego that he was not to open his flower filled *tilma* or show anyone other than the bishop the contents of what he carried with him. She instructed Juan Diego to tell the bishop of the flowers blossoming on the hill and to tell him of the instructions the Virgin Mary gave him to pick the flowers.

¹⁴³ Sigal, *The Flower and the Scorpion*. p. 4.

¹⁴⁴ *Codex Borgia: A Fuller-Color Restoration of the Ancient Mexican Manuscript*. Ed. Diaz, Gisele, Rodgers, Alan. Introduction by Bruce E. Byland. Mineola: Dover Publications, 1993. P. xxxi.

¹⁴⁵ Sigal, *The Flower and the Scorpion*. p. 153.

¹⁴⁶ Nican Mopohua p. 138.

The importance of *tilmas* in Aztec society cannot be understated. Although they would later represent the peasant class in the Viceroyalty of New Spain, *tilmas* in Aztec society represented status and rank. A *tilma*'s design and colors represented anything from a complex system of glyphs and colors to represent generals while plain *tilmas* represented the typical Aztec commoner. Historian Patricia Rieff Anawalt's "The Emperor's Cloak", for example was dyed turquoise after the stone that was one of the most precious objects within the Aztec world. She writes: "Because each rank, status and ethnic group dressed in a characteristic manner, a great deal of ethnographic and historical information is contained in their attire."¹⁴⁷ Dying the *tilma* was also a complex practice; as portions had to be tied in order to not absorb the various dyes.¹⁴⁸ Each *tilma* was carefully made through arduous tying and untying to create complex patterns and designs. These designs could denote ethnicity within the Aztec Empire as well as military ranking. Symbolically then, the Virgin Mary's instruction to use Juan Diego's *tilma* to gather flowers led to the creation of a new design painted with Castilian roses, creating her own recognizable rank within Nahua society. What would eventually be produced was a symbol not of status or rank but rather of religious affiliation, the mark of a successful convert.

Juan Diego did as he was told, but when arriving to see the bishop, the bishop's aids did not allow him to go in. Fearing that they would not allow him to complete his mission, Juan Diego gave them a peek of the flowers he was carrying. Amazed by what they saw and smelled, the aids tried to pull some of the flowers out of Juan Diego's *tilma*. Three times they tried to take a flower, but with every attempt, the flowers seemed to disappear and looked as if they were

¹⁴⁷ Anawalt, Patricia Rieff. "The Emperors' Cloak: Aztec Pomp, Toltec Circumstances." *American Antiquity*, vol. 55, no. 2, 1990, pp. 291–307. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/281648. Accessed 12 Nov. 2020. p. 292.

¹⁴⁸ Nican Mopohua, p. 298.

embroidered into the *tilma* itself.¹⁴⁹ The aids finally told the bishop of what they had witnessed, the bishop ordered that Juan Diego to be brought to see him. Juan Diego told the bishop that he had kept his promise and brought the proof the bishop required in order to build a chapel on top of Tepeyac Hill. According to the legend, Juan Diego opened his *tilma*, and Castilian roses of different kinds fell out of it upon the floor. On the *tilma* was the image of the Virgin Mary of Guadalupe, in vibrant color and detail. “They marveled at the miraculous way it had appeared. Since absolutely no one on earth had painted her beloved Image.”¹⁵⁰

Much like Jesus Christ placed the Abrahamic faith in a Roman context, so too did the Virgin of Guadalupe establish context for the Nahuas. As described by Jan Assmann: “Biblical monotheism is based not on evidence but on revelation.”¹⁵¹ For hundreds of years, the Aztec religion had created and synchronized existing gods in an effort to explain the natural phenomena surrounding them. Since its creation, religion has always served as a scientific supplement to make sense of the world. Suddenly natural disasters like storms and plagues were not random natural occurrences but rather the wrath of gods that demanded worship. Christianity however, offered an elegant and universal system of worship that required adherence to religious rules rather than a constant stream sacrifices and rituals. What it did not offer, however, was any context for the indigenous people of New Spain. With her introduction to the world at large, the Virgin of Guadalupe gave the people of New Spain, and New Spain itself a context to their salvation.

Beyond establishing New Spain as a religious hub, the Virgin Mary was able to fill the

¹⁴⁹ Nican Mopohua, p. 157.

¹⁵⁰ Nican Mopohua, p. 217-218.

¹⁵¹ Assmann, Jan. “Monotheism and Polytheism” in *Ancient Religions*, ed. Sarah Iles Johnson. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007. p. 29.

religious vacuum that was created during the conquest. While most myths of the Spaniards being revered as gods by the Aztecs have been mostly debunked as European myths of apotheosis, one cannot ignore the intense destruction that happened across the Aztec Empire as a result of conquest.¹⁵² Estimates of indigenous deaths due to smallpox and other European diseases are usually forty to fifty million deaths, or roughly ninety percent of the population. While these deaths from European disease came in various waves, the long-term destruction to the indigenous population was nonetheless devastating in both the short and long-term. Furthermore, with the fall of Tenochtitlan also came the fall of one of the religious centers of the New World. With those deaths were priests, *pillis* (noblemen), *nahuallis* (sorcerers), and other crucial agents in maintaining the Aztec religion.

Although the full conversion of the Nahuas was a battle of patience and attrition, some Nahuas fell faster than others. In one account, a priest of Ometochtil and Tezcatlipoca warned that everyone who had forsaken their god for the Virgin Mary would die. Rather than being punished by Spanish officials, the priest was stoned to death by Nahua youths that had already converted to Christianity.¹⁵³ Historian Stephaine Wood writes: “From 1525 to 1531, this religious campaign took on a decidedly violent character as youths burned temples and destroyed images.”¹⁵⁴ In art of the period, one can see the *Virgen de los Remedios* protecting the Spanish against Nahua resistance.¹⁵⁵ It is said that this was the same image of the Virgin Mary Hernán

¹⁵² Restall, Mathew. *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. P. 113.

¹⁵³ León-Portilla, Miguel. *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*. transl. Lysander Kemp, foreword by J. Jorge Klor de Alva. Boston: Beacon Press, 2006. p. 25.

¹⁵⁴ Wood, *Transcending Conquest*, p. 99-100.

¹⁵⁵ Wood, *Transcending Conquest*, p. 103.

Cortés offered to Moctezuma on the pyramid of Huitzilopochtli.¹⁵⁶ Other stories tell that the Virgin of los Remedios protected the Spaniards as they retreated from Moctezuma's court.¹⁵⁷ It is possible then that the legend of the Virgin of Guadalupe was necessary to override the narrative of a Virgin Mary that sought to destroy the Nahuas and instead create one of the Virgin Mary as a Nahua herself.

While Marian apparitions had appeared before in history, the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe in New Spain gave Nahuas and other indigenous Mexicans the justification to convert to Catholicism. The Virgin Mary provided an important sense of motherly protection to the Nahuas, a crucial sense of protection as the Nahuas faced the brutal conversion methods implemented by some Spaniards. The painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe also provided a valuable icon to bridge the worshiping methods of the Nahuas and Spaniards and allow the Nahuas to focus their devotion. Arguably, the most important aspect of the Virgin of Guadalupe is the depiction of her skin color. Catholics across the world saw the darker skin tone of the Virgin Mary, as news of the miracle reached the Catholic world and beyond, adding a new population of worthy worshippers. Advertently or not, the Virgin also strengthened the power of the Mexican priests and overall, the Mexican Catholic Church.¹⁵⁸ The worshiping of the Virgin of Guadalupe broke the strict racial and social barriers set up by the Spanish and provided a point of unity between the deeply divided Spanish and Nahua people. Devoid of the foreign, ridged, class structure forced upon the Nahuas by the Spanish, conversion was able to flourish in Mexico.

¹⁵⁶ Poole, Stafford. *Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Origins and Sources of a Mexican National Symbol, 1531-1797*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2017. p. 25.

¹⁵⁷ Poole, Our Lady of Guadalupe, p. 25.

¹⁵⁸ Brading, D. A. *Mexican Phoenix Our Lady of Guadalupe: Image and Tradition Across Five Centuries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. p. 74.

The apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe targeted Nahuas through a hybrid of Nahua and Spanish symbolism that enforced European gender norms. Rather than individually introduce foreign Christian concepts such as sin and hell, the Virgin of Guadalupe allowed Spain to impress Catholicism through idolatry in the form of a painting that promised salvation to the Nahuas. By changing the symbolic meaning behind Nahua concepts like flowers, the Virgin Mary was able to encompass multiple dimensions of Nahua beliefs. The Virgin of Guadalupe was also able to warp Nahua gender norms, targeting the ties between sexuality and divinity instead linking divinity with virginity. The Virgin of Guadalupe gave Nahuas the illusion of choice, providing an avenue to salvation without the demand of exclusivity that came with Jesus Christ. As Nahua generations lost their connection to their ancestors' religion, the painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe continued to stand as a reminder of Christianity's spiritual victory in New Spain. It is difficult to imagine that, as Cortés stood atop the great Aztec pyramid horrified by Moctezuma's god caked in blood, the idol he offered the Aztec king would be the future flag of Moctezuma's people.

CHAPTER 3

FROM *TILMA* TO FLAG: THE CASTE SYSTEM IN COLONIAL MEXICO

Neither in casta paintings nor in colonial society was caste simply an inflexible, permanent attribute; it was nonetheless understood to be an embodied, genealogical condition. Caste was simultaneously genealogical and mutable, not only in practice but also in theory because it was premised on an understanding of the human body that allowed inherited conditions to change both within an individual's lifetime and across generations.¹⁵⁹

The unprecedented wealth extracted from the Aztec Empire by the Spanish dramatically changed the life of those who participated in its fall, ushering in a new line of Spanish elites. One of the least explored facets of the conquest however, were the Spaniards' Indian allies, a large force that greatly balanced the scales of battle. These allies were called the *indios amigos* (Indian friends) and they continued to play a vital role in the Spanish conquest of the entire New World. Rather than simple auxiliaries to the Spanish military, the Nahuatl warriors were an elite military force, raised from children to become warriors of the state. They were so famous (or infamous depending on what side of the battlefield one stood at) that their reputation was well known even over a thousand miles away. In Richard Flint's *No Settlement No Conquest* for example, Flint writes: "The bloody ferocity and relish for war of the Tenocha, Tlatelolcas, Tarascos, and other allies of the expeditionary force were matters of common lore even Cíbola."¹⁶⁰ Unsurprisingly, these legendary warriors expected a high status within the Spanish world once their military service was over.

What the Nahuatl got instead was a rather rude awakening to where they fell into the Spanish worldview. Nahuatl elites looked to distinguish themselves from the commoners as they

¹⁵⁹ Twinam, Ann. *Purchasing Whiteness: Pardos, Mulattos, and the Quest for Social Mobility in the Spanish Indies.*, 2020. p. 432.

¹⁶⁰ Flint, Richard. *No Settlement, No Conquest: A History of the Coronado Entrada*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013. p. 112.

realized their efforts as *indio amigos* meant far less to the Spanish than it would have to their own culture. One way they looked to distinguish themselves was through a coat of arms, what they saw gave Spanish elites legitimacy over the commoners. One Nahua elite wrote: “The King, our lord, granted us [the right] to make this [coat of] arms; it is our strength and our assistance. It will be made so we can free ourselves of the Spaniards, so they will not dishonor us or take something from us, nor will our priest afflict us.”¹⁶¹ The account above shows an early, but growing understanding of Spanish system by the Nahua elites and their push towards Hispanization. This example of Hispanization was more than just Spanish mimicry. Some Nahuas looked to establish enough knowledge of the Spanish legal system in order to cast them out of the growing Spanish community, rather than try to assimilate with them. Hispanization was often tied with social mobility, and being able to prove one’s “Spanishness” or “whiteness.” Indeed, not long after the conquest, the lines of ethnicity began to quickly dissipate, and other elements were used by Spaniards in order to establish one’s whiteness such as one’s place of birth or wealth. “*Mestizaje*, or cultural and biological mixing, was already proliferating and possibly influencing the thinking of many of the chroniclers and annalists (commonly referred to as the *xiuhpohualli* roughly translated as the year count)¹⁶² writing in Nahuatl, inadvertently breaking down the sometimes convenient but perhaps too facile Spanish-Indian binary.”¹⁶³ This *mestizaje* would continue to flourish in the colonial world, constantly blurring the lines of ethnicity and class.

In the case of colonial Mexico, the introduction of liminal classes such as *mestizo* created

¹⁶¹ Wood, Stephanie. *Transcending Conquest: Nahua Views of Spanish Colonial Mexico*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003. p. 57.

¹⁶² Townsend, Camilla. *Annals of Native America: How the Nahuas of Colonial Mexico Kept Their History Alive*. 2019. p. 1.

¹⁶³ Wood, Stephanie. *Transcending Conquest*, p. 9.

a unique problem for Spaniards, since they could no longer simply point to one's faith as a classification for their social standings. This new obstacle presented by the Nahuas forced Spain to adapt their colonial efforts to focus on race rather than religion as they did during the Spanish *Reconquista*. Before the conquest of colonial Mexico, Spain could exile or simply kill Muslim subjects that refused to assimilate to Christianity.¹⁶⁴ The New World however, posed a different problem due to the Spanish *encomienda* system, which meant that part of a conquistador's payment was the very people that lived on the land to be used as a labor force. By the late colonial period, the *mestizaje* that took place in colonial Mexico required a reevaluation of the Spanish colonial effort, and a focus on the *castas* to establish one's place in Spanish society.

Historian Marisol de la Cadena writes: "Mestizo thus houses a conception hybridity- the mixture of two classificatory regimes- which reveals subordinate alternatives for mestizo subject positions, including forms of indignity."¹⁶⁵ De la Cadena highlights the issues with this hybridity, as being a mestizo meant that one, by definition, was part white. The Spanish caste system was built around whiteness, a concept that blurred the line of race, social and cultural performance, and religion. Each one of these factors created tensions within the caste system, as each was a form of control, while also existing as an opportunity for social mobility. Due to these tensions, other factors were necessary in establishing one's *casta* classification, such as social standing, *casta* performance, and even dressing patterns.¹⁶⁶ That is, if people could

¹⁶⁴ Ingram, Kevin. *The Conversos and Moriscos in Late Medieval Spain and Beyond. Volume Two, Volume Two*. Converso and Morisco Studies. Leiden: Brill, 2012. P. 164.

¹⁶⁵ Cadena, Marisol de la. "Are 'Mestizos' Hybrids? The Conceptual Politics of Andean Identities." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 37, no. 2 (2005): 259.

¹⁶⁶ See, Cope, Douglas R. *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660-1720*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. 1994, Earle Rebeca. "The Pleasures of Taxonomy: Casta Paintings, Classification, and Colonialism." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2016), and Twinam, Ann. *Purchasing Whiteness: Pardos, Mulattos, and the Quest for Social Mobility in the Spanish Indies*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 2020

successfully navigate the social customs of Spaniards, they were often able to transcend their true ethnic classification to another classification that provided them with greater opportunities within the Empire. Spanishness, whiteness, and/or Hispanization then could be used interchangeably to suit people's narrative and goals. These three concepts could exist as synonyms and antonyms for each other simultaneously, often left to the context of the accuser or the accused.

One of the most recognizable remnants of the Spanish *casta* system are the various *casta* paintings found in late colonial Mexico. With *mestizaje* continuously blurring the lines of Spanish ethnicity, some colonial artists looked to create a clear guide on how to classify people's ethnicity according to their respective parents. Classifications, however, posed great tensions and challenges as they were hardly ever as precise or accurate as the paintings would have one think.¹⁶⁷ These paintings consisted of typically sixteen panels portraying a father, mother, and child, each labeled with a different respective ethnicity. The child in the *casta* paintings would be the result of the two ethnically different parents and served as a guide on how to classify children of the *mestizaje*. A mestizo for example, would be the result of a Spanish parent and an indigenous parent. *Casta* paintings varied in which ethnicities the artists chose to depict, with some being limited to one family and others having as many as sixteen different families. These families are also depicted in the typical dress of their station, an important dimension in showing one's race. Despite the many *casta* paintings found across New Spain, the people they depicted were far harder to classify than by simply tracing their parents' ethnicity. In the words of historian Rebecca Earle: "A substantial scholarship now demonstrates that colonial Spanish American

¹⁶⁷ Earle Rebeca. "The Pleasures of Taxonomy: Casta Paintings, Classification, and Colonialism." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2016): p. 427.

families were flexible structures, that socioracial categories were fluid and that the vocabulary used to classify the colonial population was highly contextual.”¹⁶⁸

The *castas* paintings were not solely for the consumption of elites. Some *casta* paintings show an effort to unite the religious and racial ideas of the period as a form of resistance. In the mid-eighteenth-century, artists looked to add the Virgin Mary of Guadalupe to the *castas* paintings, placing the dark-skinned apparition of the Virgin Mary next to the Spanish racial hierarchy. Similar to the effort of Nahuas creating their own coat of arms to perform Hispanization, adding the Virgin of Guadalupe to *casta* paintings showed an intimate knowledge of the *castas* from both the elites and the commoners. Regardless of how one interprets the religious validity of the recounting of the Virgin of Guadalupe’s apparition, her presence and appearance created a cultural and religious bridge not only as explained in chapter 2, but also across the Spanish caste system. The Virgin’s skin color showed that indigenous Mexicans had the same right to salvation as their Spanish counterparts despite the complex Spanish caste system.

Having no Spanish ancestry to speak of, Juan Diego was held to one of the lowest rungs of the Spanish caste system as an indigenous born young man, especially when one considers that slaves had not been widely introduced into New Spain by 1531. One of the insights that the Virgin of Guadalupe gives scholars of the early caste system is that her skin color was seen as important only ten years after the fall of the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan. While this may seem rather obvious, scholars tend to agree that the ethnic differences between Spaniards and Nahuas

¹⁶⁸ Earle, Rebecca. “The Pleasures of Taxonomy: Casta Paintings, Classification, and Colonialism.” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2016): p. 428.

quickly dissipated.¹⁶⁹ The Virgin's skin tone was just one of the ways that the representation Virgin Mary of Guadalupe was able to transcend the Spanish norms of religious and racial understanding. Being the mother of Jesus seemed to allow the Virgin Mary to operate in a liminal role, being both perfect and yet (in the eyes of a 16th century Spaniard) deeply flawed. One possible explanation for her ability to break norms was her role as a woman. Although most Spanish subjects were still negatively affected by the rigid caste system, women seldom felt the negative consequences of race due to their gender already marginalizing them.

If the *castas* paintings looked to solidify the concepts of whiteness, it certainly failed in many respects. Some early polygenists looked to argue that there had been separate acts of creation, explaining Gentiles, Jews and Africans, while others looked for explanation that could be explained more scientifically.¹⁷⁰ Whether the *castas* paintings were looking to justify racial hierarchy or simply look to scientifically catalog castes may never be known, however their existence shows that some within the Empire did not see the *castas* as a flexible structure that could be manipulated to suit one's needs. The paintings did not account for the complexities of cases such as that of Antonio Méndes and Nicolasa. If the caste system stemmed from the Spaniards' desire to separate people religiously, the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe showed that religion also provided an avenue to unify the racially diverse colonial Mexico. The canonization of the Virgin of Guadalupe meant that whiteness no longer had a tie to the Catholicism, making the concept of whiteness even more fragile.

To understand Spanish emphasis on whiteness, it is crucial to understand the "science" of

¹⁶⁹ Wood, Stephanie. *Transcending Conquest: Nahua Views of Spanish Colonial Mexico*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003. p. 65.

¹⁷⁰ Vinson, Ben. *Before Mestizaje: The Frontiers of Race and Caste in Colonial Mexico*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. p. 21.

the colonial period. As mentioned in chapter 2 humoralism dominated Spanish understanding of health and medicine during the period colonial period. Humoralism was an ancient theory that maintained that illness and diseases came from an imbalance in the four humors, described blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile. Actions such as bleeding could help drain blood and give the other humors a chance to balance themselves, a common practice within the Spanish New World. Historian Rebecca Earle writes, “Familiarity with humoral principals was widely disseminated among educated Spaniards in both Europe and the new world, for Catholic Spain had long engaged with the traditions of both Greek and Arab humoralism.”¹⁷¹ Both Hippocrates and Galen were considered the fathers of humoralism and maintained an important role as providers of medical knowledge during the colonial period. Humoralistic thought meant that Spaniards were always at risk of losing their whiteness to the American climate and diet. As a result, Spaniards looking to preserve their whiteness in the New World faced a constant tension against acclimation, as becoming too acclimated threatened one’s whiteness. The growing tension of acclimation meant that establishing clear distinctions like *las castas* were necessary to maintaining the Spanish hierarchy.

An important factor to consider when looking at Spaniards’ understanding of humoralism is the dramatically different climates between Spain and New Spain. While most of Spain has temperate conditions, the Spaniards landed on the border of two different biomes in the New World. The Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan stood more than seven thousand feet above sea level while the coasts were lush jungles. These dramatic changes in climate played a crucial role in how humoralists understood the preservation of whiteness. Diego Andres Rocha, for example, a

¹⁷¹ Earle, Rebecca. *Body of the Conquistador: Food, Race and the Colonial Experience in Spanish America, 1492-1700*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. p. 17.

law professor at the University of San Marcos wrote in 1681 on the Spaniards that first came to the Indies: “Americans, who did not conserve the colour of the first Spaniards who came to these Indies...because their ancestors enjoyed different climates, different waters, different food.”¹⁷² According to Rocha, these changes due to climate occurred slowly, explaining why creoles remained white despite living in the New World.¹⁷³ This understanding of climate was greatly based on the ideals of humoralism, and meant that exposure to the New World would compromise the whiteness of Spanish settlers. Climate was not the only factor in changing a white European into an *indio* however. Diet played a huge role in a humoralistic understanding of the world, and thus maintaining a European diet was also crucial in sustaining one’s whiteness in the New World.

As mentioned above, climate was not alone in threatening Spanish whiteness. Diet arguably played an even bigger role in preserving whiteness, as explanations of its importance could be found in both the religious and humoralistic spheres. Bread and wine had both played a central role in Spanish diet. “Well-tempered wine rectifies and repairs all humours. It restores blood in those who lack it, cheers the melancholy and helps eliminate melancholia, dispels and destroys phlegm, humidifies the choleric temperament and helps purge yellow bile.”¹⁷⁴ The more obvious connection was the religious connection that both wine and bread had in the Christian world. They both represented the body and blood of Christ, and their consumption allowed Christians to create and a connection with Christ. With such a strong emphasis on food and religion, the food of the indigenous populations would also carry pagan traditions and rituals,

¹⁷² Rocha, Diego Andrés, and José Alcina Franch. *El origen de los indios*. Madrid: Historia 16, 1988. , p. 213-214.

¹⁷³ Earle, *Body of the Conquistador*, p. 46.

¹⁷⁴ Mexía, *Silva de varia lección*, book 3, chap. 16 vol. II p. 104.

adding yet another layer in the importance of maintaining a Spanish diet in the New World.

The most obvious explanation for the central role that bread and wine played in the Spanish diet can be seen as religious, but its origins actually go back far before the time of Christ. The ancient Greeks, for example, believed that wine and bread made humans, humans, with Homer even using “bread eaters” to refer to men.¹⁷⁵ Considering that Spanish whiteness was comprised of a wide variety of ethnic descendants, it stands to reason that many of Spanish beliefs were also tied to the ancient beliefs of Europe. Historian David Weber highlights this complexity, writing: “Unlike Native Americans, who probably had a common group of ancestors, the peoples of Iberia descended from a wide variety of tribes and genetic stains from outside the peninsula, including Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Visigoths, Franks, Jews, and Muslims.”¹⁷⁶ This ethnic variety within Spain made whiteness a less than precise analysis of race and instead created a catchall concept for those from Spain that had light enough skin. This meant that the Spaniards created the concept of whiteness as a cultural concept, rather than simply being a true ethnic classification. Although Spaniards could look at the writings of Galen and Homer to justify their whiteness, it is all too possible that many of these explanations of whiteness did not apply to those very Spaniards with non-Greek ancestors. The concept of Spanish whiteness then was a concept with shaky foundations, foundations that were only bolstered with the introduction of the non-white indigenous population of New Spain.

The importance of wheat over maize then was more than a dietary preference, as bread and wine were both crucial to preserve whiteness over the indigenous *castas* within the Spanish Empire. The constant consumption of bread and wine had thousands of years of justifying, and

¹⁷⁵ Montanari, Massimo. *Food Systems and Models of Civilization*. 2013 p. 71.

¹⁷⁶ Weber, David J. *The Spanish frontier in North America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. p. 18.

from a humoral perspective, creating Spanish whiteness. If there were Spaniards that believed they shared a common ancestry to the indigenous population of the New World, that ancestry had been diluted by the foreign foods and climates of the Americas. Many medical experts of the time believed that: “It was through eating the wrong foods that ancient Spaniards had turned into toasted and discoloured Indians, and without access to Europeans’ food was therefore the principal bulwark protecting the Spanish body from the rigours of the American climate.”¹⁷⁷

With bread playing such a central role to the Spanish diet and worldview, the lack of wheat created problems for Spanish settlers. Although maize was a prevalent dietary staple throughout New Spain, it would never truly suffice as an alternative to wheat as Spaniards looked to maintain their whiteness. One Spanish doctor, Ruy Díaz de Islas noted that: “We Spaniards are of a hardier complexion being raised on hearty foods such as meat and wine and wheat bread and hearty things.”¹⁷⁸

Even as the ideals of humoralism were abandoned for more contemporary sciences, the tension between maize and wheat would continue to stand as a status symbol. Maize, was seen as a peasant food by the Spaniards, was a direct indicator of non-whiteness and thus marginalized and despised by the Spaniards. What resulted were special loaves of bread, inaccessible to the lower castas. *Pan español* (Spanish bread) was reserved to just two master bakers, often only being accessible to the highest Spanish elites and high-ranking church officials.¹⁷⁹ Creoles on the other hand, could purchase *pan floreado* (flowered bread), bread made of selected wheat. Lastly, the bread reserved for those that found themselves at the bottom

¹⁷⁷ Earle, *The Body of the Conquistador*, p. 47.

¹⁷⁸ Earle, *The Body of the Conquistador*, p. 45.

¹⁷⁹ Pilcher, Jeffrey M. *Planet Taco: A Global History of Mexican Food*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. p. 30.

of the Spanish hierarchy was *pan común* (common bread), *pambazos* and *cemitas*. These mixed-grain breads were comprised of wheat and maize, advertently or not representing the mixed ethnicity of its consumers.¹⁸⁰ Although different breads maintained *casta* norms, the consumption of maize continued to create tensions with the Catholic Church. These tensions between wheat and maize grew so much that Catholic missionaries sought out to destroy the pagan crop and instead focus on wheat as “the symbol and sustenance of Christianity.”¹⁸¹

In conclusion, the science of the colonial period meant that whiteness was not simply something that one was born with, but something that needed to be constantly maintained and exercised. Proving one’s whiteness could potentially be a daily struggle, especially if one had been exposed to New World climate or food. This understanding of the human body meant that anyone, regardless of lineage, born in the New World would immediately lose a degree of whiteness and become a *creole*. While it may be obvious that the science of the Old World was not designed to explain an entirely new continent of ethnicities, it nonetheless continued to serve as a foundation for the Spanish way of thought. This way of thought naturally bled into the Spanish legal system, where *casta* could dramatically change the ways with which people were tried and sentenced.

Racial classifications went beyond strictly physical, and needed to be supplemented with performance of whiteness, such as dress, name and speech.¹⁸² Pointing to one’s ancestry could help define one’s *caste*, however, living in the New World could pose significant challenges in gaining access to family records.¹⁸³ Court records suggest that the way a person was dressed

¹⁸⁰ Pilcher, *Planet Taco*, p. 31.

¹⁸¹ Pilcher, *Planet Taco*, p. 22.

¹⁸² Cope, Douglas R. *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660-1720*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. 1994 p. 56.

¹⁸³ Earle, *The Body of the Conquistador*, p. 7.

could dramatically change how one was treated and overall tried. Similarly, the accused's *casta* would dictate their overall treatment throughout the legal process, regardless of how accurate their classification was. The burden of proving one's whiteness seems to have always been placed on the accused, especially when accused by someone in a higher *casta*. The legal sphere provides one of the clearest opportunities to see just how fragile the concept of whiteness truly was in Colonial Mexico. Within the legal system, accusations and defenses could be solved in complex performances of whiteness. Reputation and honor acted as a protective armor against accusations of being a lower caste, as it combined the constant performance of whiteness and implied a long history *limpieza de sangre*, or cleanliness of blood.¹⁸⁴

The concept of *limpieza de sangre* was created during the Spanish Reconquista, the centuries long effort to cast out the Islamic caliphate from the Iberian Peninsula. During the Reconquista, religion played a vital role in shaping one's loyalties, and as such was strictly monitored. Distinctions were made between Old vs. New Christians, where Old Christians could prove a long Christian lineage, or "clean blood."¹⁸⁵ New Christians on the other hand, were often met with suspicion and their *limpieza de sangre* required a complex mix of genealogical proof along with reputation. *Limpieza de sangre* dictated one's social standing and access to social mobility, with New Christians being unable to acquire the more prestigious positions within the empire. *Limpieza de sangre* then, started as a legal distinction between one's religious genealogy in the mid-fifteenth century, but would eventually transform into a social category after the introduction of the New World, eventually evolving into a discursive in the mid-sixteenth

¹⁸⁴ See, Twinam, Ann. *Purchasing Whiteness: Pardos, Mulattos, and the Quest for Social Mobility in the Spanish Indies.*, 2020.

¹⁸⁵ Torres, Max S. Hering. "LIMPIEZA DE SANGRE EN ESPAÑA.: UN MODELO DE INTERPRETACIÓN." In *El Peso de La Sangre: Limpios, Mestizos y Nobles En El Mundo Hispánico*, edited by Max S. Hering Torres, Nikolaus Böttcher, and Bernd Hausberger, 1st ed., 29–62. El Colegio de Mexico, 2011 p. 29.

century.¹⁸⁶ This model applied to the New World took a far more racialized approach, looking at the color of one's skin due to the non-existing genealogical proofs.

In the 1680s, Nicolasa Juana was investigated by the Spanish Inquisition for drunkenness in New Spain, a quality that was identified as indigenous vice, and idolatry.¹⁸⁷ Nicolasa was described as a “white mulata with curly hair, because she is the daughter of a dark-skinned mulata and a Spaniard.” Nicolasa's case shows that physical whiteness was not enough to be considered white within the Spanish Empire, especially when being investigated for a crime that harmed her reputation as a white Spaniard. The issue becomes even more complicated when one considers that the Inquisition finds Nicolasa as being a *mulata* because her mother was a dark skinned *mulata*. If Nicolasa's mother would have been physically white like Nicolasa, it is all too possible that Nicolasa would have been treated as a *mestiza* instead. However, Nicolasa's genealogy was just one component in her accusation. The Inquisition also recorded that, “her manner of dress she has flannel petticoats and a native blouse” showing that the way that Nicolasa dressed was also considered in deciding how she should be tried for her crimes. Lastly, the Inquisition noted that, “her common language is not Spanish but Chocho, as she was brought up among Indians with her mother, from whom she contracted the vice of drunkenness.”¹⁸⁸

Nicolasa's example shows any of the legal issues that existed within the Spanish caste system. After all, Nicolasa was white, albeit *mulata* due to her parents' ethnicity. She was also seen as an “Indian,” because of the language she spoke and where she was raised. As explored previously, the humoralistic understanding of the Spaniards at this time meant that such a long

¹⁸⁶ Torres, *Limpieza de sangre en España* p. 30.

¹⁸⁷ Silverblatt, Irene. *Imperial Subjects: Race and Identity in Colonial Latin America*. Edited by Andrew B. Fisher and Matthew D. O'Hara. Duke University Press, 2009. p. 91.

¹⁸⁸ Silverblatt, *Imperial Subjects: Race and Identity in Colonial Latin America*. p. 91.

exposure to Amerindians would have certainly turned Nicolasa into an *india* herself. Nicolasa's inability to perform her whiteness would have certainly separated her from her father's Spanishness and thus Nicolasa was tried as a *mulata*, the lowest class out of the three that she could have been classified as. Whiteness, as seen in Nicolasa's case, could not be simply inherited, and instead required constant performance of to exist within the Spanish world.

Naturally, Nicolasa was not alone in ambiguous racial classification of the Spanish caste system. In December of 1731, Antonio Méndes and Joseph Miguel de Alcaras were accused by don Vacilio Botello Mobellán, a man of honor who, who deemed that both Méndes and Alcaras responded to him in a way that he considered discourteous.¹⁸⁹ Mobellán had approached the two others claiming that they owed him money. This exchange resulted in Méndes taking out a knife and threatening Mobellán with violence. Mobellán accused the two men of being of inferior *calidad* (or quality of blood), and as such could not speak to him, an honorable, white man in such a way. Mobellán accused the men of being *mulattos*, and as such were not allowed to speak to him in such a discourteous way, and much less carry a weapon. Méndes claimed he was a *mestizo*, not a *mulatto*, and thus was well within his right to carry a weapon and address Mobellán however he saw fit. Méndes also told authorities that he was married to a Spanish woman, which if true, "substantiated his honor by demonstrating his intimate bonds to a Spaniard."¹⁹⁰ Despite these claims, Méndes was still referred to as a mulatto throughout the legal process. Méndes' case shows that the accusation of a well-respected *don* carried far more weight in distinguishing one's race in colonial Mexico than evidence of whiteness. Mobellán referred to Méndes as "el coconito" or little coconut, implying that Méndes' skin color shared that of a

¹⁸⁹ Althouse, Aaron P. "Contested Mestizos, Alleged Mulattos: Racial Identity and Caste Hierarchy in Eighteenth Century Pátzcuaro, Mexico." *The Americas* 62, no. 2 (2005): p. 151.

¹⁹⁰ Althouse, "Contested Mestizos, Alleged Mulattos, p. 153.

coconut.¹⁹¹

Unlike Nicolasa's ability to pass as physically white, Méndes seemingly had issues with physically representing the caste he was allegedly part of. Both of these examples highlight the fragility of the concept of whiteness within the Spanish empire, as Nicolasa's physical whiteness did little to save her from the Spanish Inquisition due to her inability to perform whiteness, while Mendés was able to perform whiteness, but his physical appearance and the accusation from a Spanish noble meant that Mendes' performance could not eliminate his perceived caste. These two examples show the importance of reputation and honor in the Spanish caste system. While wealth could help a great deal in performing whiteness and building a reputation, there still existed plenty of tensions depending on the accuser and the accused. These tensions would only be exacerbated with the *gracias al sacar* system that allowed whiteness to be purchased for a set price in the later colonial period¹⁹²

Personal wealth was one of the most obvious factors that could alter a person's *casta*. One of the clearest examples of mobility among the Spanish caste system due to wealth, is also often regarded as the first mestizo. The wealth that Hernan Cortés extracted from to Tenochtitlan is difficult to assess for a number of reasons, however what remains clear is that it was life-altering wealth and prestige. Although Hernan Cortes is often credited with leading conquest of the Aztecs, he was far from alone in his achievement. Cortes was able to make his way into the Aztec capital in large part due to his translator and mistress, Malintzin. The relationship between Cortes and Malintzin was sexual (perhaps by force) but it never materialized in marriage. Their

¹⁹¹ Althouse, "Contested Mestizos, Alleged Mulattos, p. 153.

¹⁹² See, Twinam, Ann. *Purchasing Whiteness: Pardos, Mulattos, and the Quest for Social Mobility in the Spanish Indies*. 2020, and Twinam, Ann. *Public Lives, Private Secrets: Gender, Honor, Sexuality, and Illegitimacy in Colonial Spanish America*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2007.

union produced an illegitimate child in 1523, Martín Cortes, just two years after the fall of the Aztec capital. Considering how close his date of birth was to the capture of Tenochtitlán, Martín Cortes is one of the first mestizos. His experience was far from what most future mestizos would live.

Legal evidence shows that Cortes went to the trouble of getting Martín legitimized, an expensive and timely legal process within the Spanish Empire. Cortes sent Martín to Spain to join the Order of Santiago and eventually be in the service of the king.¹⁹³ Even once Hernan Cortes had produced a true heir, legal documents reveal that in the case of none of the heirs survived, Martín was to inherit Cortes' wealth. Martín's case shows that ethnicity was not the only factor in the Spanish *castas*, as he very much lived the life of a Spanish elite despite having an indigenous mother. Historian Camilla Townsend suggests that his legitimacy was still an issue: "If Martín were ever to become the heir, he would need to leave as much of his indigenous identity behind as possible, taking these steps would put him in the strongest position possible. If he never became the heir, he would still enter the ranks of Spanish high society."¹⁹⁴ In this regard, Martín's experience was far more common to future mestizos. Martín's case shows that while it was possible to escape one's ethnicity to move up the Spanish caste, escaping it also meant a constant performance of one's whiteness was necessary to maintaining whiteness. This performance was a daily negotiation of "social conventions unconnected to the bodies they governed" showing that whiteness in Colonial Mexico was just as much a societal performance as it was a genealogical categorization.¹⁹⁵ Martín's case gives scholars insights into the Spanish

¹⁹³ Townsend, Camilla. *Malintzin's Choices: An Indian Woman in the Conquest of Mexico*. Albuquerque, NM: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 2010, p.171.

¹⁹⁴ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, p. 171.

¹⁹⁵ Earle, Rebecca. "The Pleasures of Taxonomy". p. 432.

caste system by showing that there existed exceptions to the racial hierarchy with even the earliest mestizos. This ability to transcend racial classification by having access to great wealth and constantly performing Spanish elite customs would continue to create tension for the remainder of the colonial period.

Although Martín's story is unique in considering the fame of his parents, but his ability to transcend ethnic lines is not. "Passing" was common among the *castas*, especially along the non-creole categories. As seen in the previous examples of Nicolasa and Méndes, passing was often a complex procedure that required both the accused and accuser to accept the *casta* classification claimed. The true tension lied in breaking through the creole class, the highest form of whiteness one could reach within the Spanish caste system. Buying one's whiteness was more than an act of vanity, as it was necessary to graduate from universities, become doctors, lawyers, hold public office, and even limited one's marriage options. By 1795, whiteness had become so accessible to those with financial means that the Spanish Empire decided to create an official way of buying whiteness. In 1765 for example, Christobal Polo, a *pardo*, was allowed to graduate from university by the Council of the Indies.¹⁹⁶

Similarly, in 1743, Matías Perez Grageda, a *pardo* in the new world who had been allowed to receive a university degree, sent a petition to the Council of the Indies in order to seek a second degree.¹⁹⁷ The case of Grageda shows two important concepts within the Spanish caste system. First, the caste system allowed mobility within its ranks as long as the person performed "whiteness". Secondly, it showed just how oppressive the caste system could be to someone with even the slightest nonwhite categories. Grageda was a *pardo*, had already received a title from

¹⁹⁶ Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness*, p. 238.

¹⁹⁷ Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness*, p. 152.

Madrid to work as an apothecary, a job legally reserved for whites. Despite his qualifications, Grageda still felt the social tensions of a *pardo* doing the job of a white Spaniard. His petition to the Council of the Indies showed that he feared that he would be unable to perform his profession because he was one-sixteenth mulatto. This petition looked to the Council of the Indies to establish a decree that recognized his whiteness and absolved him of his “defect that he suffered in *limpieza*.”¹⁹⁸ The defect in *limpieza* Grageda referred to the *limpieza de sangre*, or the cleanliness of blood. Despite his qualifications, Grageda’s legal petition shows that even qualified *pardos* felt the racial tension that existed within the Spanish Empire concerning the fragility of their caste system. Although there certainly existed unlikely opportunities for *pardos* to practice professions typically only accessible to the whiter *castas*, race continued to play a vital role in maintaining social control. Despite Grageda’s qualifications, he would still face plenty of obstacles when it came to performing his whiteness. More than simply proving his whiteness, Grageda would also have to prove his competence as a physician simultaneously with proving his *limpieza de sangre*.¹⁹⁹

While using social and political means to gain whiteness within the empire was not uncommon, in 1795 the Spanish Crown issued *gracias al sacar*, a legal process of buying one’s whiteness within the empire. Before *gracias al sacar*, navigating the *castas* system was a complex practice of proving one’s self to their community to gain letters of recommendation and file petitions according to what racial barrier they sought to break down. Although *gracias al sacar* was institutionalized in the late colonial period, the action itself shows just how fragile the concept of whiteness had become throughout the Spanish empire. The crown assumed that if one

¹⁹⁸ Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness*, p. 152.

¹⁹⁹ Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness*, p. 156.

could accumulate sufficient wealth to start the process, they would certainly have been “Spanish” enough to be held to a higher social standard. The crown charged 1000 reales to become a don (noble) and 500 reales to remove any traces of *pardo* from their genealogy.²⁰⁰ While buying nobility was not a uniquely Spanish concept, its racial implications certainly were. Whereas in countries like France, families looked to buy their way into nobility to avoid taxes, citizens within the Spanish Empire looked to eliminate traces of their ancestry.²⁰¹ Theoretically, *gracias al sacar* offered a legal distinction of one’s whiteness, eliminating the legal need to produce whiteness through a family tree. However, in doing so, *gracias al sacar* showed the fragile concept of whiteness within the Spanish world.

Naturally, *gracias a sacar* was not without its controversies. While allowing someone deemed to be of “impure” blood to practice a needed profession was certainly controversial within itself, it was far more controversial to openly publish that *gracias al sacar* could completely bypass genealogy to legally grant whiteness to someone.²⁰² Some white Spaniards feared that allowing *pardos* in the halls of universities would taint their privileges. Fiscal Maldonado, a man of honor, argued: “if *pardos* sat in university classes that whites would fear their own status would be lowered given their physical nearness to those of inferior position.”²⁰³ This paranoia of exposure to nonwhites was far more complex than straightforward racism or elitism. It echoes and reflects the science of the time; a belief that even limited exposure to nonwhites could physically threaten the whiteness of Spanish elites.

Studying the fragile concept of whiteness then, helps separate nearly a century of

²⁰⁰ Twinam, p. 241.

²⁰¹ See, Lynn, John. *Giant of the Grand Siècle: The French Army, 1610-1715* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

²⁰² Twinam, p. 242.

²⁰³ Twinam, p. 157.

scholarship that glorified white Spaniards while ignoring the key role that the *castas* played in creating their own history. As explored in this essay, whiteness required constant performance in order to exist and be recognized. By looking at various legal cases, it becomes obvious that wealth, language, reputation, and religion each played a far more vital role in proving the concept of whiteness than ethnicity itself did. Even more telling, the process of *gracias al sacar* confirms that whiteness was far more related to a socio-political position within the empire than it was a racial classification. Even the religious origins of the *casta* system were debased with the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe, promising religious equality among white Spaniards and the *castas*.

The Spanish caste system continues to infiltrate and shape the historiography of the Spanish Empire. One of the clearest examples of this foundation can be seen in Herbert E. Bolton's *The Spanish Borderlands*. Bolton's work explored previously neglected Spanish achieves and looked to revitalize the study of Spanish history, especially in relations to the lands now held by the United States.²⁰⁴ Although Bolton's work added an important dimension to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Anglo American perceptive of the Black Legend, his work would also widely ignore the role that the *castas* had in defining their own history.²⁰⁵ Later scholars looked to undo some of the perceptions that Bolton's work produced concerning "Spanishness" and "whiteness" and instead, to celebrate the individual cultures that were created out of centuries of *mestizaje*.

One of the issues however with restoring Spain's whiteness is that it ignored true Spanish descendants. In regards to the Black Legend, American poet Walt Whitman wrote: "To that

²⁰⁴ Hurtado, Albert L. "Parkmanizing the Spanish Borderlands: Bolton, Turner, and the Historians' World." *The Western Historical Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (1995): 149-67. p.150

²⁰⁵ Weber, David J. *The Spanish Frontier in North America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992. p. 335-336.

composite American identity of the future, Spanish character will supply some of the most needed parts. No stock shows a grander historic retrospect- grander in religiousness and loyalty, or for patriotism, courage, decorum, gravity and honor. (It is time to dismiss utterly the illusion-compound, half raw-head-and-bloody-bones and half Mysteries-of-Udolpho, inherited from the English writers of the past 200 years. It is time to realize-for it is certainly true- that there will not be found any more cruelty, tyranny, superstition, &c., in the résumé of past Spanish history than in the corresponding résumé of Anglo-Norman history.)”²⁰⁶ Despite the racial blind spot that both Whitman and Bolton seemed to have concerning the Spanish and their legacy in American culture, some scholars still see Bolton’s work as a crucial contribution to Spanish scholarship. Optimistically, Kessell writes: “ Recognizing that, and accepting the Columbus Quincentenary generation’s responsibility for fuller analyses of all the participants in contact and of all the consequences and for more shame, then we can still, after forty years, congratulate Herbert E. Bolton for giving a good part of the story- assuredly the best part”.²⁰⁷ Albert L. Hurtado also takes an apologetic stance for Bolton, writing: “But if Bolton’s racial and ethnic ideals were contradictory it must be recognized that he lived in a time when throughout the nation racial attitudes were in flux.”²⁰⁸ Both Hurtado and Kessell show the problematic nature of Bolton’s work, ignoring or belittling the lasting racial implications of his work. By doing so, they allow Bolton’s work to perpetuate ideas of whiteness while separating Spaniards from the *castas*.

Bolton’s school of thought for example, maintained a questionable view on race, and the

²⁰⁶ “Walt Whitman to the Tertio-millennial Anniversary Association at Santa Fe, New Mexico, 20 July 1883.” *The Walt Whitman Archive*. Gen. ed. Matt Cohen, Ed Folsom, and Kenneth M. Price. Accessed 11 February 2021. <<http://www.whitmanarchive.org>>.

²⁰⁷ Kessell, John L. “Bolton’s Coronado.” *Journal of the Southwest* 32, no. 1 (1990), 96.

²⁰⁸ Hurtado, Albert L. “Herbert E. Bolton, Racism, and American History.” *Pacific Historical Review* 62, no. 2 (1993), p. 142.

role it played in the colonial effort. While it is virtually impossible to ignore Bolton's contribution to the scholarship of the Spanish Empire, his views on race are also virtually impossible to ignore. Bolton praised the Spanish efforts praising their efforts as "frontiering genius" while at the same time looking at Mexicans as vicious "half breeds".²⁰⁹ Such veneration of Spanish heritage seemed to bolster the ideas behind the Spanish caste system, one that glorified whiteness and oppressed any mixture of ethnicity. Later writers would take a different stance on the importance of ethnicity, highlighting the cultural and societal requirements that often had little to do with "race" as a modern reader may understand it.

The Spanish's complex and fragile understanding of race combined with the understanding of race during Bolton's times (early half of the twenty-first century) seemed to create a strange amalgamation of deep respect at a distance for Bolton. Bolton's contradictions present a delicate balance for scholars to praise him, as to not acknowledge either side would be intellectually irresponsible. Similarly, for Mexican, Chicano, and Indian scholars, Bolton's school of thought presents valuable historical sources for the study of the Spanish frontier at a steep cost to pay. Bolton's focus on restoring whiteness to Spain was easily proven by the Spanish sources; however, those same sources did little to show the fragile foundations they were founded on. To cite Bolton can also serve to cite the disregard for one's ancestor's role in participating in "Spanish frontiering genius" such as the *indios amigos*.²¹⁰

Such veneration of only the Spanish's role in the history of Colonial Mexico would, (and continues to do so) create problems for those looking to place their Hispanic legacy in the context of Anglo history. To describe this phenomenon, historian Jeffery Pilcher uses the term

²⁰⁹ Weber, *Spanish Frontier*, p. 260

²¹⁰ Weber, *Spanish Frontier*, p. 354

“fantasy heritage” a fictional heritage which served to “situate the Spanish Southwest in the national history alongside Puritan New England and the plantation Old South.”²¹¹ Pilcher claims that this “fantasy heritage” often “served to naturalize racial hierarchies and justify white domination”.²¹² By creating a specific respect for Spanish and not the other *castas*, Boltonians also created an elusive heritage that few if any could really claim. With few Hispanics able to claim their direct Spanish heritage, Anglos were able to have an appreciation for the Spanish legacy while maintaining disdain for Mexicans. Bolton’s school then did much to separate the Spanish from the Black Legend, but overemphasized, as Weber writes, “Spaniards in the borderlands and losing sight of the fact that genetically and culturally the society of northern New Spain had been essentially mestizo or Mexican.”²¹³ Similarly, Prescott has been criticized for his “romantic” approach to history that “advance[s] an ethnocentric vision in which the US can be viewed as the culmination of providential history”²¹⁴

Under the Black Legend, Spain’s history became an exaggerated version of cruelty to fit the Anglo worldview, and became a source of justifiable Hispanophobia. In order to undo some of the Hispanophobia that dominated Anglo scholarship, Bolton looked to correct Hispanophobia by restoring whiteness to the Spanish settlers. Albert L. Hurtado writes: “Bolton’s concern about racial questions contrasted with the relative inattention to this subject of most early twentieth-century American historians, many of whom showed outright hostility to anyone who could not

²¹¹ Pilcher, Jeffery M. *Planet Taco: A Global History of Mexican Food*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012 p. 106.

²¹² Pilcher, *Planet Taco: A Global History of Mexican Food*, p. 106.

²¹³ Weber, *Spanish Frontier*, p. 255.

²¹⁴ Ernest, John. “Reading the Romantic Past: William H. Prescott’s History of the Conquest of Mexico.” *American Literary History* 5, no. 2 (1993): 232.

claim Anglo Saxon, Protestant, and white origins.”²¹⁵ In an America that had yet to see the civil rights movement come to fruition, and a rampant Mexican immigration due to the Mexican Revolution, it was not enough to bring attention to the complexities of race but to rather connect Spain with whiteness.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Hurtado, Albert L. “Herbert E. Bolton, Racism, and American History.” *Pacific Historical Review* 62, no. 2 (1993): 127-42.

²¹⁶ Kessel, John L. “Bolton’s Coronado.” *Journal of the Southwest* 32, no. 1 (1990): 91.

CONCLUSION

A Genealogy of values, morality, asceticism, and knowledge will never confuse itself with a quest for its 'origins', will never neglect as inaccessible the vicissitudes of history. On the contrary it will cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning; it will be scrupulously attentive to their petty malice; it will await their emergence, once unmasked as the face of the other.

M. Foucault

The Virgin of Guadalupe was, and continues to be, central to the religiosity of Mexico. Despite starting out as a local folk legend, the Virgin eventually became the flag of a revolution that fought for racial equality in 1810. An overlooked quality of the Virgin's relevance throughout the colonial period was the Nahuatl resistance to Spanish colonialism. Despite starting off as a religious tradition that garnered the disdain of early Spanish theologians, the Virgin would eventually grow into a manifestation of Mexican religious legitimacy much like France's St. Denis or England's St. George. The Nahuatl role in this religious transformation is often overlooked, and instead they are often seen as helpless victims or passive actors in the Spanish colonial effort. However, this work has shown that Nahuatl were central to Spanish colonial methods, and forced the Spanish to adapt, modify, and in cases completely change their approach to colonizing the New World. Almost two decades ago, in his foreword of Miguel León-Portilla's *The Broken Spears*, Jorge Klor de Alva emphasize the importance of centering the study of indigenous texts: "The Nahuatl narratives in this collection, which now includes texts from the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, contribute to our understanding of some of the most important concerns in the world today, especially in the more multicultural nations of Europe and in the United States. These include the challenge of cultural pluralism and social diversity

and the search for common ground in a sea of ethnic differences.”²¹⁷

As chapter 1 shows, the Spanish arrived in the New World with distinct colonial patterns that served them well during the Spanish *Reconquista*. The Spanish also looked to their European ancestors, tracing their conversion from the polytheistic Greco-Roman religion to Catholicism. By comparing the Nahua pantheon to that of the Greco-Roman pantheon, the Spanish intentionally made comparisons based on European gender norms rather than looking to create the most accurate comparisons. Considering that these comparisons were made to help Europeans understand the Nahua gods more accurately, what resulted was an oversimplification of indigenous religion that created religious blind spots that would hinder the religious conversion of the Nahuas throughout the colonial period (and arguably to this day). Bernardino de Sahagún’s attempt to compare both pantheons had deeper implications than seemingly intended, creating an avenue for Nahuas to syncretize their religion to Europeans. This exchange would continue throughout the colonial period, merging Christian ideals and traditions to those of the Nahuas.²¹⁸

While chapter 1 establishes the foundation of Nahua religious syncretism, chapter 2 explores one of the clearest examples of this amalgamation of Spanish and Nahua religion, the legend of the Virgin of Guadalupe. While this myth is said to take place just ten years after the conquest, the larger acceptance of the myth would not come until the mid to late colonial period. Historian Cornelius Conover for example, writes: “Archival evidence from the city council and current-events chroniclers show that creole patriotism accounted for little of the growth in the cult of Guadalupe until the 1760’s. Far more important were demands for supernatural wonders,

²¹⁷ León Portilla, Miguel, José Jorge Klor de Alva, Angel María Garibay K., Lysander Kemp, and Alberto Beltrán. *The Broken Spears: The Aztec account of the Conquest of Mexico*. 2006. p. xiii

²¹⁸ See, Cervantes, Fernando, and Andrew Redden. *Angels, Demons and the New World*. 2013.

shifts in the specialties of leadings saints, and promotion by colonial officials.”²¹⁹ Yet, much like the Greco-Roman legends that remained dormant in European consciousness explored in chapter 1, the legend of the Marian apparition remained dormant until her relevance could be used as an anti-colonization tool (and eventual symbol of revolution) by Creoles and indigenous people. The Virgin of Guadalupe would serve as a much-needed female icon for the Nahuas, and would merge both Nahua and Spanish symbolism in the supernatural wonders (such as her painting) to create a uniquely Mexican religious symbol.²²⁰

Although the Virgin would serve as a religious bridge between the Spanish and Nahuas, the legend of her apparition would have significant racial implications for the late colonial period. Due to her apparition’s darker skin tone, the Virgin of Guadalupe’s very painting challenged the already weakened Spanish *castas* system. As chapter 3 explored, the *castas*’ greatest weakness was its reliance on the fragile concept of whiteness to assert colonial control. In *The Limits of Racial Domination* for example, Douglas Cope argues that if one “wished to convince the authorities of someone’s racial status, they went beyond physical characterization” and often needed to include information about the individual’s name or speech to fully prove someone’s racial identity.²²¹ Examples like Cope’s show that the Spanish had to constantly adapt their *castas* system to the unique obstacles of the New World and go beyond obvious race and factor in a person’s wealth and social standing. The greater implications of this work can be seen when looking at how foundational works in the historiography treated the “whiteness” of Spaniards.

²¹⁹ Conover, Cornelius. “Reassessing the Rise of Mexico’s Virgin of Guadalupe, 1650s–1780s.” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 27, no. 2 (2011): 251.

²²⁰ See, Sigal, Peter Herman. *The Flower and the Scorpion: Sexuality and Ritual in Early Nahua Culture*. 2012.

²²¹ Cope, Douglas R. *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660-1720*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994 p .56

Whiteness, in colonial Mexico as it is today, is a constantly changing classification that is hardly made up of ethnic differences, as much as it is a socio-political construct that marginalizes those that are unable to perform its requirements. Whiteness remains an elusive and flexible concept, which can often times be broken down by access to wealth, good social reputation, ability to speak language in a certain way, and, at times, hinges on one's religion. As such, understanding the crucial role that the indigenous population played in forming Mexican identity should be seen as a constant resistance of Spanish colonialism rather than a quick and decisive conquest that ended with the fall of Tenochtitlan. Likewise, our current understanding of the Nahua religion should not be based on loose comparisons to familiar pantheons and instead should be read as unique entities, created over centuries to fit the specific religious needs of the various indigenous populations of Meso-America. Similarly, the apparition and painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe should be seen as the merging of two separate religious worlds, desperate to find a middle-ground, rather than a religious icon engineered by Spanish theologians. As the sixteenth-century Nahuatl text, *The Annals of Juan Bautista* says: "Pay attention to your ancestry, from which came forth your artistry. Enter into, think of, your lineage. Otherwise because of your arrogance there will be nothing to be honored, to be renowned. Remember your commitment, your social contract."²²²

²²² Townsend, Camilla. *Annals of Native America: How the Nahuas of Colonial Mexico Kept Their History Alive*. 2019. p.55

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