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“The rupture generation” : nineteenth-century Nahua intellectuals in Mexico City, 1774-1882

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Summary in English

In the present dissertation several ideas are examined about the phenomenon of intellectuality in Mesoamerica and its continuation of Nahua intellectuality from the sixteenth through the nineteenth century in Mexico City. One of the premises that this work discusses is the possibility of analyzing the phenomenon of indigenous intellectuality by approaching a study of the theoretical positions used to understand the historical development of other non-indigenous or westernized intellectual examples. Thus, this current work offers a general analysis about several diverse concepts that may contribute to our better understanding of the intellectual phenomenon in Mesoamerica, which in turn may help us explain its continuation from the pre-conquest period through the nineteenth-century in Mexico.

The dissertation argues that indigenous intellectuality existed and prevailed by means of common modes of expression throughout the Mesoamerican territory, and that diverse indigenous institutions existed in the pre-conquest period that sponsored this activity according to their own regional and cultural characteristics. During the 16th century, the process of conquest and colonization led by the Spaniards in Mesoamerica disrupted Indigenous Peoples' intellectual traditions; however, this event did not prevent Mesoamerican Indigenous Peoples from continuing with the production of their own intellectual expressions. After the Spaniards established Mexico City as the capital of New Spain, the colonial authorities sought to create their own intellectual tradition and impose it upon the recently subjugated people of the region. Through their attendance and participation in the educational institutions sponsored by the colonial authorities, Indigenous Peoples experienced a process of synergy in which they maintained essential Mesoamerican elements of knowledge and combined them with new European ideas, which resulted in the ultimate continuation of indigenous intellectualism.

In the specific case of Mexico City, from the 16th century onwards, the intellectual tradition among the Nahua People continued under the above mentioned circumstances until the early years of the 19th century, when the political order in New Spain dramatically changed. A troubling period of instability occurred in Spain and throughout the Spanish Empire which ultimately led to the issuing of the Constitution of Cadiz in 1812. Contrary to its intentions, the new social changes brought about by the promulgation of this constitution deeply affected the integrity of indigenous communities in Mexico. Years later, in 1821 Mexico declared its independence from Spain, and this historical process also affected the judicial nature of the lives of Mexico's Indigenous Peoples. These two major events represented another important breaking point in the Nahua intellectual tradition in Mexico City.

Throughout all of these changes, certain educational, religious, and cultural institutions offered Mexico's Indigenous Peoples spaces within which they could continue with their intellectual production. Most notably, during the last decade of the 18th century, several Nahua students attended educational institutions sponsored by the Spanish colonial authorities. While enrolled in these institutions these Nahua students experienced the political changes and

transition from living in a colonial system to becoming citizens of an independent Mexican government. Based on their common characteristics, as well as their individual and collective experiences, this dissertation argues that these Nahua students represent a “rupture generation” in the Mesoamerican intellectual tradition. Through the review of numerous documental and archival sources, this dissertation examines the lives and works of at least four of these Nahua intellectuals who served as characteristic examples of the members of this generation: Juan de Dios Rodríguez Puebla, Pedro Patiño Ixtolinque, Francisco de Mendoza y Moctezuma, and Faustino Galicia Chimalpopoca.

After 1821, all of these Nahua intellectuals actively participated in the political arena, either as members of the Mexico City Ayuntamiento or as directors of various schools or educational institutions. Either occupying positions as politicians, or in working as collective representatives or lawyers, eventually all of these Nahua intellectuals became defenders of the rights that indigenous communities had to administer their collective properties for their own benefit. Throughout the years that these Nahua intellectuals remained politically active, they defended the rights of Indigenous Peoples before the early independence era Mexican justice system. By doing that, the members of this “rupture generation,” as this study illustrates, displayed a deep knowledge about their Mesoamerican heritage, while at the same time revealing their proficiency and an acquired depth of knowledge about the classical and contemporary European philosophical and political ideas of their own times.

Nevertheless, from 1850 onward, three of these four Nahua intellectuals under study had already passed away, leaving only the youngest of this generation, Faustino Galicia Chimalpopoca, to continue with their collective work in defending their Indigenous communities’ lands and their cultural and linguistic heritage. Faustino Chimalpopoca witnessed the deterioration of the use of the Nahuatl language in both the spheres of the administration of justice and government, which had resulted in a general widespread contempt on the part of non-indigenous Mexican national society for the Nahuatl language and the Nahua culture of its speakers. As this dissertation argued, this reason may have played a major motivating role in Faustino Chimalpopoca’s desire and later work in preserving, collecting, transcribing and copying ancient indigenous documents which he considered to be in danger of being lost due to the diminishing legal and political importance of the use of indigenous language records in official circles which existed at that time. Desperately seeking a formal means of preserving Nahua culture and ensuring indigenous rights to their lands and cultural patrimony, Chimalpopoca sought to continue in the public and educational sphere throughout various changing governments and rotating political parties. In 1864, during the period of the French Intervention in Mexico, Faustino Chimalpopoca quickly became a strong supporter of the Emperor Maximilian of Habsburg, for whom he worked as a personal instructor and interpreter of the Nahuatl language. During the time Faustino Chimalpopoca remained as a member of the imperial court of Emperor Maximilian, he continued collecting and transcribing historical documents, as well as representing indigenous communities before the justice system. In the end,

this dissertation concludes that the life and work of Faustino Chimalpopoca can be considered as an epitome and one of the best examples of the Nahua intellectuals who were members of this “rupture generation.”