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Introduction

“The Rupture Generation:” Nineteenth-Century Nahua Intellectuals in Mexico City, 1780-1882

The study of intellectuality in general is a fascinating topic that has encouraged several scholars to approach the study of this human experience from diverse perspectives and areas of knowledge. Therefore, studying intellectuals and intellectuality as a social phenomenon is not a new interest among scholars. From the nineteenth century onward scholars, most of them European, have questioned the role and social importance of intellectuals.¹ The early works produced by those scholars who initially approached the study of intellectuals and their role in society began with their first attempts to define the process of intellectualism, and hence, to give a definition to the term “intellectual.” By identifying intellectuals as a specific group prevailing within western societies, these early scholars approached the understanding of this phenomenon by examining the way in which this group interacts with different social circles within a society. By identifying the characteristics of intellectuals in these early studies, scholars attempted to assess the impact that intellectuals of the past had on their contemporary societies and the impact which their works had on certain social issues within them.

Nevertheless, the recognition of the existence of diverse intellectual spheres in non-Western societies remains a topic still under construction and development among modern scholars. The recognition of the existence of intellectuals and intellectuality within non-westernized societies has raised other types of challenges to current scholars. Sociologists, political scientists and anthropologists were the first to point out the importance that indigenous intellectuals had on the modern world. On the other hand, current scholars have revisited the study of indigenous intellectualism in the Americas in order to recognize the agency of indigenous communities to interpret the historical events which concerned them through their own means and from their own perspectives.

Thus, current historians have revisited the works produced by indigenous intellectuals in order to variously emphasize their existence, to place them into the historiography, and to point out the important social roles that they played in the past. In the specific case of the Spanish colonial history of Mexico, there are extensive secondary studies of scholars who have reviewed the importance of Nahua intellectuals and their works as historians, such as Diego Muñoz Camargo (1529 - 1599), San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin (1579-1660?), Fernando de Alva Cortés Ixtlilxóchitl (1568-1648) or Fernando Alvarado Tezozomoc (1525-

¹ A summarized reviewed about these works is offered by Homi Bhabha in his article entitled “The World and the Home,” *Social Text*, No. 31/32, (1992): 141-153.

1606).² Nevertheless, the study of indigenous intellectuals' production during the last years of the Spanish colonial era in New Spain, and the early years of independent Mexico, still deserves more attention from current scholars. The major contributions of these secondary works, besides their revision of these early indigenous intellectuals' works, reside in the fact of recognizing the existence of indigenous intellectuals during the period of the Spanish colonization in New Spain. Additionally, these secondary works also recognized the influence of both Mesoamerican and Western knowledge in the works of these intellectuals, which represents a feature of major importance in this intellectual phenomenon.

These recent secondary studies have challenged the precepts of official Mexican historiography, which in general has denied Indigenous Peoples their participation in history as active agents. Contrary to Mexican official historiography, which has divested Indigenous Peoples of their agency in creating history from their own perspectives, we can see that similarly to the rest of intellectuals from other epochs and places throughout the world, indigenous intellectuals played an important role in the development of history. Considering indigenous intellectuality as an existing and constant phenomenon from early Mesoamerican times results in the recognition of Indigenous Peoples' continued agency to interpret history from their own perspective, even after the tragic years of the European colonization. This recognition also suggests that this intellectual tradition continued after the early decades of the nineteenth century, when the transformation of the political regime changed the Spanish Americas.

Both the political and social changes that occurred in early nineteenth century in Mexico, passing from a colonial regime to the establishing of an independent nation, represented a major break in the periodization of Mexican history. This period of transition remains as one of the most dramatic historical processes that the country experienced since this change transformed both the institutional life and social organization of the country. There is no doubt that these transformations influenced the life of Mexicans in general, and especially the works that

² For instance, see Susan Schroeder, *Chimalpahin and the Kingdom of Chalco* (Arizona: Arizona University Press, 1991); James Lockhart, Susan Schroeder, and Doris Namala, trans., *Annals of His Time Don Domingo de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); Arthur J. O. Anderson, *Codex Chimalpahin: Society and Politics in Mexico Tenochtitlan, Tlatelolco, Texcoco, Culhuacan, and Other Nahuatl Altepetl in Central Mexico* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997). Also see Amber Brian, Bradley Benton, and Pablo García Loaeza, trans., *The Native Conquistador: Alva Ixtlilxochitl's Account of the Conquest of New Spain* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2015); Ernst Mengin, *Diferentes historias originales de los reynos de Culhuacán, y México, y de otras provincias* (Berlin: Baessler Archive, 1944). About this work see José Rubén Romero Galván, "Posible esquema de las Historias originales de Chimalpahin," *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl*, número 1 (1976): 73-78. See also Domingo Francisco de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin, *Relaciones originales de Chalco Amaquemecan*, Silvia Rendón, trans., (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1965). See also Domingo Chimalpahin, *Diario* (México: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2001); Domingo Chimalpahin, *Memorial Breve acerca de la fundación de la ciudad de Culhuacan*; Victor M. Castillo, ed., (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1991); also Domingo Chimalpahin, *Las ocho relaciones y el memorial de Culhuacan*, 2 vols., Rafael Tena, trans., (México: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1998).

intellectuals in the country produced. Consequently, the work of Nahua intellectuals' did not remain excluded from this process.

The rapid transformation that occurred in New Spain, and later on in the newly formed country called Mexico during the first three decades of the nineteenth century, still represents a challenge for any historian studying this time period due to several reasons. The constant changing in the federal administration, along with the transformation of the institutional life, in combination with constant revolts and foreign invasions that the country endured, makes the task of tracing historical and official documentation very difficult. This quick transformation affected the way nineteenth century institutions organized their documentation and preserved contemporary information. Throughout this process and the turmoil of the early post-independent period, much of the existing documentation became lost and often reorganized and redistributed throughout various institutions. This fact allowed for the fragmented information that before might have been archived in one file in a specific institution in one place, to later be relocated and scattered across several different institutions organized in a disarticulated way placing parts of any one specific case or type of documentation in different files and archives.

Even facing these difficulties and the constant transformation that institutional life experienced in Mexico during the early decades of the nineteenth century, intellectuals did not stop producing their different works. Similarly to their non-indigenous counterparts, Nahua intellectuals continued with their work during the last years of the Spanish colony in Mexico, and continued producing their work during the subsequent decades after independence of Mexico.

This current dissertation emerged while seeking answers for a series of basic questions that attempted to understand indigenous intellectualism as an integral phenomenon in Mesoamerica, New Spain and eventually Mexico. This research first began by seeking answers to the central question of asking about the way in which the Mesoamerican intellectual tradition continued after the Spanish invasion and the process of European colonization. At that point in the research, it became necessary to focus the research on providing elements to properly define both intellectuality and the intellectual phenomenon in their Mesoamerican historical context. Similarly, I questioned myself about the similarities and differences that existed between indigenous intellectuals and non-indigenous ones. By assuming that the Mesoamerican intellectual tradition continued during the period of the Spanish colonization, through this research I sought to know how, and under which circumstances and conditions, this intellectual tradition continued. I also remained interested in knowing more about the lives of those indigenous intellectuals who continued this work throughout the period of the Spanish colony. Additionally, one of the main questions that framed this research focused on providing an answer to the question of how Nahua intellectuals in Mexico City had experienced the transition from the colonial regime to the independent political establishment prevailing in Mexico after 1821. About this period of transition, I remained interested in discovering the ways and means by

which these Nahua intellectuals had interpreted their own context, and how they responded to the turbulent and changing years when the shaping of Mexico took place.

Initially led by these inquiries, the proposal of this current dissertation resides in locating and identifying a few of the members of a much larger generation of Nahua intellectuals who received their education under the Spanish colonial regime, and who all eventually experienced the political transition that occurred in the second decade of the nineteenth century, which resulted in the independence of the territory. It is the proposition of this dissertation that the process of political and social transformation that these Nahua intellectuals experienced during the early decades of the nineteenth century determined the character of their own intellectual works. Also, following the premise that during the second decade of the nineteenth century Mexico experienced a historic moment of political transition that marked the end of the colonial regime in Mexico, in this present work I identify several of the major individuals who experienced this transition and I classify them as being members of a “rupture generation.” This work also aims to offer an initial identification of the social elements that characterized the life and works of Nahua intellectuals who shaped this “rupture generation.”

Similarly, in this dissertation, I attempted to also theoretically approach the definition, in the Nahua indigenous context, for diverse concepts, such as “intellectual” and “indigenous intellectual.” By establishing these definitions at the start of this study, I hope to set the basis for encouraging a more in depth debate about the use and understanding of these concepts within the context of historical research.

Additionally, from the identification of a few members of this “rupture generation” and through the exploration of their works, this study’s proposal defends the idea that indigenous intellectualism remains as a long term process. This phenomenon of indigenous intellectualism remained rooted in Mesoamerican knowledge and traditions. Moreover, during the period of the Spanish invasion Indigenous Peoples experienced a process of synergy that eventually resulted in the continuation of their intellectual traditions. The process of synergy in which both Mesoamerican and European elements of knowledge resulted in an unique indigenous intellectual tradition, also continued throughout the years of the Spanish colonization and the first five decades of the nineteenth century.

In this sense, during the time that Spanish colonization lasted in Mesoamerica, colonial authorities created spaces and cloisters in which indigenous intellectuals continued with their production under the sponsorship of colonial authorities in an institutionalized way. On the other hand, indigenous intellectuals did exist who continued their intellectual work outside the Spanish institutions and without the sponsorship of the colonial authorities. Still, the institutionalized intellectual tradition led by Indigenous Peoples during colonial times thrived for three centuries, and continued long after the end of the colonial era in Mexico.

Through the process of identifying the individuals who shaped this “rupture generation” by examining the available documentation, I was able to follow the lives and works of at least four Nahua individuals. For the purpose of this research, these individuals will serve as a representative sample of a much larger group of Nahua intellectuals. Through this process, I identified several of the names of other individuals who also shaped this “rupture generation.” These individuals all shared common characteristics, such as their ethnic identity as Indigenous Peoples, and the fact that these individuals all lived in Mexico City during their early and adult lives. The members of this group also gained access to education through their attendance at colonial institutions, as well as the fact that later they all experienced the political changes of having been inhabitants of a colonial territory and then later becoming citizens in a newly declared independent country. Finally, these four representative Nahua intellectuals played an active role in matters that concerned them as Indigenous Peoples. Based on the documentation reviewed for this study a considerable number of intellectuals existed who shared these characteristics during this period of time. Nevertheless, it was not possible for me to trace all of their individual careers and lives through extant documentation, which is the reason why these other intellectuals do not make up a part of this current research. Nevertheless, the fact that many of these other Nahua intellectuals were not included in this work does not mean that these intellectuals did not play an important role in society. In future research I intend to expand the examination of the lives and careers of many of these other Nahua intellectuals, but this will necessitate significant and detailed archival research that is not possible now. The names of the Nahua intellectuals upon which this study is based include Pedro Patiño Ixtolinque (1774-1834), Juan de Dios Rodríguez Puebla (1798-1848), Francisco de Mendoza y Moctezuma (?-1866?), and Faustino Galicia Chimalpopoca (1805-1882). These four Nahua intellectuals served in this research as a small case study sample that aims to offer a contribution to the understanding of the indigenous intellectual phenomenon in the last decades of New Spain and the first decades of Mexico.

In this current work, the revision of the material created by these Nahua intellectuals also did not pretend to be exhaustive or complete. The documentation reviewed in this present study is rather also a representative sample that serves as an example for understanding a larger intellectual phenomenon in Mexico. Thus, these Nahua intellectuals in Mexico City represent only a small sample whose analysis enables us to understand Nahua indigenous intellectuality in Mexico during the early decades of the nineteenth century.

Based on the discussion above, this dissertation project begins by including a discussion of definitions. I consider that one of the current problems that we have as scholars in approaching the phenomenon of indigenous intellectuality resides in the lack of proper definitions of the terms. In this current work, I include an initial section in which I aim to present a basic definition of the key concepts involved in this research. Terms such as “intellectual,” “indigenous intellectual,” and “Nahua People” are reviewed in order to present a conceptual delimitation that can contribute to the identification and understanding of the

phenomenon of Nahua intellectuality as an autonomous manifestation with its own characteristics.

In order to understand the early influences that Nahua intellectuals received during their lives, a subsequent section of this work includes a series of life sketches with the biographical information of these selected intellectuals. An examination of the extant information about these Nahua intellectuals' lives and scholarly formation, as well as the positions that they held in society, will lead us to better understand their later involvement in specific issues that affected them both as individuals and also as members of an indigenous community. By identifying the problems that these Nahua intellectuals faced during the last years of the Spanish colony and the early years of Mexico as an independent nation, I became able to trace and follow the works that these Nahua intellectuals produced. Consequently, the following section of this work focused on the study of these Nahua intellectuals' production with a focus on attempting to understand the role that they played in the shaping of their immediate social group.

Considering that these Nahua intellectuals also represented the work and interests of a specific generation in Mexico City, the final section of this research views the representative life and work of Faustino Chimalpopoca as the best example of the culmination of the long term Nahua intellectual phenomenon in the capital of the country. The work that Faustino Chimalpopoca conducted from 1830 and until his death in 1887, revealed the leading role that Mr. Chimalpopoca played in the society of the capital as the last surviving member of this generation of Nahua intellectuals. Through the copies and transcriptions that Faustino Chimalpopoca made of Nahua indigenous documents we can see the way in which Mexican society quickly changed to the detriment of indigenous societies in the capital of Mexico. The work of Faustino Chimalpopoca epitomized both the main characteristics of the members of the "rupture generation" and the way in which its members worked on behalf of the autonomy of Indigenous Peoples in Mexico. As with any research project, this current dissertation does not pretend to make any definitive or conclusive observations about the 19th-century Nahua intellectual phenomenon in Mexico City. Instead, this dissertation aims to present and research what I considered the most important historical aspects used to identify, observe, understand and recognize the Nahua intellectual experience in Mexico City during a determined point in history.

From a wider perspective, the contribution of this work resides in its recognizing and giving evidence to Nahua intellectuals as major participants in their own history. By identifying Nahua intellectuals' agency, this dissertation hopes to contribute to the questioning of the disenfranchising arguments promoted by official Mexican historiography. Finally, this dissertation attempts to present Nahua intellectuality, especially during the early years of the Mexican republic, as a phenomenon similarly comparable and approachable to other intellectual manifestations throughout the world.