

European Appropriation of Prehispanic Speeches: Reexamining the *Huehuetlatolli* as a Colonial Project

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Abstract:

The Nahuatl speeches known as *huehuetlatolli* have been studied primarily as a symbolic practice of Prehispanic Aztec morality and philosophy from the colonial period to the present. When the Spanish missionaries came to New Spain for their evangelical project, they needed to prove the Indians as capable and reasonable human beings who could be converted into Christians against their fellow Spaniards who despised the Indians as inferior creatures or barbarous savages. In this context, the Spanish priests presented the moral, philosophical, and religious behaviors that the speeches promoted as evidence of indigenous civility and intellectuality. Such a presentation of Indians, however, involved serious Europeanization of the speeches as the Spanish priests frequently modified and transformed the *huehuetlatolli* to make them similar to the content and style of European moral and religious speeches. This study traces how the Spanish priests transformed the *huehuetlatolli* by examining in detail not only the chronicles of Frays Andrés de Olmos and Bernardino de Sahagún who first collected the *huehuetlatolli* in Nahuatl and translated them into Spanish but also those of Frays Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan de Torquemada, and other chroniclers who took advantage of *huehuetlatolli* to promote their own colonial projects.

Keywords: *Huehuetlatolli*, Nahuatl Speeches, Andrés de Olmos, Bernardino de Sahagún, Colonial Project

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Far before the arrival of the Europeans to the New World, the Indians of central Mexico developed persuasive speeches whose purpose was to pray gods or exhort, counsel, and advise each other. These speeches, generally known as *huehuetlatolli* in Nahuatl, have been considered the most eloquent practices of Nahua oral traditions as well as the most symbolic examples of Nahua philosophy and morality. Angel María Garibay K., who first studied *huehuetlatolli* extensively in the nineteen forties, argued that the *huehuetlatolli* appeared to be “uno de los más

seguros veneros de la mentalidad antigua y el mejor instrumento para conocer las ideas morales y filosóficas de los mexicanos de antaño [. . .]” [one of the most reliable sources of ancient mentality and the best instrument to know the moral and philosophical ideas of the ancient Mexicans] (1992, 415). A little later, the French scholar, Jacques Soustelle, presented the moral behaviors and politeness that the *huehuetlatolli* emphasized as clear evidence of civilized practice in the Aztec society (1956; 2006, 221-227). In the same pattern, Miguel León-Portilla, who is probably one of the most influential scholars in the current Nahuatl cultural and literary studies, argued that “their [*huehuetlatolli*] value is fundamental for the study of the most elevated aspects of Nahuatl thought and culture” (1992, 76) and later presented the *huehuetlatolli* as clear evidence of a metaphysical understanding of human existence in contrast to the dominant ideology of the Aztec military mysticism (1992, 189-196; 203-205). Most scholars who have studied the *huehuetlatolli* share almost the same perspective as Garibay, Soustelle, and León-Portilla in their approach to the *huehuetlatolli*. To name a few, Thelma D. Sullivan (1976, 79), Josefina García Quintana (1976, 61), Salvador Díaz Cíntora (1995, 5), and Carmen Espinosa Maldonado (1997, 16) examine the religious, moral, political, and economic practices recorded in *huehuetlatolli* as the Prehispanic Nahuatl traditions. As these scholars emphasized the Prehispanic traits of *huehuetlatolli*, however, they tended to overlook the colonial influence in the process in which the speeches were collected and disseminated among the Spanish chroniclers.

When the Spanish missionaries came to the New World for their religious missions, they encountered a serious impediment to their evangelical project from their fellow Spaniards. The Spanish conquistadors and even some priests who tried to justify the colonization of the New World argued that the Indians could not deserve Christian doctrine, considering them intellectually inferior creatures like apes. In response to this claim, the Catholic missionaries needed to demonstrate that the Indians were intelligent and civilized enough to understand Christian doctrine and could be converted into Christians. Thus, demonstrating indigenous intellectuality and civility was one of the essential and urgent tasks for the missionaries, which was especially crucial for the Franciscans as the followers of millennialism who tried to build the eternal kingdom on earth through the conversion of the Indians in the New World. In this context, the Franciscan missionaries paid special attention to the indigenous speeches in Nahuatl, *huehuetlatolli*, because according to them, these speeches promoted the moral, philosophical, and religious ideas as advanced and civilized as those of Europeans. In order to present the Indians as civilized and intellectual human beings like the Europeans, however, the missionaries transformed the indigenous speeches into those similar to European speeches. This study traces such transformation of *huehuetlatolli* by examining in detail not only the chronicles of Frays Andrés de Olmos and Bernardino de Sahagún, who first collected the *huehuetlatolli* in Nahuatl and translated them into Spanish, but also those of Frays Bartolomé de Las Casas, Juan de Torquemada and several others who took advantage of *huehuetlatolli* to promote their own evangelical projects.

Presenting the *Huehuetlatolli* as a Prehispanic Indigenous Product

As the main collectors and translators of *huehuetlatolli*, Frays Olmos and Sahagún maintained the similar view of presenting these speeches as evidence of indigenous civilized practices before the conquest. Prior to presenting their argument, however, the priests had to prove the indigenous origin of *huehuetlatolli* and its faithful translation in Spanish because some Spaniards seriously doubted the indigenous intellectual capacity. Olmos collected first *huehuetlatolli* as a part of his larger project of examining indigenous culture and traditions. According to Fray Gerónimo de Mendieta (1971, 75), Fray Olmos was officially ordered to study indigenous political and social systems by the Real Audiencia and his Franciscan order in 1533. In the process of examining indigenous systems, Olmos was asked to select bad or good customs in order to decide whether they could be allowed to remain or would be destroyed under colonial rule. The *huehuetlatolli* must have been considered good customs and would have been recommended to be continued. As most of his studies about Prehispanic indigenous traditions are now missing, however, it is difficult to trace how Olmos himself verified the indigenous origin of *huehuetlatolli* and confirmed its faithful translation in Spanish. Yet, Olmos included one indigenous speech in his Nahuatl grammar book, *Arte para aprender la lengua mexicana*. In addition, several speeches collected by him were translated in Spanish and were widely circulated among the Spanish priests and chroniclers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For instance, Frays Bartolomé de las Casas, Juan de Tovar, Jerónimo de Mendieta, Juan de Torquemada, and Juan Bautista, and the judge Alonso de Zorita included several *huehuetlatolli* in their chronicles acknowledging Fray Olmos's manuscripts as their main sources. Thus, these chronicles, along with Olmos's Nahuatl grammar book, could provide some clue as to how Olmos and later chroniclers tried to prove the indigenous origin of *huehuetlatolli* and its faithful translation.

Fray Olmos's Nahuatl grammar book, *Arte para aprender la lengua Mexicana*, provides little information about the origin and translation of *huehuetlatolli*. While dividing the book into three main parts, Olmos mentioned that the last part dealing with Nahuatl orthography accompanied "una platica por los naturales compuesta prouechosa y de buena doctrina, con otras maneras de hablar" [A useful and good doctrinal speech composed by the natives, with other ways of speaking] (1972, 10). Olmos simply verified the indigenous origin of the speech by stating that it was composed by the natives. Unfortunately, Olmos did not provide any more information as to how the speech was collected in Nahuatl and translated in Spanish. Yet, Zorita, who included several speeches collected by Olmos in his chronicle, recorded in detail a procedure as to how Olmos collected the entire *huehuetlatolli*. Before presenting the advice of a father to his son as an exemplary speech, which is almost identical to the speech Olmos included in his grammar book, Zorita explained how Olmos asked the indigenous leaders to provide him with the speeches in Nahuatl:

Demás de criar los hijos con la disciplina é cuidado que se ha dicho, los padres ansimismo lo tenían en les dar muchos y muy buenos consejos, y los tienen hoy en día los indios principales por memoria en sus

pinturas: é un Religioso muy antiguo en aquella tierra [Nueva España], é que ha siempre tratado é comunicado y doctrinado aquellas gentes, los tradujo de su lengua, y dice que hizo a unos principales que los escribiesen, é que no pusiesen más que la sustancia de ellos, é que los escribieron y ordenaron en su lengua sin estar él presente, y los sacaron de sus pinturas, que son como escritura é se entienden muy bien por ellas; é que no mudó letra de lo que le dieron, más que dividirlo en párrafos o partículos para que mejor se entendiese la sentencia; y que los nombres que había de sus dioses, les avisó que los quitasen é pusiesen en nombre de Dios verdadero y Señor nuestro: y para que se vea claramente que no son, como ya otra vez se ha dicho, tan faltos de razón como algunos los hacen, se ponen aquí á la letra. (2003, 497)

[In addition to raising children with the discipline and care that has been said, the parents had maintained it in the same way by giving them much and very good advice, and today the indigenous leaders have them by memory in their paintings: a very old religious man in that land [New Spain], and who has always dealt with, communicated and taught those people, translated the advice from their language, and says that he made some leaders write them, and include only the substance of the advice. And they wrote and arranged the advice in their language without him being present, and they took the advice out of their paintings, which are like writing for them and they understood the paintings very well. He says that he did not change a letter of what they gave him, besides dividing it into paragraphs or parts so that the sentence could be better understood; and that he advised them to take the names of their gods out and put the name of the true God and our Lord instead. And so that it may be clearly seen that they are not, as it has already been said, so unreasonable as some people make them out to be, the advice is presented here without modification.]

Zorita did not identify “*un Religioso muy antiguo*” (a very old religious man) with Fray Olmos, but all the speeches that he included in his chronicle were almost identical to those of Olmos that other Frays Las Casas, Torquemada, and Bautista confirmed in their chronicles. According to Zorita, the indigenous leaders were asked by Olmos to write parental advice; that is, the speeches to their children, based on their oral tradition and pictorial books. They collected the speeches by themselves while Olmos was not present and were allowed only to replace the names of indigenous gods with those of Christian sacred figures because this replacement would demonstrate the Indians as reasonable human beings like the European Christians. In this paragraph, Zorita provided a couple of important clues to trace the indigenous origin and authenticity of *huehuetlatolli*. According to him, the *huehuetlatolli* was a pure indigenous product because the indigenous lords themselves collected the speeches based on their pictorial books and oral traditions, and the translations of *huehuetlatolli* were faithful because only the names of indigenous gods were replaced with those of the Christian God in the speeches.

While Zorita focused more on the indigenous origin and authenticity of *huehuetlatolli*, Las Casas, who also included several *huehuetlatolli* in his chronicle, emphasized the faithful translation of *huehuetlatolli* by Olmos in Spanish. According to him, Olmos stated in a prologue that he did not add or remove anything in the speeches translated in Spanish from the original Nahuatl source:

Todo lo que habemos en esta parte de la crianza de los hijos destas nuestras indianas naciones, en los precedentes capítulos dicho, se confirma por unas exhortaciones que otro religioso de la orden de San Francisco me envió de la Nueva España, estando yo en España la Vieja, las cuales había él romanzado de la lengua mexicana fielmente, sin añadir ni quitar cosa que fuese de sustancias, sacando sentido de sentido, no palabra de palabra; porque como él dijo en un prologuillo que a las dichas pláticas y exhortaciones hizo, a veces una palabra en aquella lengua requiere muchas de las nuestras, y una nuestra comprende muchas de las suyas, y porque son cosa de notar en gente que ha sido hasta agora tan menospreciada, quise referillas aquí, mudando algunos vocablos que parecían no bien sonar, según el estilo de que al presente usamos. (1967, 437)

[Everything that we have in this part of raising the children of these our Indian nations, in the previous chapters said, is confirmed by some exhortations that another religious man of the order of San Francisco sent me from New Spain, while I was in Old Spain, which he had faithfully translated from the Mexican language, without adding or removing anything that was substantial, making sense of meaning, not word for word; because as he said in a preface that he made to said speeches and exhortations, sometimes a word in that language requires many of ours, and one of ours includes many of theirs, and because they are something to notice in people who have been so despised until now, I wanted to refer to them here, changing some words that seemed not to sound well, according to the style that we currently use.]

Las Casas did not identify Fray Olmos here by name with ‘the religious person of Saint Francis Order’ who provided him with the indigenous speeches, but he later confirmed that he received them from Olmos (1967, 447). He mentioned that Olmos faithfully translated the Nahuatl speeches in Spanish based on their meaning, not necessarily word by word. This comment indicates that the original meaning of the Nahuatl speeches might have been modified or rephrased so that it could sound naturally to a Spanish audience. Yet, for Las Casas, the speeches in Spanish that he included in his chronicle were results of the faithful (“fielmente”) translation Fray Olmos conducted from the original Nahuatl text.

The indigenous originality and the faithful translation of *huebuetlatolli* that Zorita and Las Casas presented seem to be verified by the only speech that Olmos included in his book, *Arte para aprender la lengua mexicana*. For a clearer explanation, three versions of the speech are examined below: a Spanish translation by Olmos, its original Nahuatl text, and the complete translation of this Nahuatl text. The first two versions appeared in Olmos’s *Arte para aprender la lengua mexicana* while the final version is a complete translation of the same Nahuatl text which Fray Juan Bautista reproduced in his book *Huebuetlatolli* at the beginning of the seventeenth century:

O mi hijo precioso, nacido y criado en el mundo por Dios, en cuyo nacimiento nos y tus parientes pusimos los ojos con gran sentimiento. (1972, 257)

[Oh, my precious son, born and raised in the world by God, on whose birth we and your relatives looked with great feeling.]

Nopilhtze, nocuzque, no quetzale, otiyol, otitlacat, otimotlalhticpacquixtico; in ytlalhticpac in totecuyo omitzycux, omitzpic, omitztlacatili in ypalhnemoani in Dios. Auh mixco mocpac otitlachixque yn timonauan, in tinmotauan; yoan in mauiuan, in motlauan, in moayolhque omixco omocpac tlachixque, ochocaque, otlaucuxque mopampatzinco inic otitlacat in tlalhticpac. (1972, 231)

Hijo mío, mi collar, mi pluma preciosa, has venido a la vida, has nacido, has venido a salir a la tierra, en la tierra del Señor Nuestro. Te forjó, te dio forma, te hizo nacer, Aquel por quien se vive, Dios. Hemos visto por ti tus madres, tus padres; y tus tías, tus tíos, tus parientes, han visto por ti, han llorado, han sufrido por ti en tanto venías en tanto nacías sobre la tierra. (*Huehuetlatolli* 1991, 49)

[My son, my necklace, my precious feather, you have come to life, you have been born, you have come to appear to earth, in the land of Our Lord. He forged you, shaped you, gave you birth, He Through Whom One Lives, God. Because of you, we have seen your mothers, your fathers; and your aunts, your uncles, your relatives, they have seen because of you, they have cried, they have suffered for you as you came, as you were born, on earth.]

As Las Casas already mentioned, Olmos did not translate the original Nahuatl paragraph word by word in his translation by simply presenting the main ideas of the original Nahuatl text. The complete translation of the Nahuatl text, however, seems to support the indigenous originality of the speech that Zorita recorded because the speaker clearly used Nahuatl idioms such as necklace (“cozcatl”) and feather (“quetzal”) to metaphorically refer to his child, which did not appear in European discourse. In addition, several discursive techniques such as repetitions and/or parallelism of the same concept that are prevalent in oral traditions are evident in this paragraph. To describe the birth of his son, for instance, the speaker used the following three phrases in a parallel form: “you have come to life” (otiyol), “you have been born” (otitlacat), and “you have come to appear to earth” (otimotlalhticpacquixtico). Another example is shown when the speaker paralleled three different phrases to present the same meaning: he used “He forged you” (omitzycux), “he shaped you” (omitzpic), and “he gave you birth, He Through Whom One Lives, God” (omitztlacatili in ypalhnemoani in Dios) to present his son as God’s creation. Unlike Zorita affirmed, however, the names of the indigenous gods were not replaced with those of the Christian god. Rather, the word Dios borrowed from Spanish appeared in the Nahuatl text along with the epithet of the indigenous god, ypalhnemoani (He Through Whom One Lives), which might have supported the indigenous origin of the speech.

Another collector of *huehuetlatolli*, Sahagún, seems to have undergone almost the same procedure as Olmos to complete his collection and translation. Sahagún obtained information for his encyclopedic project, *Florentine Codex*, from the indigenous leaders who were familiar

with Prehispanic indigenous administrative, military, political, and religious traditions. Unlike Olmos who avoided a direct contact with the indigenous leaders, Sahagún collected the information through a dialogue in which he could ask questions and receive answers from them:

En el dicho pueblo [Tepepulco] hice juntar todos los principales con el señor del pueblo, que se llamaba don Diego de Mendoza, hombre anciano de gran marco y habilidad, muy experimentado en todas las cosas curiales, bélicas y políticas y aún idolátricas. Habiéndolos juntado propúseles lo que pretendía hacer y les pedí me diesen personas hábiles y experimentadas, con quien pudiese platicar y me supiesen dar razón de lo que les preguntase. Ellos me respondieron que se hablarían cerca de lo propuesto, y que otro día me responderán, y así se despidieron de mí. Otro día vinieron el señor con los principales, y hecho un muy solemne parlamento, como ellos entonces le usaban hacer, señaláronme hasta diez o doce principales ancianos, y dijéronme que con aquellos podía comunicar y que ellos me darían razón de todo lo que les preguntase. (1997, 73)

[In the said town [Tepepulco] I gathered all the leaders along with the governor of the town, who was called don Diego de Mendoza, an old man of great stature and skill, very experienced in all things of government, war and politics and even idolatry. Having brought them together, I proposed to them what I intended to do and I asked them to provide me with skilled and experienced people, with whom I could talk to and who would be able to answer the questions that I was asking. They answered me that they would talk each other about what was proposed, and that another day they would respond to me, and thus they took their leave from me. Another day the governor came with the leaders, and having made a very solemn dialogue, like they then used to do, they introduced me to up to ten or twelve elders, and told me that with those I could communicate and that they would give me an account of everything that I asked them.]

Sahagún tries to demonstrate that all information he recorded in his book came from the indigenous people and thus represented the true aspect of Prehispanic indigenous society. For emphasis, he repeated the indigenous authenticity when he presented the *buehuetlatolli*. In the prologue to Book 6 of the *Historia general* that consisted of indigenous speeches, Sahagún specifically confirmed that they were truly authentic indigenous products: “En este libro se verá muy claro que lo que algunos émulos han afirmado, que todo lo escrito en estos libros, antes de éste y después de éste, son ficciones y mentiras, hablan como apasionados y mentirosos, porque lo que en este libro esté escrito no cabe en entendimiento de hombre humano el fingirlo, ni hombre viviente pudiera fingir el lenguaje que en él está. Y todos los indios entendidos, si fueran preguntados, afirmarían que este lenguaje es propio de sus antepasados, y obras que ellos hacían” [In this book it will be shown very clearly that what some rivals have claimed, that everything written in these books, before this one and after this one, are fictions and lies, they speak as biased parties and liars, because it is not within human understanding to invent what is written in this book, nor could a living man feign the language that is in it. And all the knowledgeable Indians, if they were asked, would confirm that this language is typical of their ancestors and the works that

they did] (1997, 297). Sahagún mentioned here that the reason he wanted to demonstrate the indigenous authenticity of *huehuetlatolli* was to counterargue those who thought his entire project was based on fiction or lies. According to him, the indigenous descendants could surely verify that their ancestors created and used the speeches.

The *huehuetlatolli* collected in Book 6 of the *Florentine Codex* demonstrate their indigenous origin that Sahagún fervently defended. Some scholars such as Baudot (1995, 231) even argued that the speeches collected by Sahagún were more refined than those collected by Olmos as the former were provided by the most educated informants of the indigenous society. The following paragraph could be one of the many speeches of the book that shows itself as a Prehispanic practice. Here again, three versions of the paragraph are provided: the original Nahuatl paragraph from the *Florentine Codex*, its English translation, and Sahagún's Spanish translation from the *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*.

Tlacatle iaotzine, titlacaoane, tezcatlipucae, ioalle, ehecatle: manoço ivijan, iocuxca texillan, tetozcatlan maqujltitiaz in ac iehoatl: auh in quezquj oticmomaceujli, manoço ivian, iocuxca itech onaciz in Tonatiuh in manjc in tlanexti in totonametl, in quauhtleooanjtl, in vel cujcujliujc in nexeoac in quauhtli in ocelutl, in tiacauh, in oqujchtli, in javmjcquj in xippilli [. . .].

“O master, O yaotl, o Titlacauan, O Tezcatlipoca, O night, O wind: may there be peace, repose, for whomever is brought unto the lap, the bosom [of god]. And as many as thou hast rewarded [with death], may they in peace, in repose attain the sun, which endureth, shineth; the resplendent one, the ascending eagle, the well-blotched one, the ashen one, the eagle, the ocelot, the valiant warrior, the brave warrior, the one who died in war, the turquoise prince. (Sahagún 1950-1982, 6:12-13)

¡Oh señor humanísimo, señor de las batallas, emperador de todos, cuyo nombre es *Tezcatlipoca*, invisible e impalpable! Suplícoos, que aquel, o aquellos que permitiéredes morir en esta guerra, sean recibidos en la casa del sol, en el cielo, con amor y con honra, y sean colocados y aposentados entre los valientes y famosos que han muerto en la guerra [. . .]. (Sahagún 1997, 304)

[Oh, most humane lord, lord of battles, emperor of all, whose name is Tezcatlipoca, invisible and impalpable! I beg you, that he, or those whom you allow to die in this war, be received in the house of the sun, in heaven, with love and honor, and be placed and lodged among the brave and famous who have died in the war.]

This paragraph comes from a prayer dedicated to the indigenous god, Tezcatlipoca, in which the indigenous priest promoted war-death among the Aztec warriors. From the beginning of the prayer, the priest preached that the warriors were destined to nourish the sun with food and drink, in other words, with their body and blood. After their death, as shown in the paragraph, they could go to the house of the sun in the sky where they could stay and repose peacefully. The speaker then metaphorically presented the warriors who died during the war as eagles and

jaguars. The destiny of the warrior to be sacrificed to the gods eulogized here demonstrates without a doubt Prehispanic indigenous origin as it reflects the Aztec cosmological creation of the world and human beings. According to Aztec cosmology, people owed enormous debt to the gods because the latter sacrificed their body and blood to create the current world and human beings. Thus, the Aztecs thought that the debt could be paid back to the gods by their human blood and body through human sacrifice (Carrasco 1998, 183-188; Smith 2003, 215-218). The content of the prayer exactly matches with such a cosmology of the Aztecs. Along with the Prehispanic cosmological tradition, the paragraph seems to have kept original indigenous discursive styles and terms as it kept six different epithets to refer to the indigenous god Tezcatlipoca and repeated the same concept of the dead warriors with different metaphorical phrases in the original Nahuatl text. Presenting the *huehuetlatolli* as original indigenous speeches was an important prerequisite for the priests to develop and justify their colonial project.

Presenting the *Huehuetlatolli* as Evidence of Indigenous Civility and Intellectuality

One of the main reasons that Frays Olmos and Sahagún collected the indigenous speeches was to demonstrate that the natives were highly civilized and reasonable human beings just like European people, because according to them, the moral and philosophical content that the speeches promoted were not different from but very similar to those of the Europeans. Frays Las Casas and Torquemada, who extensively used Olmos's *huehuetlatolli*, were the most passionate about showing such as similarity between indigenous and European people. In his *Apologética historia sumaria*, Las Casas aptly used the *huehuetlatolli* to demonstrate indigenous civility and morality:

Estas exhortaciones son las que, con otras que por abreviar deixo de referir, me envió aquel padre religioso de San Francisco estando yo en Castilla, llamando fray Andrés de Olmos, padre en su Orden, y también en la experiencia de la lengua de la Nueva España bien antiguo, las cuales amonestaciones creo yo que sonaban mejor en la lengua mexicana que en la romance que les dio el padre susodicho, porque es cierto, según arriba creo que hobe apuntado y abajo quizá lo diré más largo, que cuasi universalmente todas las gentes destas Indias tienen natural elocuencia, y así les es fácil orar y representar sus bienes y sus males como si todas las reglas y colores de la Retorica hobiesen aprendido y embebido en si toda su vida [cuanto] contiene el arte, mayormente las mexicanas. (1967, 447)

[These exhortations are those that, with others that in order to abbreviate I stop referring to, sent me that religious father of Saint Francis while I was in Castile, called Fray Andrés de Olmos, very old father in his Order, and also with experience with the language of the New Spain. I believe that those admonitions sounded better in the Mexican language than in the romance language (Spanish) in which the aforementioned father translated them, because it is true, as I believe that I have noted down above and below perhaps I will say it longer, that almost universally all the people of these Indies have a natural eloquence, and thus it is easy for them to pray and exemplify their goods and their ills as if they, especially, the Mexicas (People of Tenochtitlan), had learned and imbibed all their lives all the rules and natures of the Rhetoric, all those that it contains.]

Las Casas began his evaluation of *huehuetlatolli* stating that he received indigenous speeches from Fray Olmos and presents a couple of major characteristics of them. He noticed that all indigenous people, particularly the Mexicas, the people of Tenochtitlan, possessed “natural eloquence” and thus could orate about or exemplify good and bad as if they had learned the rules and techniques of European rhetoric. Las Casas presented here the natural eloquence not only as the most important talent with which the Indians were able to develop moral standards, but also as a practice very similar to European rhetoric. It is important to notice Las Casas’s emphasis on the natural eloquence of the Indians as evidence of indigenous civility and intellectuality. The Europeans of the sixteenth century considered the eloquence and moral orations as the highly esteemed cultural and intellectual traditions that the Renaissance humanists revived from the European classical period.

The renaissance humanists who tried to revive classical languages and texts paid special attention to ancient rhetoric. In this process, they focused on several classical orators among whom Cicero became probably the most popular classical rhetorician (Abbott 1996, 6-7). His ideas and books on eloquence, language, government, and human community greatly influenced the intellectual formation of the renaissance humanists. The importance of Cicero in the works of Las Casas and Spanish missionaries was very clear as these chroniclers implicitly and explicitly used Cicero’s ideas about rhetoric. Cicero’s following idea about eloquence can easily explain why Las Casas focused on indigenous eloquence in *huehuetlatolli*:

Moreover, if we wish to consider the origin of this thing we call eloquence-whether it be an art, a study, a skill, or a gift of nature- we shall find that it arose from most honorable causes and continued on its way from the best of reasons. For there was a time when men wandered at large in the fields like animals and lived on wild fare, they did nothing by the guidance of reason but relied chiefly on physical strength, there was yet no ordered system of religious worship nor of social duties, no one had seen legitimate marriage nor had anyone looked upon children whom he knew to be his own, nor had they learned the advantage of an equitable code of law. And so through their ignorance and error blind and unreasoning passion satisfied itself by misuse of bodily strength, which is a very dangerous servant. At this juncture a man-great and wise I am sure- became aware of the power of latent in man and the wide field offered by his mind for great achievements if one could develop this power and improve it by instruction. Men were scattered in the fields and hidden in sylvan retreats when he assembled and gathered them in accordance with a plan, he introduced them to every useful and honorable occupation, though they cried out against it at first because of its novelty, and then when through reason and eloquence they had listened with greatest attention, he transformed them from wild savages into a kind and gentle folk (1949, 5-7).

According to Cicero, eloquence and reason were the most essential talents that distinguished human beings from wild animals, and with these talents human beings were able to initiate civilization. In this process of building civilization, a wise man could persuade his fellow human beings through eloquence and reason to follow his civilized projects. The Cicero’s argument could be the most useful evidence for Las Casas, who dedicated his entire life to demonstrate the Indians as intellectual and civilized human beings: the eloquence demonstrated in indigenous *huehuetlatolli* could serve for Las

Casas to prove the intellectuality and civility of almost all indigenous people of the new world (“cuasi universalmente todas las gentes destas Indias tienen natural elocuencia” [almost universally all the people of these Indies have a natural eloquence]). In other words, Las Casas presented the eloquence of *buehuetlatolli* as a strong counterargument against his Spanish and any other European intellectuals who compared indigenous people to animal-like inferior creatures such as apes.

In addition to presenting eloquence and reason as evidence of indigenous intellectuality and civility, Las Casas pointed out the moral values that the indigenous speeches promoted as another piece of evidence. He argued that the moral values that the *buehuetlatolli* promoted were as virtuous as those that the Bible and the ancient Greeks encouraged:

Pero comoquiera y con la llaneza y humildad del estilo que las susodichas exhortaciones y platicas familiares o paternales se hayan dicho y hoy se digan, considerando solo la sentencia de ellas, que es lo que es de atender y digno de considerarlo, ¿quién podrá decir con verdad que alguno de los preceptos de la ley natural que se contienen en nuestro divino Decálogo, ni en los que conciernen a las virtudes de la prudencia y justicia y fortaleza y temperancia, que son las que llaman morales, y todo lo demás tocante a la modestia y honestad, en especial, que son partes de la temperancia, en las dichas exhortación o avisos y consejos paternales falta? *Item*, ¿qué mejores o qué más naturales amonestaciones y más necesarias para componer en virtuosas costumbres la vida humana pudo poner y declarar a los hombres Platón, ni Sócrates, ni Pitágoras, ni después dellos Aristóteles, que las que acostumbraban y tenían en frecuentísimo uso dar a sus hijos y unos a otros estos barbaros? (1967, 447)

[But just with the simple and plain style that the mentioned exhortations and family or parental speeches have been said and are said these days, considering only their essence, which is what is to pay attention to and is worth considering, who can say with truth that some of the precepts of natural law that are contained in our divine Decalogue and even in those that concern the virtues of prudence and justice and fortitude and temperance, which are those that they call moral, and everything else regarding modesty and honesty, especially, which are parts of temperance, are missing in the said exhortations or parental warnings and advice? *Item*, how much better, more natural, and more necessary admonitions in the moral customs of human life could even Plato, Socrates, Pythagoras, and later Aristotle propose and declare to people, than those that these barbarians (the Indians) had a custom to use and frequently give to their children and each other?]

Las Casas stressed that the *buehuetlatolli* as exhortations and family or parental speeches demonstrated not only the fundamental precepts that the divine Ten Commandments instructed but also the virtues such as prudence, justice, spirit, modesty, honesty, and temperance that were highly esteemed in European society as moral behaviors. Furthermore, he also presented the indigenous speeches, *buehuetlatolli*, as good and virtuous admonitions similar to those that the Greek philosophers such as Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle could compose for men.

After focusing on the major traits of *buehuetlatolli*, Las Casas then reached the final conclusive evaluation about the intellectuality and civility of the Indians: they were human beings

who maintained highly sophisticated government policies and lived good intelligent, prudent, and rational lives. Thus, according to him, the Indians certainly could be taught and deserved Christian doctrine: “*Item, ¿qué más enseña la ley cristiana, salva la fe y lo que predica de las cosas invisibles y sobrenaturales? Luego ninguno puede negar estas gentes haber tenido sufficientísimas policías muy bien gobernadas y vivir como hombres de muy buenos ingenios, y más que otros reglados, cuerdos, prudentes y racionales, y con lo que al fin de aquellas exhortaciones dice aquel padre, este capítulo acabo*” [Item, what else does the Christian law teach, save the faith and what it preaches about invisible and supernatural things? Therefore, no one can deny these people having had sufficiently very well-governed orders and living as men of very good ingenuity, and more than those who were regulated, sensible, prudent and rational, and with what that father says at the end of those exhortations, this chapter ends] (1967, 448). In this context, the *huehuetlatolli* could have served as clear evidence for Las Casas who tried to refute so strongly the argument of his religious and political rivals such as Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda who rejected indigenous rationality and humanity at the famous Valladolid Debate in the middle of the sixteenth century.

The observations of Las Casas regarding *huehuetlatolli* seem to have set the standard criteria for later Spanish priests such as Gerónimo de Mendieta and Juan de Torquemada to approach these indigenous speeches. Torquemada, for instance, more concretely demonstrated how the Spanish priests used the *huehuetlatolli* to prove indigenous civilized governing systems by focusing on the wise and prudent education of the Indians. In Chapter XXXVI of Book XVIII titled “Donde se ponen ciertas pláticas con que estas gentes indianas doctrinaban a sus hijos, dignas de ser sabidas y muy provechosas para saberse uno regir y gobernar” [Where appear certain speeches with which these indigenous people taught their children, worthy of being known and very useful to know how one ruled and governed] (1975, 4:260), in which Torquemada included a speech collected by Olmos, he began with the importance of education of the children which the Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, and the biblical text, *Ecclesiastes*, emphasized. Afterwards, he presented the indigenous speech as a good example of child education in which the father taught his son how to worship an indigenous god as his real creator and also taught him that he should respect all types of people including the elders and the poor. While presenting the speech, Torquemada frequently interjected to demonstrate that the same types of instructions could be found in biblical tradition such as in the words of Moses and the *Proverbs*. His notes are italicized in the following paragraph:

hijo mío, nacido en el mundo de tus padres y criado por Dios, en cuyo nacimiento, nosotros que somos tus padres y parientes, pusimos los ojos, quiero que sepas que has nacido y salido de nuestras entrañas como el pollito de el cascarón, y creciendo como él te impones al vuelo y ejercicio de las cosas temporales; no sabemos el tiempo que Dios querrá que gocemos de joya tan preciosa, como es un hijo; y para esto, lo primero que debes hacer, es vivir con tiento, encomendándote al Dios que te crió, pidiéndole que te ayude, pues es tu padre que te ama más que yo: *Bien vienen estas palabras con las que dijo el espíritu Santo: Ama al que te crió y hizo con toda tu ánima; porque como dijo Moysén: él es tu padre, que te posee, que te crió y*

bizo; suspira a él (prosigue luego el padre) de día y de noche, y pon en él tu pensamiento; *que fue doctrina del Espíritu Santo, determinada en su eternidad para ser enseñada a los hombres después en tiempo, diciendo en los Proverbios: Pon en Dios tu pensamiento, en todas las cosas que hicieres y él enderezará tus pasos*; sírvele con amor y él te hará muchas mercedes y te libraré de los peligros. A la imagen de Dios y a sus cosas ten mucha reverencia y ora delante de él devotamente y aparéjate bien para sus fiestas; reverencia y saluda a los mayores (proseguían luego) y no olvides a los menores y no seas como mudo; y consueta a los pobres y afligidos con buenas palabras; honra a todos, en especial a tus padres, a los cuales debes obediencia, temor y servicio. *Esto dijo Dios, por estas palabras: Honra a tu padre y la madre, para que vivas vida larga y buena. Y proseguía el indio, diciendo: El hijo que esto no hace, no será bien logrado. No sigas a los locos desatinados que ni acatan a padre. Ni reverencian a madre; mas como animales brutos no van camino derecho, y como los tales son sin razón, ni oyen doctrina, ni se dan nada por la corrección; el semejante a éstos que ofende a los dioses morirá mala muerte o desesperado o despeñado, o las bestias fieras lo matarán y comerán.* (1975, 4:262)

[My son, born in the world of your parents and raised by God, in your birth, we who are your parents and relatives, we set our eyes, I want you to know that you were born and emerged from our entrails like a chick from the shell, and growing like him, you force yourself to fly and exercise temporal things; we do not know how long God will want us to enjoy such a precious jewel, as he is a son; and for this, the first thing you must do is live with care, entrusting yourself to the God who created you, asking him to help you, because he is your father who loves you more than I do: *These words come well with what the Holy Spirit said: Love the one who created and made you with all your soul; because as Moses said: he is your father, who owns you, who created and made you*; sigh to him (the father continues later) day and night, and put your thoughts into him; *that it was a doctrine of the Holy Spirit, determined in its eternity to be taught to men later in time, saying in Proverbs: Put your thought on God, in all the things you do and he will straighten your steps*; serve him with love and he will do you many favors and free you from dangers. To the image of God and his things have much reverence and pray before him devoutly and prepare well for his festivities; venerate and greet the elders (they continued later) and do not forget the minors and do not be silent; and console the poor and afflicted with kind words; honor everyone, especially your parents, to whom you owe obedience, fear, and service. *This is what God said, by these words: Honor your father and mother, so that you live a long and good life. And the Indian continued, saying: The son who does not do this will not achieve much. Do not follow the foolish madmen who do not obey even their father. Nor do they revere their mother; but like brute animals they do not go straight, and as such they are without reason, nor do they listen to doctrine, nor do they give themselves anything for correction; the one like these people who offend the gods will die a bad death or desperately or shamefully, or the wild beasts will kill and eat him.*]

This paragraph demonstrates how Torquemada took advantage of *huebuetlatolli* to prove that the indigenous intellectual and cultural traditions were not different from but very similar to those of the Christians. Thus, Torquemada like Las Casas argued that the Indians are rational and political human beings who lived with order and reason: “Aquesta doctrina tenemos maravillosamente probada en los indios de esta Nueva España, los cuales no sólo cuidaban de criar

a sus hijos, con el sustento y manjar corporal con que fortificaban los cuerpos y crecían en edad y años, pero con admirable doctrina moral, para hacerlos racionales y políticos y que viviesen la vida de hombres que tenían, como los que constaban de ánima capaz de orden y de razón” [We have wonderfully proven this doctrine in the Indians of this New Spain, who not only took care of raising their children, with the sustenance and corporal nourishment with which they fortified the bodies and grew in age and years, but with admirable moral doctrine, to make them rational and political and make them live the life of men they had, like those who consisted of a soul capable of order and reason] (1976, 4:261). The *huehuetlatolli* in Torquemada’s chronicle appeared as clear evidence that could verify the highly advanced level of the Prehispanic indigenous society comparable to that of the ancient Europeans.

Most of the chroniclers who included Fray Olmos’s *huehuetlatolli* in their chronicles shared almost the same purpose and pattern of justifying indigenous civility and intellectuality. While Las Casas y Torquemada selectively and partially used the *huehuetlatolli* collected by Fray Olmos, Fray Juan Bautista Viseo published the entire *huehuetlatolli* collected by Olmos in 1601 with slight modifications. As the complete title of the book, *Huehuetlatolli, que contiene las pláticas que los padres y madres hicieron a sus hijos y a sus hijas, y los señores a sus vasallos, todas llenas de doctrina moral y política* [*Huehuetlatolli, which contains the speeches that fathers and mothers made for their sons and daughters, and the lords for their vassals, all speeches full of moral and political doctrine*], demonstrates, Fray Bautista wanted to show how good the moral, religious, and political systems the Indians maintained were just like what Las Casas and Torquemada tried to show with the *huehuetlatolli*. Yet, Bautista went further, arguing that the indigenous systems were much better than those of the Christians or even the Spaniards and thus the Christian republics should emulate these indigenous systems. For instance, by presenting how an indigenous king was selected and instructed with several admonitions and wise advice, Bautista maintained that if the Christian republics followed the indigenous political system, they would have secularly and spiritually better shape and progress:

Este era el modo que tenían en sus elecciones y los buenos y sanos consejos que daban a sus gobernadores, considerando como si lo hubieran leído en la Escritura Divina, que el buen gobierno del príncipe consiste principalmente en honrar y servir a Dios con que se perpetúan los Reinos. Y lo segundo en el buen trato y conservación de los plebeyos y pobres. Y no hay duda que si este modo de proceder se guardara en todas las Republicas Cristianas tuvieran otro talle y otra medra, así en lo espiritual como en lo temporal, bien diferente de la que por nuestros pecados vemos. (1601, folio A4, page 2)

[This was the way they had in their elections and the good and healthy advice they gave to their governors, considering as if they had read it in the Divine Scripture, which the good government of the prince consists mainly in honoring and serving a God with whom they perpetuate the kingdoms. And the second in the good treatment and conservation of the commoners and the poor. And there is no doubt that if this way of practices were kept in all the Christian Republics, they would have another appearance and advancement, both in the spiritual and worldly matters, very different from the one that we see because of our sins.]

Fray Bautista focused not only on the political system but also on the indigenous education of children. He particularly centered on how girls were educated religiously and practically: they attended schools where well qualified teachers taught them their religious and moral duties and domestic responsibilities at the time as women. For this reason, Fray Bautista argues that if Spanish women of his time behaved like the indigenous women, their children could be better educated, their husbands would feel more comfortable, and they would behave themselves much better morally and financially: “De las cuales si las mujeres españolas de estos tiempos tuvieran mediano cuidado, sus casas fueran mejor regidas, sus hijos más bien doctrinados, y sus maridos más regalados, y menos molestados con infinidad de gastos impertinentes, que ellas hacen: con que muchos infiernan su anima, ya las veces antes de esto pierden su crédito y honra, y dejan muchos huérfanos y viudas en los Hospitales” [Of which if the Spanish women of these times were moderately careful, their houses were better managed, their children better educated, and their husbands more comfortable, and less bothered with an infinity of impertinent expenses, which they do: with which many bring hell to their soul, because in many cases due to this they lose their credit and honor, and they leave many orphans and widows in the Hospitals] (1601, folio A5 page 2-foilo A6 page 1). By presenting the superior quality of the indigenous moral behavior and political system demonstrated in *huehuetlatolli*, Fray Bautista concluded that “Por esto se entenderá, que los indios antiguos tenían mucha policía en su gobierno, y alcanzaban mucho de moralidad” [By this it will be understood that the ancient Indians had many laws and orders in their government, and they achieved much morality] (1601, folio A6 page 1).

While Fray Olmos was collecting the indigenous speeches in the middle of the sixteenth century, so was his Franciscan companion, Fray Bernardino de Sahagún. Sahagún’s collection of indigenous speeches was not widely known to other priests of his time like those of Olmos, but Sahagún had the same purpose of collecting the speeches just like Olmos and his followers who took advantage of them to demonstrate indigenous civility, morality, and intellectuality. In Book 6 of his *Historia general*, in which Sahagún collected and translated indigenous speeches in Spanish, he insisted that these speeches represented a highly advanced level of Prehispanic indigenous society. As the title of Book 6, “De la Retórica y Filosofía moral y Teología de la gente mexicana, donde hay cosas muy curiosas, tocantes a los primores de su lengua, y cosas muy delicadas tocante a las virtudes morales” [Of the Rhetoric and Moral Philosophy and Theology of the Mexica people, where there are very curious things, regarding the beauty of their language, and very delicate things regarding the moral virtues] (1997, 295) demonstrated, Sahagún tried to present the speeches as the symbolic examples of indigenous rhetoric, philosophy, and religion. In the prologue to Book 6, Sahagún began with the argument that indigenous rhetorical, moral, and religious practices were not inferior nor barbarous but comparable and even equal to those of any European ancient or contemporary nation:

Todas las naciones, por bárbaras y de bajo metal que hayan sido, han puesto los ojos en los sabios y poderosos para persuadir, y en los hombres eminentes en las virtudes morales, y en los diestros y valientes

en los ejercicios bélicos, y más en los de su generación que en los de las otras. Hay de esto tantos ejemplos entre los griegos y latinos, españoles, franceses e italianos, que están los libros llenos de esta materia.

Esto mismo se usaba en esta nación indiana, y más principalmente entre los mexicanos, entre los cuales, los sabios retóricos, y virtuosos, y esforzados, eran tenidos en mucho; y de estos elegían para pontífices, para señores, y principales y capitanes por de baja suerte que fuesen. Estos regían las repúblicas y guiaban los ejércitos, y presidían los templos. (1997, 297)

[All the nations, however barbarous and lowly they may have been, have set their eyes on the wise men and powerful men to persuade, and on eminent men for moral virtues, and on the skilled and brave men for military exercises, and more in those of their generation than in those of others. There are so many examples of this among the Greeks and Latins, Spaniards, French, and Italians, that the books are full of this matter.

The same was used in this Indian nation, more mainly among the Mexica, among whom wise rhetoricians, the virtuous, and the valorous were held in great esteem; and from these men they elected for pontiffs, and lords, and nobles, and captains no matter how lowly their status were. These people governed the republics and led the armies, and presided over the temples.]

Sahagún argued that as even barbarous and primitive nations recognized wise, virtuous, skillful, and courageous people, so did the European nations of the Greeks and Romans as well as the Spaniards, French, and Italians from the ancient to the contemporary period. Then, he also argued that the Mexicas (People of Tenochtitlan) did the same by electing wise rhetoricians, the virtuous, and the courageous as priests, political leaders, and military captains. According to Sahagún, the Mexicas in particular were able to build an empire with such leaders. The *huehuetlatolli* that Sahagún collected in Book 6 could serve as evidence to demonstrate how those Mexica leaders worshipped their gods, instructed their children, and maintained a righteous and virtuous society. By doing so, Sahagún wanted to make it clear that indigenous people were not different but capable human beings like the ancient or even their contemporary Europeans.

Examining the *Huehuetlatolli* as a Colonial Project

Frays Olmos, Sahagún, and other Spanish priests collected and disseminated the *huehuetlatolli* as a Prehispanic practice which proved the civility and intellectuality of indigenous people. In this process, however, there was a possibility in which the Spanish priests could have modified and transformed the original content, themes, and discursive forms of the indigenous speeches to make their argument more appealing to their European audience. In fact, a few scholars have noticed that several moral issues that the indigenous speeches dealt with were quite similar or even identical with those of the Bible or European traditions. Mónica Ruiz Bañuls observed that “Al leer los *huehuetlatolli* libres de toda predisposición, nos damos cuenta de que lo enseñado en ellos no sólo se encuentre en los cánones morales de la vida cristiana, sino que tanto su estilo como su temática guardan extraordinarias similitudes con unos textos esenciales dentro de la tradición sapiencial bíblica” [When reading the *huehuetlatolli* free of any predisposition, we realize that

what is taught in them is not only found in the moral canons of Christian life, but that both their style and their themes maintain extraordinary similarities with some essential texts within the biblical wisdom tradition] (2009, 161). She found that the similarities between *huebuetlatolli* and the Bible appeared as a result of the universal sapiential traditions that existed in every human society (2009, 199-200). Another scholar, Aysha Pollnitz (2017), also observed that the indigenous informants, who helped the Spanish priest, Juan Bautista, collect the indigenous speeches in Nahuatl, transformed these speeches emulating the Bible, European rhetoric, and Renaissance speech theory of Erasmus that they learned at the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco. Although these scholars provided insightful studies, I would argue that the similarities between *huebuetlatolli* and biblical traditions were the intended result of the careful deliberations of the Spanish priest-collectors, Olmos and Sahagún, who tried to demonstrate the similarities of both traditions. In addition, although the contribution of the indigenous informants to the speeches was obvious and important, I would argue that Frays Olmos and Sahagún as the supervisors of the collection project were more decisively influential in the process of selecting the contents and topics of the speeches. For this reason, it is essential to focus on how as the two main collectors of *huebuetlatolli*, Olmos and Sahagún modified or transformed the indigenous speeches into the products familiar to the European audience.

As examined previously, Zorita and Las Casas stated that Fray Olmos collected pure indigenous speeches and translated them faithfully. Zorita mentioned that Olmos only replaced the names of the indigenous gods with those of the Christian god in *huebuetlatolli* while Las Casas stated that Olmos did not translate the *huebuetlatolli* word by word, but his translation was faithful to the original Nahuatl text. It is true that the speeches that these chroniclers included in their chronicles reflected certain aspects of indigenous traditions. Yet, a close examination of the speeches in Nahuatl and their translation in Spanish that Olmos collected and completed respectively reveals that Olmos seems to have not only modified the indigenous speeches a lot more than by simply replacing the names of indigenous gods with those of the Christian god, but also by translating them as freely as possible. The following paragraph that appears in the only speech collected by Olmos in *Arte para aprender la lengua mexicana* demonstrates how he modified the indigenous *huebuetlatolli* to make it sound similar to Christian discourse. Here again, the first two paragraphs in Spanish and Nahuatl appeared in Olmos's book while the final paragraph is a complete translation of the same Nahuatl paragraph which Fray Juan Bautista reproduced in his book *Huebuetlatolli*:

A la imagen de Dios y de sus santos, y a la cruz ten reuerencia y mas al santo sacramento y al nombre de I. C. ante el cual ora deuotamente y prepárate en las fiestas. (1972, 258)

[To the image of God and his saints, and to the cross have reverence and more to the holy sacrament and to the name of J. C. before whom you pray devoutly and prepare yourself at the festivals.]

Yoan in canin ixpan tiquiçaz in yxiptlatzin in totecuyo, anoço yn ytlaçouan, anoço cruz, uelb ticmauiztiliz, ixpan timopachoz, anoço timotlanquacoloz. Aub intla uelb yebuatl in totecuyo I. C. ynacayotzin ysanto sacramento ixpan tiquiçaz, tlapanauia inic ticmotlatlaubtiliz in yca mochi moyollo, ca moteoub, ca motlatocauh, ca motemaquixticatzin, ca motlaçotatzin. Yoan uelb ticmauiztiliz in ytocatzin I. C., yoan in ilhuitzin uelb ypan tinocencauaz. (1972, 233-234)

Y por donde pases, frente a la imagen del Señor Nuestro, o de sus amados, o de la Cruz, los honorarás mucho; te inclinarás frente a Él o doblarás la rodilla. Y mucho más si sales al mismo cuerpo del Señor Nuestro, Jesucristo (que está dentro del Santo Sacramento), así le suplirás con todo tu corazón porque es tu Dios, porque es tu Señor, porque es tu Redentor, porque es tu verdadero Padre que está dentro del Santo Sacramento. Y mucho honorarás el nombre del Señor Nuestro, Jesucristo, y en su fiesta te ataviarás muy bien. (*Huehuetlatolli* 1991, 53)

[And wherever you go, in front of the image of Our Lord, or of his loved ones, or of the Cross, you will honor them very much; you will bow before Him or you will bend the knee. And much more if you go to the very body of Our Lord, Jesus Christ (who is inside the Holy Sacrament), so you will supply him with all your heart because he is your God, because he is your Lord, because he is your Redeemer, because he is your true Father who is inside the Holy Sacrament. And you will very much honor the name of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, and at his feast you will dress very well.]

As Las Casas affirmed, Olmos did not translate the original Nahuatl text word by word but his translation was faithful and accurate as he presented the main ideas of the original Nahuatl text. In the example above, however, the original Nahuatl text and its translation that Olmos collected and completed respectively seem to have been already too Europeanized. Olmos's translation did not include any trace of indigenous religious and cultural traditions and thus sounded like a genuine Christian speech. Las Casas's comments (1967, 437) could explain this Christianization of the Spanish translation: he mentioned that he changed "algunos vocablos que parecían no bien sonar, según el estilo de que al presente usamos" [some words that seemed not to sound well, according to the style that we use at the present time]. Like Las Casas, Olmos and his followers might have trimmed the wording to be similar to the European speeches and thus appealed to European readers. On the other hand, the original Nahuatl text sounds even more like a part of a Christian sermon rather than indigenous speech. As Zorita mentioned, the speaker replaced the names of indigenous gods, for instance, *ypalhnemoani* (He Through Whom One Lives), with *totecuyo* (Our Lord) or Jesus Christ, but he went further to explain the religious meaning of Jesus Christ as God and Redeemer within Christian doctrine. Furthermore, the speaker introduced a new custom of bending the knee in front of the Christian god to indigenous people who did not have such a custom before the conquest. Many parts of both the Spanish translations and their original Nahuatl speeches collected by Olmos did not maintain their original indigenous content and meaning but were largely Christianized.

As another collector of the speeches, Sahagún also insisted on their indigenous origin by

arguing that any indigenous people could prove them to be the speeches of their ancestors. As previously examined, the *buehuetlatolli* collected by him surely demonstrated certain aspects of Prehispanic traditions. Like Olmos and his fellow priests transformed and modified original indigenous speeches to promote their colonial project, so did Sahagún with the speeches he collected. Sahagún's most serious transformation or modification of the indigenous speeches is found in the treatment of the indigenous god Tezcatlipoca. Sahagún collected 60 speeches in Book 6 of the *Florentine Codex* and its Spanish version, *Historia general*, and the first eight of them were dedicated to two indigenous gods: Tezcatlipoca and Tlaloc. Yet, seven of them are exclusively used to pray to Tezcatlipoca. In addition, numerous speeches in Book 6 dealt with the ceremonies of the inauguration of the new king, marriage, childbirth, and death that were presided over by Tezcatlipoca. Thus, in the speeches collected in Book 6, Tezcatlipoca appeared as the most omnipresent and almighty god that presided over almost all aspects of indigenous life just like the Christian god over the Christians. A comparison of the speeches collected in Book 6 of the *Florentine Codex* to those translated in Spanish in *Historia general* reveals how carefully Sahagún transformed Tezcatlipoca as the supreme god to be very similar to the Christian god. To better present the analysis of the transformation, three paragraphs are provided here: the original Nahuatl text from the *Florentine Codex*, its full translation, and the translation of the original Nahuatl text that Sahagún completed in his book *Historia general*:

Tlacatle, totecue, tloque, naoaque, iooalle, ehecate: a ca nelle ca axcan, mjxpantzinco njqujztiujtz, mjxpantzinco, naciujtz, mjxpantzinco njtlacueiacxolujtiutz, njtlaviltectiujtz: in njmaceoalli anânjqualli, in âjjectli, [. . .].

O master, O our lord, O lord of the near, of the nigh, O night, O wind, now in truth I come to appear before thee, to reach thee. Before thee I come jumping over ridges, I come siding up – I who am a commoner, unrighteous, evil. (Sahagún 1950-1982, 6:1-2)

¡Oh valeroso señor nuestro, debajo de cuyas alas nos amparamos, y defendemos, y hallamos abrigo: tu eres invisible, y no palpable, bien así como la noche y el aire! ¡Oh, que yo, bajo de poco valor, me atrevo a parecer delante de V. M.! (Sahagún 1997, 299)

[Oh our brave Lord, under whose wings we shelter, and defend, and find protection you are invisible, and not palpable, just like the night and the air! Oh, that I, of little value, dare to appear in front of Your Mercy!]

At first glance, Sahagún seems to keep the original indigenous discursive style and terms more than Olmos because he kept six different epithets to refer to the indigenous god Tezcatlipoca in the original Nahuatl text. In his Spanish translation, however, Sahagún simply translated only one epithet, Our Lord (“totecue”), which would sound very similar or even identical to the Spanish word, “Nuestro Señor” (Our Lord). In addition, he appears to paraphrase some of the

epithets in his translation: Lord of the near (“tloque”) and Lord of the night (“naoaque”) was translated as “tu eres invisible” (you are invisible) and “no palpable” (you are not palpable) respectively. In the same pattern, he also translated the Lord of night (“iooalle”) and Lord of wind (“ehecatle”) as “bien así como la noche y el aire” (just like the night and the air). Sahagún’s paraphrased translations of the epithets of indigenous names arguably stated that the god exists everywhere and every single moment without being viewable or touchable. Yet, Sahagún’s translations of the names of Tezcatlipoca did not fit in the indigenous religious practice before the conquest. According to Cartwright Brundage (1979, 57), “[t]he Aztecs appear to have been a people compelled to insist on the visible presences of their gods.” Thus, the Aztecs made various types of the wooden or stone statues of their gods and displayed them in the temples and public places. In addition, they also selected a living person who was considered as an *ixiptla*, an impersonator or embodiment or representation of a god (Basset 2015, 45-88; Brundage 1979, 57-58; Smith 2003, 217-218), worshipped him as the god for a year, and ritually sacrificed him during the religious ceremony dedicated to this god. In case of Tezcatlipoca, the Aztecs demonstrated probably the most conspicuous example of the *ixiptla* practice which numerous colonial chronicles recorded. Sahagún himself as one of them documented that during the *toxcatl*, a religious festival dedicated to Tezcatlipoca, “mataban en esta fiesta un mancebo escogido, que ninguna tacha tuviese en su cuerpo, criado en todos los deleites por espacio de un año, instruido en tañer y cantar y en hablar” [At this festival they killed a chosen young man, who had no blemish on his body, raised in all the delights for a year, instructed in ringing and singing and speaking] (1997, 81). Thus, the translation of Tezcatlipoca as an invisible and untouchable god seems to be a deliberate effort by Sahagún to transform the indigenous to a Christian-like god.

There is another important transformation of the original Nahuatl text by Sahagún who tried to make the indigenous god, Tezcatlipoca, similar to the Christian god. He added to his Spanish translation the phrase, “debajo de cuyas alas nos amparamos, y defendemos, y hallamos abrigo [under whose wings we shelter, and defend, and find protection], which did not appear in the original Nahuatl text. A comparison between this addition and the following psalm shows how Sahagún tried to make the role of the indigenous god Tezcatlipoca similar to that of the Christian god: “Ten misericordia de mí, oh Dios, ten misericordia de mí; Porque en ti ha confiado mi alma, Y en la sombra de tus alas me ampararé Hasta que pasen los quebrantos [Have mercy on me, oh God, have mercy on me; Because my soul has trusted in you, And in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge Until the losses pass] (*La Santa Biblia* 2005, 835). By using the words, “alas” (wing) and “amparar” (take refuge) that appeared in the Psalms and also the same concept of God’s protection in his translation, Sahagún presented an indigenous god very similar to the Christian god. The Spanish readers, most of whom did not know Nahuatl, might have been able to understand the indigenous speech as Sahagún intended in his translation. In the typical indigenous discourse, however, tree (“arbol”) instead of wings (“alas”) was used as a metaphor to describe the protection or shelter of the indigenous gods. The most representative example would

be the concept of *Tamoanchan*, a paradisaical place of the Aztecs, where the gods lived and the dead or sacrificed warriors could go. According to several songs collected in the *Cantares mexicanos* and numerous pictorial codices, *Tamoanchan*, was identified with a blooming tree (Granziera 2012, 44). Under the tree, the warriors who were sacrificed or died during the war were transformed into various birds or insects that could enjoy their eternal life (Sahagún 1950-1982, 6:12-15). *Tamoanchan* appears here as the eternal shelter created by the gods for the Aztec warriors.

Throughout the Nahuatl speeches that he collected in Book 6 of the *Florentine Codex* and the Spanish translations that he completed in Book 6 of the *Historia general*, Sahagún presented Tezcatlipoca as the almighty god and the giver of life. In chapter 2 of the book in which the priests asked Tezcatlipoca for wealth, for instance, they called this god “!Oh señor nuestro, valerosísimo, humanísimo, amparador!, vos sois el que nos dais vida, y sois invisible y no palpable, señor de todos y señor de las batallas” [!Oh our lord, most courageous, humane, protector!, you are the one who gives us life, and you are invisible and not palpable, lord of all and lord of battles] (1997, 301). As the Aztecs worshiped Huitzilopochtli, not Tezcatlipoca, as the most powerful among the numerous gods before the conquest, however, the former must have been revered as the owner of the heaven and earth, and the giver of life. In fact, numerous colonial sources recorded that the rituals and temples dedicated to Huitzilopochtli were most solemnly and largely celebrated and constructed respectively in the Central Basin of Mexico. They also recorded that the same epithets that Sahagún used to refer to Tezcatlipoca were applied to Huitzilopochtli. According to Diego Durán, “El ídolo [Huitzilopochtli] de que vamos tratando era tan temido y reverenciado de toda esta nación, que a él solo llamaban “Señor de lo criado y Todopoderoso”, y a este eran los principales y grandes sacrificios, cuyo templo era el más solemne y suntuoso, mayor y más principal entre todos los de la tierra” [The idol [Huitzilopochtli] that we are dealing with was so feared and revered by all this nation, that they only called him “Lord of creation and Almighty”, and the primary and large sacrifices were dedicated to this god, whose temple was the most solemn and sumptuous, largest and most principal among all those on earth] (1984, 1:18). Another chronicler, Fernando de Alvarado Tezozomoc, also provided similar information about Huitzilopochtli but with more detailed information:

La fiesta mas celebrada y mas solemnizada desta tierra, y en particular de los Mexicanos y Tetzucanos, fue la del ídolo llamado *Huitzilopochtli*, cuyas ceremonias son muy diversas y tienen mucho que notar, porque mas simbolizan algunas de nuestra religión cristiana, y otras á la ley vieja. Era tan temido y reverenciado este ídolo de toda esta nación indiana, que á él solo llamaban todopoderoso y señor de lo criado; á éste eran los principales y grandes sacrificios, y por el consiguiente tenía el mas sumptuoso templo, de grande altura y mas hermoso y galan edificio, cuyo sitio y fortaleza se ve en las ruinas que dél and quedado en medio desta ciudad (1992, 93).

[The most celebrated and most solemnized festival in this land, and especially of the Mexicas and Tetzcocas, was that of the idol called Huitzilopochtli, whose ceremonies are very diverse and have

much to observe, because they symbolize some of our Christian religion, and others of the old law. This idol of this entire indigenous nation was so feared and revered that he alone was called almighty and lord of creation; To this god were dedicated the primary and large sacrifices, and consequently he had the most sumptuous temple, of great height and the most beautiful and elegant building, whose site and fortress can be seen in the ruins that remain in the middle of this city.]

Durán and Alvarado Tezozomoc commonly recorded that only Huitzilopochtli was called the God Almighty (“todopoderoso”) and Lord of Creation (“lo criado”). The latter even stated that some rituals dedicated to Huitzilopochtli were very similar to Christian ceremonies, which Sahagún would have highlighted in the prayers or speeches he collected in Book 6. Along with the information on the rituals and temples dedicated to Huitzilopochtli, Durán and Alvarado Tezozomoc provided another clue to better understand the moral behaviors that the *huehuetlatolli* promoted. Sahagún presented Tezcatlipoca as the god promoting all these behaviors among the indigenous people, but according to Durán (1984, 1:35-36) and Alvarado Tezozomoc (1992, 102-103), it was Huitzilopochtli who obligated the Indians to strictly follow the ten commandments that dealt with most of the moral issues promoted in *huehuetlatolli*: serve the gods with fear and reverence, honor the parents, respect the elders, prohibit adultery, punish robbery with severe penalty, etc.

It looks like Sahagún intentionally transformed the roles of Huitzilopochtli into those of Tezcatlipoca to promote his colonial project. In order to make the indigenous religious speeches similar to the Christian prayers, Sahagún did not want to nor was able to present Huitzilopochtli as the almighty and omnipotent god similar to the Christian god due to the massive human sacrifice that the former required, as numerous Spanish chroniclers reported. For instance, Durán (1984, 2:345) recorded that when the ruler Ahuitzotl finished the construction of the Templo Mayor dedicated to Huitzilopochtli, the Mexica sacrificed 80,400 individuals of various regions. When Sahagún confuted the indigenous gods as devils and demons in the *Historia general*, he presented Huitzilopochtli as the most symbolic figure among the indigenous devils:

Por vuestra misma relación sabemos que los antiguos mexicanos adoraron y tuvieron por dios a un hombre *Huitzilopochtli*, nigromántico, amigo de los diablos, enemigo de los hombres, feo, espantable, cruel, revoltoso, inventor de guerras, y de enemistades, causador de muchas muertes y alborotos y desasosiegos. A éste tan pésimo hombre hacían grandes fiestas vuestros antepasados cada año; y en cada fiesta mataban por su honra y delante de su imagen y en su capilla muchos hombres, sacándoles los corazones y ofreciéndolos al mismo *Huitzilopochtli*, derramando delante de él su sangre y comiendo las carnes de ellos, así sacrificados. Estas son cosas horrendas, abominables, crueles, y muy vergonzosas. (1997, 60)

[By your own report we know that the ancient Mexicans worshiped and had as a god a man Huitzilopochtli, a necromancer, friend of devils, enemy of men, ugly, frightening, cruel, unruly, inventor of wars and enmities, the cause of many deaths and riots and distress. Your ancestors used to make big festivals every year for this worst man; and at each feast they killed many men for his honor and before his image and in his chapel, taking out their hearts and offering them to the same Huitzilopochtli, pouring

out his blood before him and eating the flesh of the sacrificed. These are hideous, abominable, cruel, and very shameful things.]

Sahagún desecrated Huitzilopochtli by calling him the worst man and explicitly expressed his abomination toward Huitzilopochtli mostly because of the human sacrifice dedicated to him that the indigenous ancestors conducted on a large scale. In this context, it would be unreasonable for Sahagún to attribute most of the moral speeches to Huitzilopochtli. As a missionary who tried to demonstrate indigenous civility and intellectuality and also the similarities between indigenous and European religion through the *buehuetlatolli*, Sahagún needed to avoid presenting Huitzilopochtli as the Lord Almighty and Lord of Creation who taught moral values promoted in *buehuetlatolli*.

The replacement of Huitzilopochtli with Tezcatlipoca seems to have been an important issue when Sahagún was collecting the *buehuetlatolli* for his encyclopedic project, *Florentine Codex*. Before this project, Sahagún presented Huitzilopochtli as the supreme god of the Indians. In one of his earliest works, the *Primeros Memoriales*, Sahagún described the pictorial images of the indigenous gods along with the alphabetic explanation of each god regarding their roles and positions in the indigenous pantheon. In the section entitled “in which are named what were attributed to the gods,” Sahagún recorded the following roles attributed to Huitzilopochtli (1997, 121):

Vitzilopochtli	Huitzilopochtli
Tenemjtia	He nourishes people.
Tetlamachtis	He makes people rich.
Tecuiltonoa	He makes people wealthy.
Tetlaocatilja	He makes people rulers.
Tetlauelia	He is wrathful with people.
Temjctia	He kills people.

Sahagún presented Huitzilopochtli as the patron of life or nourishment or giver of life, richness, wealth, and rulership. He was also presented as the patron who caused wrath and death among people. On the other hand, Sahagún attributed two roles to Tezcatlipoca (1997, 121):

Tezcatlipoca	Tezcatlipoca
Tlayocuya. i. Teyocuya	He creates things; that [is], he creates people.
Teyavchjoa	He makes war on people.

Tezcatlipoca was described by Sahagún here as the creator of things and people, and also the instigator of war among people. Comparing these descriptions of Huitzilopochtli and Tezcatlipoca

to those that Sahagún recorded in the *Historia general*, most of the characteristics of Huitzilopochtli were now transferred to Tezcatlipoca:

El dios llamado *Tezcatlipoca* era tenido por verdadero dios, e invisible, el cual andaba en todo lugar, en el cielo, en la tierra, y en el infierno; y tenían que cuando andaba en la tierra movía guerras, enemistades y discordias, de donde resultaban muchas fatiga y desasosiegos. Decían que el mismo incitaba a unos contra otros para que tuviesen guerras, y por esto le llamaban *Necóc Yáotl*, que quiere decir sembrador de discordias de ambas partes; y decían él sólo ser el que entendía en el regimiento del mundo, y que él solo daba las prosperidades y riquezas y que él sólo las quitaba cuando se le antojaba; daba riquezas, prosperidades y fama, y fortaleza y señoríos, y dignidades y honras, y las quitaba cuando se le antojaba; por esto le temían y le reverenciaban, porque tenían que en su mano estaba el levantar y abatir, de la honra que se le hacía. (1997, 31-32)

[The god called Tezcatlipoca was considered a true god, and invisible, who was present in every place, in heaven, on earth, and in hell; and they believed that when he walked around on earth, he caused wars, enmities and discords, from which much fatigue and anxiety resulted. They said that he himself incited one against the other to have wars, and for this they called him *Necóc Yáotl*, which means the sower of discord on both sides; and they said he was the only one who understood the regiment of the world, and that he was the only one who gave prosperity and riches and he was the only one who took them away when he felt like it; he gave riches, prosperity and fame, and strength and lordships, and dignities and honors, and he took them away when he pleased; For this reason they feared and revered him, because they believed that it was in his hand to lift up and to put down, by the honor that was done to him.]

Sahagún maintained here some original roles of Tezcatlipoca such as a cause of war and discord among people but at the same transferred to Tezcatlipoca several roles such as the patron of nourishment (“fortaleza”), richness (“riqueza”), wealth (“prosperidad”), and rulership (“señorío”), which he originally assigned to Huitzilopochtli in his *Primeros Memoriales*. The transfer of the roles of Huitzilopochtli to Tezcatlipoca was a significant colonial project for Sahagún because Huitzilopochtli, as the archival Satan that required of the Indians a massive human sacrifice, should not be a god who also required of them highly civilized and advanced moral and social practices as described in *huehuetlatolli*.

Conclusive remarks

After the conquest, the Spanish missionaries and conquistadors selectively collected and frequently trimmed Prehispanic indigenous traditions to justify their own colonial projects. The Prehispanic indigenous speeches known as *huehuetlatolli* could be a good example that went through such a process. Frays Olmos and Sahagún collected the indigenous speeches in Nahuatl, translated them into Spanish, and used their moralizing content to rationalize indigenous civility and intellectuality. By doing so, they tried to show that Indians were capable human beings who

could be converted into Christians like Europeans. In this context, the *huehuetlatolli* as original indigenous oral speeches were significantly modified and transformed by the Spanish priests who tried to make them similar to the content and style of European religious and moral speeches. Yet, this transformation does not mean that all surviving speeches were entirely Europeanized and completely lost their Prehispanic traits, but rather that they became hybrid products in many cases in which European content appeared in indigenous discursive styles or vice versa. Thus, to properly study the *huehuetlatolli*, it is essential to examine first which parts of *huehuetlatolli* were Europeanized or Christianized as well as which other parts could still be considered Prehispanic.

By examining the indigenous speeches in general and at the same time focusing on the specific speeches such as the religious orations dedicated to Tezcatlipoca, this essay suggests that the current scholarly tendency to view the *huehuetlatolli* as a pure Prehispanic product or as a simple hybrid product of European and indigenous traditions needs to be revised. In other words, the entire corpus of the surviving *huehuetlatolli* needs to be reexamined in the colonial as well as precolonial context. In addition, this essay also suggests possible future studies. For instance, Book 6 of Sahagún's *Florentine Codex*, which is a collection of *huehuetlatolli*, includes numerous pictorial images that correspond to the collected speeches. At first glance, just like the *huehuetlatolli* are currently treated, these images seem to be originated from the pictorial writing system that the Aztecs used to record their history, culture, and religion before the conquest. As a few scholars such as Jeanette Favrot Peterson (2019) have demonstrated, however, the pictorial images included in Book 6 also exhibit explicit influence of the European painting. More similar studies could fill in the gaps for current studies that have primarily focused on the indigenous speeches alphabetically recorded.

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