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Mexican Studies, Volume 35, Number 1, Winter 2019, pp. 61-87 (Article)

Published by University of California Press



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## The Indigenous Governor of Tlaxcala and Acceptable Indigenousness in the Porfirian Regime

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This article examines how Próspero Cahuantzi, governor of Tlaxcala from 1885–1911, claimed his Indigenous heritage. Cahuantzi asserted his Indigenousness by contributing to the Porfirian administration's nation-building campaigns, which glorified Mexico's Indigenous past. The article traces how Cahuantzi collected, disseminated, and protected Indigenous artifacts and history. Through his actions, which included giving speeches in Nahuatl at the Eleventh International Congress of Americanists (Mexico City, 1895), Cahuantzi ingratiated himself to national and international elites. Thus, the article shows how Cahuantzi's Indigenousness helped him to secure a permanent political position in Porfirio Díaz's dictatorship (1876–1910).

**Key words:** Governor, Indian, Indigenous, nation-building, patrimony, politics, Porfiriato, Tlaxcala.

Este artículo examina la manera en que Próspero Cahuantzi, gobernador de Tlaxcala entre 1885 y 1911, reclamó para sí su legado indígena. Cahuantzi afirmó su carácter indígena colaborando con las campañas de construcción nacional del gobierno porfiriano que glorificaban el pasado indígena de México. En el artículo se revisa cómo Cahuantzi recolectó, difundió y protegió los objetos y la historia indígenas. Mediante sus acciones, entre las que se contó pronunciar discursos en náhuatl en el Décimo Primer Congreso Internacional de Americanistas (ciudad de México, 1895), Cahuantzi se congradió con las élites nacionales e internacionales. Así, el artículo muestra

\*For their comments on earlier drafts, I graciously thank Christina Bueno and Casey Lurtz, attendees at the Southeastern Council of Latin American Studies annual meeting (2016) and the University of Chicago's Latin American History workshop, as well as the editor Ruth Hellier-Tinoco and reviewers of *MS/EM*.

*Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* Vol. 35, Issue 1, Winter 2019, pages 61–87. ISSN 0742-9797, electronic ISSN 1533-8320. ©2019 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Reprints and Permissions web page, <https://www.ucpress.edu/journals/reprints-permissions>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/msem.2019.35.1.61>.

cómo la condición indígena de Cahuantzi le ayudó a mantener un puesto político permanente en la dictadura de Porfirio Díaz (1876–1910).

**Palabras clave:** Construcción nacional, gobernador, indígena, indio, patrimonio, política, Porfiriato, Tlaxcala.

On October 1, 1895, attendees of the Eleventh International Congress of Americanists gathered in Mexico City. Since the inauguration of the meetings twenty years earlier, international delegates, including intellectuals and archaeologists, had communed biennially to deliberate advancements in the field of “Americanism.”<sup>1</sup> Congressional attendees were especially interested in studying the ancient Americas. So, when Mexico was selected as the first place outside of Europe to host the Congress, President Porfirio Díaz and his administrators saw it as a critical opportunity to highlight the nation’s Indigenous past on a global stage.<sup>2</sup> It was thus fitting that, to inaugurate the Eleventh Congress, attendees toured the recently commissioned Gallery of Monoliths at the National Museum.<sup>3</sup> The gallery housed some of the most impressive artifacts discovered during excavations of archeological sites, including Teotihuacán, the Plaza Mayor, Mexico City, and Chichén Itzá.<sup>4</sup> At the tour’s conclusion, Próspero Cahuantzi, the governor of Tlaxcala,<sup>5</sup> stood before three major artifacts to give his speech: the Aztec calendar stone, the colossal head of the Aztec god Xipe Totec, and a statue of the Maya god Chac-mool. His address was summarized in the Congressional record as follows:

Mr. Colonel D. Próspero Cahuantzi, Governor of the State of Tlaxcala, read a speech that paid tribute to the importance of studying archeological

1. Christina Bueno, *The Pursuit of Ruins: Archeology, History, and the Making of Modern Mexico* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2016), 25.

2. *Actas del Congreso Internacional de Americanistas: Actas de la Undécima Reunión, México, 1895* (Germany: Kraus-Thomson Organization Limited, 1968), 29. [https://archive.org/stream/proceedingsinter1895inte/proceedingsinter1895inte\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/proceedingsinter1895inte/proceedingsinter1895inte_djvu.txt).

3. The National Museum was opened in 1825. It changed to the National Museum of Archaeology, History, and Ethnology in 1909 and in 1944 it became what it is today, the National Museum of Anthropology. Bueno, *The Pursuit of Ruins*, 62–63, 222.

4. Bueno writes, “The purpose of the gallery was to hold the finest pieces from as many of the pre-Hispanic cultures as possible.” Bueno, “Forjando Patrimonio: The Making of Archaeological Patrimony in Porfirian Mexico,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 90:2 (May 2010): 236.

5. Cahuantzi was governor from 1885 to 1911.

monuments to advance the history of the ancient peoples of the Americas, especially those of Mexico during ancient times.<sup>6</sup>

Cahuantzi's speech at the National Museum followed the toast he gave speaking in Nahuatl the night before, when he closed the Congress's "highly animated" banquet.<sup>7</sup>

I argue that, by placing himself in front of pre-Hispanic artifacts and toasting in the modern Aztec language, Cahuantzi was attempting to authenticate congressional proceedings that enshrined Indigenous Mexicans as symbols of a glorious national history. Drawing on the work of historians Christina Bueno and Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, I discuss how Porfirian nation-building elites—the administrators and intellectuals with various training and backgrounds, who were also in Díaz's close circle—used Indigenous antiquity to root the young nation in a common cultural heritage.<sup>8</sup> In Mexico and throughout Latin America, coordinators of nation-building projects wrote patrimonial chronicles, collected Indigenous relics to display at home and abroad, and organized grandiose ceremonies to elevate the status of Indigenous civilizations—especially empires, such as the Aztecs, Inca, and Maya—to that of the ancient Greeks and Romans.<sup>9</sup> However, according to historians of late nineteenth-century nation-building, these Indigenous groups were honored as part of the past.<sup>10</sup> As Rebecca Earle writes,

6. *Actas del Congreso, 1895*, 37. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

7. *Ibid.*, 36.

8. Bueno, "Forjando Patrimonio," 219 and Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs: Crafting a Modern Nation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1996), 255–261. These politicians and scholars, sometimes dubbed the "wizards of progress," are the subjects of Bueno and Tenorio-Trillo's analyses.

9. In addition to Bueno and Tenorio-Trillo's work, examinations of late nineteenth-century nation-building in Mexico include: Barbara A. Tenenbaum, "Streetwise History: The Paseo de la Reforma and the Porfirian State, 1876–1910," in *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico*, eds. William H. Beezley, Cheryl English Martin, and William E. French (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1994); Enrique Florescano, *Imágenes de la patria a través de los siglos* (México, D.F.: Taurus, 2005), 189–254; Rebecca Earle, *Return of the Native: Indians and Myth-Making in Spanish America, 1810–1930* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Guy Rozat, *Los orígenes de la nación: Pasado indígena e historia nacional* (Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2011).

10. This is in contrast to after the Revolution, when nation-builders endeavored to incorporate present indigenous peoples into the nation-state through schools and various other state-funded programs. Examples of the rich canon of literature on post-Revolutionary nation-building in Mexico include, but are by no means limited to: Alexander S. Dawson, *Indian and Nation in Revolutionary Mexico* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2004); Paul Gillingham, *Cuaubtémoc's Bones: Forging National Identity in Modern Mexico* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico

“Contemporary Indigenous peoples were rarely accepted as part of the national present.”<sup>11</sup> Instead, nation-builders believed that contemporary Indians were degraded and hindered national progress.<sup>12</sup>

Through an examination of Cahuantzi’s political career, this article challenges historians’ suppositions that a living person who readily adopted “Indigenous” signifiers could not fit into, much less propel forward, the Porfirian vision of nationhood. I argue that Cahuantzi carved out a permanent position for himself as a model of a “civilized” Indigenous person within the racist milieu of late nineteenth-century Mexico. Moreover, I propose that Díaz supported Cahuantzi for seven consecutive terms as governor—the longest of any state governor during the Porfiriato—in part because Cahuantzi laid claim to his “Indigenous” heritage.

I contend that Cahuantzi came to exemplify “acceptable indigenoussness.”<sup>13</sup> The governor fashioned himself into a living personification of ancient monuments heralded by the intellectual and political elites constructing a national Mexican identity. Cahuantzi did this, I argue, by exploiting the incongruities and fluidity inherent to the category of Indigenous and by selectively engaging with the cultural and social indicators of Indigenous alterity in the context of late nineteenth-century nation-building.<sup>14</sup> The governor presented himself as a representative of the glorious Indigenous past while also divorcing himself from contemporary notions of pejorative Indianness. My argument thus builds upon vital scholarly assessments about how Indigenous alterity was inextricably

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Press, 2011); Natividad Gutiérrez, *Nationalist Myths and Ethnic Identities: Indigenous Intellectuals and the Mexican State* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2015); Ruth Hellier-Tinoco, *Embodying Mexico: Tourism, Nationalism and Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Rick Anthony López, *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State After the Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

11. Earle, 5.

12. The elites in charge of nation-building projects did not necessarily agree on why contemporary Indigenous peoples were barbaric and their attitudes towards Indigenous peoples depended on historically-changing national ideologies. See, for example, Earle, 170-1, 181; and Rozat, 413–418.

13. Earle uses this phrase to explain how the Guatemalan government selected an image of an “Indian princess” to depict on a stamp in 1878. Earle, 15.

14. Debates about “Indigenous alterity”—how and why Indigenous peoples are considered “others” and the validity of these distinctions—are superbly interrogated in various chapters in the edited volume: *Beyond Alterity: Destabilizing the Indigenous Other in Mexico*, edited by Paula López Caballero and Ariadna Acevedo-Rodrigo (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 2018).

shaped by historical and shifting circumstances.<sup>15</sup> Cahuantzi's case emphatically underscores how the category of Indigenous cannot be understood apart from the political context in which it was being produced.

This article is structured in four main sections. Firstly, utilizing travel accounts and secondary sources, the article sketches Cahuantzi's rise to power and explains how he became one of Díaz's closest regional allies. In the second section I turn to various publications to discuss Tlaxcala's role in history, using editions of historical chronicles and manuscripts, as well as secondary sources. I also draw upon government correspondence from the *Archivo Histórico del Estado de Tlaxcala*, as well as state and national newspapers. Thirdly, I utilize the published record of the Eleventh International Congress of Americanists to explain how Cahuantzi disseminated his region's history and used it to boost his own political standing. Fourthly, I examine a case that was deliberated before the *Gran Jurado de la Cámara de Diputados del Congreso* in 1896 in which Cahuantzi was tried for violating the separation between church and state when he participated in a prominent regional bishop's funeral. Through my analysis of the case's published legal testimonies, I argue that Cahuantzi and those defending him carefully selected discourses that would both exonerate the governor and reinforce his status as a representative of, as they stated, "pueblos civilizados."<sup>16</sup> The court case, as such, provided a platform for Cahuantzi to disassociate his public identity from negative perceptions that he was the backwards "Indian" governor of Tlaxcala, and therefore, unfit to rule.

### Governor Próspero Cahuantzi

Cahuantzi was from the town of Santa María Ixtulco in the small central state of Tlaxcala.<sup>17</sup> Like the majority of Tlaxcalans, he spoke

15. As Paula López Caballero and Ariadna Acevedo-Rodrigo assert, "The category *indigenous* is a permanent field of negotiation and dispute whose meanings are always volatile and elusive," López Caballero with Acevedo-Rodrigo, "Introduction: Why Beyond Alterity?" in *Beyond Alterity*, 6.

16. Alonso Rodríguez Miramón, *Discurso pronunciado por el C. Diputado Licenciado Alonso Rodríguez Miramón el 26 de noviembre de 1896, ante el gran jurado nacional que conoció del proceso instruido al gobernador del estado l. y s. de Tlaxcala, Coronel Próspero Cabuantzi acusado de violador de la Leyes de Reforma, por algunos periodistas de la Capital de la República* (Tlaxcala: Impr. del gobierno del estado, 1896), 17.

17. A territory of the State of Mexico until 1857, Tlaxcala was the fifth smallest state by area in the Mexican Federation, with a population growing from 154,871 in

Nahuatl in addition to Spanish.<sup>18</sup> While he received only a rudimentary primary education, many sources attest to his skills as an autodidact.<sup>19</sup> From a family of landless peasants, Cahuantzi's only opportunity for advancement was through the military, which he joined in 1856 at the age of 22.<sup>20</sup> While climbing the military ranks, he earned the rank of colonel and eventually formed a friendship with then General Porfirio Díaz. Much later, in 1885, Díaz appointed Cahuantzi governor of Tlaxcala. Cahuantzi was one of many of Díaz's former military comrades whom Díaz awarded with a governorship. In addition to *rurales* and *jefes políticos*, state governors like Cahuantzi were Díaz's most essential regional interlocutors.<sup>21</sup>

Cahuantzi's surname, bilingualism, physiognomic features, and humble family origins led some non-Mexicans to recognize Cahuantzi as Indigenous.<sup>22</sup> For example, U.S. social scientist Frederick Starr depicted Cahuantzi as a "pure blood indian, whose native language is Aztec . . . a large well-built man, with full face and little black eyes that are sunken deeply into the flesh . . . [and] a man of some force and energy."<sup>23</sup> Henry Baerlein, a traveler, likewise portrayed Cahuantzi as a "delightful Aztec gentleman."<sup>24</sup> Later, in

1886 to 184,171 in 1910. *Censo y división territorial del Estado de Tlaxcala* (México, 1895 and 1910).

18. The state census classified 60% of Tlaxcalans as "indígena" because they spoke Nahuatl or Otomí, but only 20% of Tlaxcalans spoke exclusively in an Indigenous language. *Censo y división territorial del Estado de Tlaxcala* (México, 1902).

19. Ricardo Rendón Garcini, *El Prosperato: el juego de equilibrios de un gobierno estatal* (México, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno, 1993), 41.

20. *Ibid.*, 42. The national guard was a common career path for many rural men during this period. See Patrick J. McNamara, *Sons of the Sierra: Juárez, Díaz, and the People of Ixtlán, Oaxaca, 1855–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 2.

21. Díaz's appointment of military governors was a system of spoils rewarding those who had helped him to stage a coup and seize the presidency. This new cadre of provincial leadership allowed him to control state operations and militarize civilian politics while dramatically reducing the size and cost of the armed forces. For a comparative analysis of Porfirian governors see Daniel Cosío Villegas, *Historia moderna de México, El Porfiriato, La vida política interior, Parte segunda* (México: Editorial Hermes, 1972), 425–493. Other in-depth studies include: Ricardo Rendón Garcini, *El Prosperato*; Charles A. Hale, *Emilio Rabasa and the Survival of Porfirian Liberalism: The Man, His Career, and His Ideas, 1856–1930* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008); and Jürgen Buchenau and William H. Beezley, editors, *State Governors in the Mexican Revolution, 1910–1952: Portraits in Conflict, Courage, and Corruption* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009).

22. Rendón Garcini, 41.

23. Frederick Starr, *In Indian Mexico: A Narrative of Travel and Labor* (Chicago: Forbes & Company, 1908), 85.

24. Henry Baerlein, *Mexico: The Land of Unrest* (London, 1914), 123.

1914, when the *New York Times* reported Cahuantzi's capture at the hands of Francisco "Pancho" Villa, they described Cahuantzi as "a full-blood Tlaxcalan Indian," assigning a more correct characterization than "Aztec" yet one that nevertheless relied on a biological understanding of Indigenous difference.<sup>25</sup>

In contrast to accounts from these non-Mexicans, it was rare for Cahuantzi to be labeled an "Indian" or "Indigenous" in Mexican historical records. Cahuantzi may have been construed as exhibiting "typical" Indigenous physiognomic features. But, as historians, such as Douglas Cope, have elucidated, beginning in colonial Mexico, a person's physiognomy did not historically denote Indigenous classification in Mexico.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, even if Cahuantzi was seen as having Indigenous heritage, his background did not preclude him from attaining political leadership in late nineteenth-century Mexico.<sup>27</sup> What mattered more for Cahuantzi's political position was, foremost, that he was a close Porfirian ally and, secondly, that he was from Tlaxcala.

For myriad reasons, Cahuantzi's place of origin distinguished him from other governors and, as I will argue, was fundamental to his political success. Cahuantzi was not Maya or Yaqui, P'urhépecha, to name only two examples of Indigenous groups that the Porfirian administration waged war against,<sup>28</sup> and, thusly, considered *indios bárbaros* obstinate to Porfirian ideals of progress. Cahuantzi was also only one of a handful of governors who was born in the place that he ruled and who did not come from wealthy, educated, or politically influential backgrounds.<sup>29</sup> Cahuantzi's longevity in office also set him

25. *The New York Times*, 7 October 1914.

26. Cope's study makes the case that, rather than being predicated on physical appearance, Indigenous distinction was determined more by cultural and social markers. See Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660–1720* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010).

27. The success of President Benito Juárez, a Zapotec Indian from Oaxaca, and even Díaz's success, a mestizo, likewise, from Oaxaca, attests to the fact that "Indian ancestry was no bar to the presidency," Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, vol. 1* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 3.

28. The Porfirian state's most egregious repression of Indians—including their recolonization, enslavement, and extermination—targeted groups along the northern border as well as Mayas in the Yucatán. See for example: Evelyn Hu-DeHart, *Yaqui Resistance and Survival: The Struggle for Land and Autonomy, 1821–1910* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984); Paul J. Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress: Bandits, Police, and Mexican Development* (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1992); and Gilbert Joseph and Allen Wells, *Summer of Discontent, Seasons of Upheaval: Elite Politics and Rural Insurgency in Yucatán, 1876–1915* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

29. François-Xavier Guerra, *México: del Antiguo Régimen a la Revolución*, vol. 1 (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1988), 65–66.

apart from other governors.<sup>30</sup> By the turn of the nineteenth century, Díaz had expelled most of his initial military appointees and replaced them with civilians.<sup>31</sup> Whether because of ruptures with local factions, estrangements from Díaz, ascent to another office, or ailment or death, turnover at the state level was common. Unlike Tlaxcala, most states had seen at least two or three, or even upwards of twelve governors during the Porfiriato.<sup>32</sup> Cahuantzi, meanwhile, was regularly invited to the capital for business and pleasure throughout his twenty-six years in office.

I argue that Cahuantzi's duration in office is tied directly to his upbringing as a Tlaxcalan and as someone who Mexicans and non-Mexicans alike, because of Cahuantzi's affirmations, came to view as having Indigenous heritage. There were various ways that Cahuantzi, like many other leaders before him—including Díaz—could have acculturated to whiteness by dropping all Indigenous signifiers. Once Cahuantzi became governor, during which time he gained lands as well as political prestige, he could have spoken exclusively in Spanish at public events. Instead, Cahuantzi embarked on a mission to publicize his region's rich Indigenous history, and moreover, to position himself as a modern exemplar of this history.

### **Tlaxcala and Mexican Nation-Building**

When Cahuantzi came to office in 1885, Tlaxcala, like much of central Mexico, was experiencing the effects of modernization. Completed in 1873, the Mexicano rail line—the first to connect the crucial port of Veracruz to the capital—ran directly through Tlaxcala. Along with the railroad, textile and glass factories were built, bringing with them the potential to attract more investment and to generate tax revenue.<sup>33</sup> But, for the most part, urban centers such as Mexico City, the port of Veracruz, and especially the nearby city of Puebla garnered more public admiration than Tlaxcala. Tlaxcala was much smaller and less industrialized than other locales along the Mexicano line. An 1885 editorial published in the state's official newspaper encapsulated

30. Tlaxcala and many other states passed constitutional amendments to allow consecutive gubernatorial election. Carlos Bravo Regidor, "Elecciones de gobernadores durante el Porfiriato," in *Las elecciones y el gobierno representativo en México (1810–1910)*, ed. José Antonio Aguilar Rivera (México: Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas, 2010), 266–7.

31. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, vol. 1, 17.

32. This excludes interim governors. Bravo Regidor, 268.

33. Rendón Garcini, 94.

some Tlaxcalans' laments that the region was not receiving its due. They wrote:

It causes us real and profound grief to see the little or nonexistent regard given to our state, so notable [as it is] for its historical memories, for its momentous past, for the heroism of its valiant sons who have always fought, [who were] always the first ones [to arrive] where there was a right to defend, a freedom to protect... Tlaxcala is motivated by the incessant desire for progress... The great Xicotencatl's belligerent descendants [Tlaxcalans] have become humble shepherds and peaceful farmers.<sup>34</sup>

The editorial wished to imply, as well as bemoan, how Tlaxcala was better known for its past rather than for its contemporary accomplishments. Because of Tlaxcala's pivotal role in the Spanish conquest or overthrow of the Aztec Empire, Tlaxcala's "historical memories" had been permanently etched into Mexico's historic narrative.<sup>35</sup> The Tlaxcalans helped the Spanish to invade and destroy the city-state of Tenochtitlán, Tlaxcala's rival, by aiding the Spanish with military strength and intelligence that all but secured European victory. In the aftermath of conquest/invasion, the Spanish "rewarded" the Tlaxcalans for their allegiance, granting them a slight degree of autonomy as compared to other Indigenous groups. Although they had to fight diligently and consistently to retain their privileges—and their population was still decimated by disease, nevertheless—colonized Tlaxcalans were exempt from *encomienda* and had direct parlay, or communication, with the crown. The Spanish also recruited Tlaxcalans to help pacify and Christianize more "rebellious" natives in the north. Unlike other native groups who were less accepting of Christianity, Tlaxcala had one of the longest histories of Indigenous Catholicism in Mexico. Tlaxcala had been a central locus of Catholic worship and pilgrimage ever since a young Indian boy, according to legend, viewed a Marian apparition in the town of Ocotlán in 1541. Soon thereafter, many Tlaxcalan elites converted to Catholicism. Thus, centuries earlier, in the eyes of the Spanish colonizers, Tlaxcalans had distinguished themselves from less civilized Indigenous groups.<sup>36</sup>

34. *Periódico Oficial del Estado de Tlaxcala*, (Tlaxcala) 19 Sept. 1885.

35. *Ibid.* Even before the conquest, the Tlaxcalans likened themselves to other tribes they considered more advanced, such as the Mexica. Tlaxcalans were also very proud that they had continually beat back the Mexica's attempts to capture them. See: Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs*, 108.

36. The role of Tlaxcalans during and after the Spanish conquest has been well documented. See, for example, Charles Gibson, *Tlaxcala in the Sixteenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1952). More recent scholarly examinations

### National Patrimony: Past in the Present

As with many other places in Latin America in the late nineteenth century, constructing and commemorating Mexico's national history was a priority for the Porfirian regime. Because the sculptors of national history were heavily influenced by scientific positivism, they were especially interested in using the pre-Columbian past to prove how Mexico's path to progress had begun long before their time.<sup>37</sup> Bueno assiduously tracks how officials enacted laws to protect "ancient objects" and appointed key statesmen and archeologists to collect and guard them in Mexico City's National Museum and at international expositions.<sup>38</sup> As Bueno articulates, "the very act of protecting [artifacts] was thought to give Mexico the coveted aura of a scientific, civilized, modern nation."<sup>39</sup> By endowing Mexico with a national patrimony—a deeply-rooted, mutual ancestry—Porfirian nation-builders hoped that this would improve Mexico's cultural repute, and in turn, build worldwide trust in Mexican institutions. Scholars of late nineteenth-century nation-building also emphasize how, although Porfirian efforts to craft a uniform national history were much more directed than those of previous administrations, the process of doing so was still highly contested and negotiated. As Tenorio Trillo asserts, "eclectic selectiveness echoed the entire Porfirian treatment of Mexico's Indian past and present."<sup>40</sup> Throughout the Porfiriato, there was no one vision of how the Indigenous past should inform Mexico's present.

For Cahuantzi, the inconsistencies and contradictions intrinsic to the process of compiling a uniform national history opened the door to imprint Tlaxcala into Mexico's broader patrimonial narrative. Cahuantzi was not the first to realize how Tlaxcala could be made to represent national antiquity. In 1875, the Mexican government purchased Rodrigo Gutiérrez's painting *El Senado de Tlaxcala* which depicts Tlaxcalan elites debating whether to ally with the

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include: Andrea Martínez Baracs, *Un gobierno de indios: Tlaxcala, 1519–1750* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2008); Kelly McDonough, "'Love' Lost: Class Struggle among Indigenous Nobles and Commoners of Seventeenth-Century Tlaxcala," *MS/EM*, 32:1 (Winter 2015), 1–28; and Jovita Baber, *The Construction of Empire: Politics, Law and Community in Tlaxcala, New Spain, 1521–1640* (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2005).

37. For an examination of how French positivism influenced Mexican patrimonial constructions, see Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs*, 20–27, 128.

38. Bueno, *The Pursuit of Ruins*, 2.

39. Bueno, "Forjando Patrimonio," 224.

40. Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs*, 103.

Spanish in the midst of conquest. Art historian Stacie Widdifield observes that, unlike other artistic conquest representations, “this scene is peopled entirely by Indians” who are positioned in classical form to mimic a Roman senate deliberation, foregrounding Tlaxcalans’ ancient supremacy.<sup>41</sup> When the Porfirian government began to promulgate national Mexican history at World’s Fairs and other international showcases, *El Senado de Tlaxcala* became an exhibition mainstay.

It was due to Cahuantzi’s efforts that two other important representations of Tlaxcalan history began to circulate alongside *El Senado de Tlaxcala* at various international exhibitions: firstly, a lithographic copy of the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* (1892) and the *Descripción de la ciudad y provincia de Tlaxcala* (1585), recommissioned as *Historia de Tlaxcala* (1892).<sup>42</sup> Both the *Lienzo* and *Historia* helped to revitalize Tlaxcala’s reputation as a preeminent Indigenous group. The actors putting together patrimonial exhibits consulted few, if any, Indigenous voices. In light of this, I argue that Cahuantzi’s broadcasting of his region’s history—told by Indigenous peoples, on the global stage—is remarkable.

Originally authorized in 1552 by the Cabildo de Tlaxcala, a position held by an Indigenous Tlaxcalan, the images contained in the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* portrayed the stages of the Mexican conquest from a predominately Indigenous viewpoint. Although the original *Lienzo* cloths were lost—believed to have disappeared in transit from Tlaxcala to Mexico City during the French intervention of the 1860s—a very accurate paper copy had previously been recreated and stored in Tlaxcala.<sup>43</sup> Despite that it was “difficult work,” Cahuantzi ordered a reproduction of and wrote an introduction for Tlaxcala’s copy of the *Lienzo* in 1890 to present it as an “homage to his state” at the Columbian Historical Exposition in Madrid

41. Stacie G. Widdifield, *The Embodiment of the National in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexican Painting* (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1996), 103–4. See also Earle, 123–5; Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World’s Fairs*, 118–9; and Florescano, *Imágenes de la Patria*, 179–83.

42. Próspero Cahuantzi, ed., *Lienzo de Tlaxcala, manuscrito pictórico mexicano de mediados del siglo XVI* (México, D.F.: Librería Anticuaria G.M. Echaniz, 1939); Diego Muñoz Camargo and Alfredo Chavero, *Historia de Tlaxcala* (México: Oficina tip. de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1892).

43. Today *Lienzo* fragment copies are housed at the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City, the Benson Latin American Collection in Austin, Texas, the University of Glasgow, and Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana. For details of the mystery behind the disappearance and recovery of the *Lienzo* see the narrative of art historian Byron Hamman in *Mesolore*: <http://www.mesolore.org/tutorials/learn/19/Introduction-to-the-Lienzo-de-Tlaxcala-/54/History-and-Publications>.

(1892).<sup>44</sup> When the *Lienzo* was finally published as a stand-alone work in 1939, it included Cahuantzi's introduction and listed him as editor.<sup>45</sup>

Cahuantzi also disseminated the first known written account of Tlaxcalan history, *Descripción de la ciudad y provincia de Tlaxcala*.<sup>46</sup> Part illustrated codex, part Spanish-language narrative, *Descripción* was written by Diego Muñoz Camargo—a mestizo chronicler descended from a noble Tlaxcalan mother and a Spanish father—to curry Tlaxcalans' favor with King Phillip II. Its narrative and images explained how migrating P'urhépecha and Chichimecas founded Tlaxcala in the tenth century, as well as Tlaxcalans' role in the conquest, their privileged status during the early colonial period, and their religious and warfare customs.<sup>47</sup>

Cahuantzi passed the *Lienzo* and *Descripción* into the hands of notable (and controversial) Porfirian intellectual, Alfredo Chavero.<sup>48</sup> Chavero went on to publish the *Lienzo* in *Homenaje á Cristóbal Colón: Antigüedades mexicanas* (1892) and reissued *Descripción* as *Historia de Tlaxcala* for which he wrote an additional introduction.<sup>49</sup> Both works were then exhibited time and time again. In sum, both the *Lienzo* and *Descripción*, which had long resided in Tlaxcala, began to be valued again beyond Tlaxcala's borders because of Governor Cahuantzi's insistence and connections to national influencers.

In addition to circulating narrative chronicles, Governor Cahuantzi shed light on Tlaxcalan history by collecting and donating artifacts to World's Fair commissions. In 1888 he called for "able" men to exhume a small hacienda believed to be a "cemetery for Tlaxcalan nobles."<sup>50</sup> Initial excavations uncovered "bones, rock and

44. Cahuantzi, ed., *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, 1; Cahuantzi, *Informe de gobierno*, 1893.

45. Cahuantzi, ed., *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*.

46. Muñoz Camargo and Chavero, *Historia de Tlaxcala*.

47. *Ibid.*

48. In addition to directing the National Museum, Chavero also wrote the pre-Hispanic volume of Mexico's first comprehensive historical narrative *México a través de los siglos* (1887–89). For more on Chavero, see: Bueno, *The Pursuit of Ruins*, 41–2, 60, 125–6; Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs*, 55, 66–73, 84, 256.

49. Alfredo Chavero y Junta Colombina de México, *Homenaje á Cristóbal Colón: Antigüedades mexicanas* (México: Oficina tip. de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1892).

50. *El Diario de Hogar*, 21 Nov. 1888, in Sonia Lombardo, *El pasado prehispanico en la cultura nacional: memoria hemerográfica, 1877–1911*, vol. I (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1994), 1:155. These early excavations were limited, and it was not until well into the twentieth century that well-known sites in Tlaxcala, like Cacaxtla and Xochitécatl, were discovered and excavated.

clay tools, jewelry and adornments.”<sup>51</sup> The governor congregated a local committee to scope out other excavation sites to search for “still unknown antiquities, the study of which could prove very useful.”<sup>52</sup> As Cahuantzi explained, the committee was on a quest to uncover “our [Tlaxcala’s] little known ancient history.”<sup>53</sup>

Cahuantzi also requested that provincial officials mine their archival and archeological collections and that they record every artifact they donated to the patrimonial cause. In his *Memoria de la administración pública del Estado de Tlaxcala*—a state of the state report Cahuantzi delivered to Tlaxcala’s legislature—the governor itemized over one hundred historic documents and artifacts in the *Archivo General del Estado*.<sup>54</sup> The report began by outlining the titles and tributes that the Spanish bequeathed to the Tlaxcalans in the early 1500s. It also included a sampling of ancient hieroglyphs that represented pre-Hispanic towns still standing in Tlaxcala. Cahuantzi’s organizing enabled him to showcase Tlaxcalan artifacts at expositions in Paris (1889), Madrid (1892), Chicago (1893), Mexico City (1895), San Antonio (1900), Buffalo (1901), and Saint Louis (1904).<sup>55</sup> Cahuantzi was by no means the only regional official to answer the call of commissions for historical artifacts. Yet the hundreds of letters that the governor and his administrative staff wrote to local and national officials over the years seeking to obtain historical relics—extensive holdings of which can be found today in the *Archivo Histórico del Estado de Tlaxcala*—point to, in my estimation, Cahuantzi’s near obsession with measuring Tlaxcala’s progress through the recovery of its antiquity.

Whereas commissions parsed out the “Indigenous” past from the modern present in their solicitations, Cahuantzi strategically refused to separate the past and present so neatly. For example, the

51. *Ibid.*

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*

54. Próspero Cahuantzi, *Memoria de la administración pública del estado de Tlaxcala presentada a la H. Legislatura del mismo, por el gobernador constitucional Coronel Próspero Cahuantzi, el 2 de abril 1893* (Tlaxcala: Imprenta del Gobierno, 1894), 12.

55. Archivo Histórico del Estado de Tlaxcala, Tlaxcala, (hereafter AHET), Ayuntamiento, 21 Mar. 1888, Caja (C) 175, Expediente (Exp) 1, Documento (d) 1, ficha (fs) 70–71; 24 Apr. 1888, C. 175, Exp. 2, d. 4, fs. 342–3; 13 Feb. 1892, C. 188, Exp. 3, d. 4, fs. 264–67; 25 Mar. 1892, C. 189, Exp. 1, d. 4, fs. 29–34; 25 Oct. 1892, C. 192, Exp. 1, d. 8, fs. 165–8; Sin clasificar, Siglo XIX, 1899, C. 1, Exp. 5 d. 3, fs. 111; 1902, C. 1, Exp. 11, d. 1, fs. 4–5; 23 Feb. 1902, C. 1. Exp. 1, d. 2, fs. 72–80; Justicia y gobernación, 1 Dec. 1903, C. 34, Exp. 51, fs. 49; C. 35, Exp. 42, fs. 92; Cahuantzi, *Informe de gobierno*, 1893; *Periódico Oficial del Estado de Tlaxcala* (Tlaxcala), 1 Sept. 1900.

commission for the *Congreso de Artes y Ciencias de la Exposición Universal* (St. Louis, 1904) requested exemplars of “anthropology”—historical data about and representations of pre-Columbian cultures—as well as examples of “social economy” including information about electricity, transportation, mining and metallurgy, education, and agricultural production.<sup>56</sup> The commission additionally asked for photographs “of isolated types of Indians of pure race that exist in the state” as well as photographs and artifacts that would represent their lifestyles—where they lived, what they ate, how they cared for their children, and how they celebrated.<sup>57</sup> For non-Indigenous peoples, the commission would have likely recorded some of this information under “social economy.” Contrastingly, for people they judged to be “isolated types of Indians” the commission asked targeted, discriminatory questions. The commission’s bifurcated appeal makes evident how those building national patrimony did not consider Indigenous peoples as actors in modern institutions such as public schools and industry.

Nevertheless, when Cahuantzi answered the entreaties of commissions, he sent things that justified the continued relevance of Indigenous practices for contemporaneous Tlaxcalans. To the St. Louis commission the governor sent a Tlachiquero—a vessel for drinking aguamiel (the juice from the maguey plant); a traditional pulque container; clay statues including a priest, a rural soldier, a bull-fighter, an Indigenous bride, and “a female Indian” with her family; a barrel of local aguardiente; various pre-Hispanic tableaus; many different textiles and traditional clothing; and a bag of each of agricultural products from the region—corn, fava beans, lentils, various other beans, wheat, rye, and barley. Aside from the pre-Hispanic tableaus, these items still had significance for daily life in Tlaxcala.<sup>58</sup> Cahuantzi also replied with a detailed response to the commission’s four-page survey on “social economy.” He explicated how Tlaxcala was handling and tracking its expenditures and debt; the number of schools in the region and teacher salaries; agricultural and mineral production; and the number of telegraph, telephone, and electricity lines that were in use and planned for installation. Notably, he did not include a separate section expressly on “Indians.”<sup>59</sup> Likewise, in 1893,

56. AHET, Justicia y gobernación, 19 May 1903, C. 35, Exp. 42, fs. 92.

57. Ibid.

58. AHET, Sin clasificar, Siglo XIX, 1904, C. 1, Exp. 15, fs. 5, Exp. 17, fs. 12; C. 2, Exp 1, fs. 2–3.

59. AHET, Justicia y gobernación, 1 Dec. 1903, C. 34, Exp. 51, fs. 49; C. 35, Exp. 42, fs. 92.

when he replied to the Chicago World's Fair commission, Cahuantzi sent cloths from local textile factories alongside lithographs of pre-Hispanic scenarios.<sup>60</sup>

Cahuantzi had multiple reasons to conflate items that the commissions would have otherwise separated into representations of Indigenous versus modern life. Firstly, the governor was exploiting antiquity in order to engender recognition of and excitement about Tlaxcala in the present day. As one state official who had assisted the governor with amassing items to exhibit at the World's Fair in Paris in 1889 rejoiced, "The spirit of emulation and activity has awoken among the inhabitants of this state, [with an] understanding of the opportunities that exhibiting national products in Europe [may bring]."<sup>61</sup> Tlaxcala's pre-Hispanic legacy was well known. Contemporary Tlaxcalans, therefore, needed to justify their continued relevance "so that the name of the state does not vanish, [especially] when its industrious and capable residents can raise it to the level that it deserves."<sup>62</sup>

Secondly, and relatedly, Cahuantzi, in all likelihood, did not want the non-Mexicans who were observing Tlaxcala's historical objects to think of Tlaxcala as a place where "isolated types of Indians" continued to live, and thus as a place that was pejoratively "Indian." Cahuantzi's intent, as well as the intent of all those striving to create a national patrimony, was to venerate the Indigenous past in order to evince Mexico's deep roots and forward-thinking ambitions. For Cahuantzi, to divide local artifacts into "Indian" and "non-Indian" would be an inherently subjective endeavor that did not reflect most Tlaxcalans' day to day reality. More importantly, to do so would also reinforce racist assumptions of Indigenous "backwardness" and undermine the *raison d'être* of the nation-building project—to prove that Tlaxcala was modern and worthy of international attention.

### *Geographic Publications*

If showcasing artifacts was one way in which Cahuantzi realized his wider goal of making Tlaxcala better known beyond Mexico, then encouraging the publication of geographic studies was another. The governor oversaw two publications: *Gran cuadro histórico, político, geográfico, industrial, y religioso de la ciudad de Tlaxcala y del Estado de su nombre* by regional geographer

60. *Periódico Oficial del Estado de Tlaxcala* (Tlaxcala), 8 Apr. 1893.

61. AHET, Ayuntamiento, 29 May 1888, C. 175, Exp 3. d. 2, fs. 97–105.

62. *Ibid.*

Pedro Larrea y Cordero (1886); and *Geografía y estadística del estado de Tlaxcala* by Alfonso Luis Velasco (1892).<sup>63</sup> Significantly, both authors worked for the Secretaría de Fomento in Mexico City.<sup>64</sup> While their obvious function was to orient travelers and investors to the region, especially with the Mexicano rail line now passing through, these studies were also another occasion for Cahuantzi to link Tlaxcala's present-day successes to its pre-Hispanic relevance. In the preface to the *Gran cuadro histórico*, for example, author Larrea y Cordero attributed Tlaxcala's "modern progress" to its "historical memories and traditions . . . its ancient monuments and grandiose ruins."<sup>65</sup> Another purpose of the *Gran cuadro histórico*—a work that was funded entirely by Cahuantzi's government—was to adulate Cahuantzi himself. Dedicated to "Sr. Gobernador del Estado Coronel Próspero Cahuantzi," the preface lists many of Cahuantzi's accomplishments during his first two years in office, including that he had a "[good] management of public funds" and "honorable employees."<sup>66</sup>

The preface to the 1886 publication *Gran cuadro histórico* serves to illustrate Governor Cahuantzi's motivations behind contributing to nation-building campaigns. On the one hand, Cahuantzi sought to introduce travelers to Tlaxcalan antiquity because rendering the region more recognizable to non-Mexicans and Mexicans alike could possibly attract resources. On the other hand, positioning himself as a native son of Tlaxcala, as a progressive, modern successor to his honorable ancestry, shored up his own political standing among the politicians who upheld the national regime.

### **Eleventh International Congress of Americanists (1895)**

Cahuantzi's extensive participation in the Eleventh International Congress of Americanists in Mexico City demonstrates how, by 1895, Díaz's government had both acknowledged and rewarded Cahuantzi's efforts to propagate Tlaxcala's history. Although other

63. Pedro Larrea y Cordero, *Gran cuadro histórico, político, geográfico, industrial, y religioso de la ciudad de Tlaxcala y del Estado de su nombre* (Tlaxcala: Imprenta de gobierno, 1886); Alfonso Luis Velasco, *Geografía y estadística del estado de Tlaxcala* (México: Oficina Tip. de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1892).

64. Larrea y Cordero appears to only have written one other territorial study on Veracruz. Mexico City-trained geographer and statistician Velasco conducted twenty separate regional analyses for the Porfirian government.

65. Larrea y Cordero, *Gran cuadro*, 72–3, cited in René Cuéllar Bernal, *Tlaxcala a través de los siglos* (México: B. Costa-Amic, 1968), 237.

66. *Ibid.*

governors donated artifacts to and even attended the Eleventh Congress, Cahuantzi was one of few regional officials whom the congressional commission selected to help prepare, organize, and execute this central event. For the Porfirian administrators and scholars who comprised the commission, the Eleventh Congress was as a critical chance to proclaim Mexico's pre-Columbian magnificence to "Americanists" from the USA, Canada and Europe, whose opinions they revered.<sup>67</sup> The commission planned elaborate tours and feasts in and around Mexico City. Attendees visited archeological sites where excavations were underway (indeed, many digs had been prompted by the coming Congress), and they also visited places where historical objects were being stored and analyzed (such as museums). Artifacts that Americanists had discussed at previous Congresses were now being displayed in Berlin, Boston, and Paris—modern cities that Porfirians emulated. Commission members were thusly thrilled that emblems of their past could be shown in such world-renowned museums and that collections in Mexico City would rise in fame.<sup>68</sup>

In light of the tremendous value that Americanists placed on Indigenous artifacts, it was a significant feat that Cahuantzi was chosen to head the Congress's Archeological Commission. It was equally significant that President Díaz gave him the assignment. Charged with "enriching collections," Cahuantzi received and organized all artifacts that state officials sent to Mexico City.<sup>69</sup> Officials were told to send artifacts directly to "*Delegado de la Federación, el Gobernador de Tlaxcala, Coronel D. Próspero M. Cahuantzi.*"<sup>70</sup> Accompanied by other commission members, the governor traveled to ongoing digs at Mitla and Teotihuacán, as well as digs in many states, to take stock of the "most interesting artifacts that exist in state museums or in other private collections."<sup>71</sup> Once the conference was underway, Cahuantzi escorted congressional attendees during excursions to archeological sites which he had already toured.<sup>72</sup>

67. Bueno, *The Pursuit of Ruins*, 114.

68. *Ibid.*, 25–6.

69. Archivo Histórico del Museo Nacional de Antropología, Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City (hereafter cited as AHMNA), vol. 203, exp. 113, fol. 295–296 (I thank Christina Bueno for directing me to this document).

70. *Ibid.*

71. *El Universal*, 23 Jun. 1895, 7 Sept. 1895; *El Monitor Republicano*, 10 Nov. 1895, in Lombardo, *El pasado prehispanico*, 1: 275, 284, 291.

72. *Actas del Congreso, 1895*, 28; *El Monitor Republicano*, 10 Nov. 1895, in Lombardo, *El pasado prehispanico*, 1: 291.

Cahuantzi also played a key role in protecting artifacts once they arrived in Mexico City. Despite the commission's assurances that they would return relics to their original locations, historical items had a way of disappearing.<sup>73</sup> Because of its illustrious pyramids and elaborate ruins, the commission was especially concerned about safeguarding objects from Teotihuacán, which were of particular importance, "in order to present them as best as possible and in all of their grandeur to Americanist Congress members."<sup>74</sup> In response to various concerns that Teotihuacán's artifacts would vanish, Díaz "specially" invited Governor Cahuantzi to join the team working on Teotihuacán to "take care of objects that had been taken [from the site]."<sup>75</sup> Díaz assured contributors that the governor would take instructions directly from Antonio García Cubas, the geographer mapping and studying the site, and that additional police, fire patrols, and soldiers would carefully guard objects day and night on site and in the National Museum.<sup>76</sup> That the president purposely recommended Cahuantzi for this position reveals how, in Díaz's eyes, Cahuantzi had proven himself a trustworthy custodian of Mexico's heritage.

### *Language as Identity*

Despite the meeting's focus on antiquity, Cahuantzi pushed congressional attendees to think of the modern vitality of Indigenous practices. Just as the governor had refused to separate Tlaxcalan artifacts into racialized categories of "Indian" and "non-Indian," Cahuantzi spoke in Nahuatl at various points during the Congress. Cahuantzi moved fluidly between Nahuatl and Spanish, speaking bilingually just as most Tlaxcalans did in their day to day lives. Cahuantzi dazzled congressional attendees with speeches in Nahuatl and engaged with attendees' discussions about the "Mexicano" language.<sup>77</sup> In one exchange, Cahuantzi dialogued with Agustín Hunt Cortés, a US priest, a Nahuatl scholar, and a long-time Mexico resident.<sup>78</sup> Cahuantzi responded to Hunt Cortés's speech

73. Bueno, "Forjando Patrimonio," 239–245.

74. *Actas del Congreso, 1895*, 548.

75. *Ibid.*

76. *Ibid.*; *El Universal*, 7 Sept. 1895, in Lombardo, *El pasado prehispanico*, 1: 284; Bueno, *Pursuit of Ruins*, 128.

77. *Actas del Congreso, 1895*, 99.

78. After the Congress, Hunt Cortés went on to publish various works on Nahuatl philology, focusing especially on Tonantzin, the Indigenous cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Hunt Cortés's publications are listed in *Tepuztlabcuilolli, impresos en*

on the “excellences of the Nahuatl or Mexicana language and on the Indigenous race’s present condition” by underscoring Indigenous peoples’ sophisticated spiritual knowledge, mentioning how “the ancient Mexican peoples had very advanced ideas about divinity, ideas that their descendants preserve with veneration and respect.”<sup>79</sup>

During his speeches and presentations, participants lauded Cahuantzi for concurrently representing Indigenous past and present. However, while it is noteworthy that they respected Cahuantzi’s viewpoint, congressional members considered few other perspectives from peoples who thought of themselves as having Indigenous heritage. Thus, I argue, Cahuantzi’s extensive contributions to the Eleventh International Congress of Americanists nonetheless reinforced how late nineteenth-century indigenismo was built on national intellectuals’ and politicians’ contradictory and exclusionary understandings of Indigenous identity.<sup>80</sup> When congressional participants discussed the “Mexicano” language or even when they spoke in Nahuatl, these actions did not negate their firmly held belief that contemporary Indigenous peoples were, for the most part, degraded.<sup>81</sup> The congressional record stresses how attendees examined Nahuatl’s “scientific” merits.<sup>82</sup> Communicating in Nahuatl was acceptable only within the context of celebrating American antiquity and only to examine it from a scientific, and by inference, modern perspective. What is more, throughout the congressional record, Cahuantzi is not labeled “Indio” nor does he call himself “Indio.” Whereas, within the Congress’s bounds, it was allowable to give a speech in Nahuatl, it was still essential for Cahuantzi’s political image that he not be deemed an “Indian” and thus associated with “uncivilized” contemporary Indians.

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*náhuatl: historia y bibliografía 2* by Ascensión Hernández de León-Portilla (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1988), 189–92. Hunt Cortés also published the short-lived journal, *Hunt-Cortés Digest: A Monthly Journal of Things about Mexico, the Egypt of the West and of General Literature* (Mexico: Imp. de A. Carranza y Comp, 1905).

79. *Actas del Congreso, 1895*, 99.

80. Indigenismo is the valorization of indigenous peoples and cultures by the nation-state. My analysis of Cahuantzi’s participation in nation-building campaigns squares with Bueno’s assertion about Porfirian indigenismo that it was “confined to glorifying antiquity rather than promoting the well-being of Indians.” Bueno, “Forjando Patrimonio,” 216–7.

81. Earle, 170.

82. *Actas del Congreso, 1895*, 99.

### **Cahuantzi and the *Gran Jurado de la Cámara de Diputados del Congreso* Case (1896)**

A few months after Cahuantzi took part in the Congress of Americanists in Mexico City, the governor yet again drew the national spotlight. In September 1896, Cahuantzi participated in the funeral procession and burial of one Bishop Melitón Vargas of Puebla, Tlaxcala's neighboring state. The funeral services for the bishop took place at the Santuario de Ocotlán in Tlaxcala, rather than in Puebla. This location was the important Catholic pilgrimage site where, in 1541, it is reported that a young Tlaxcalan boy viewed a Marian apparition. Cahuantzi's involvement in the funeral for the Bishop of Puebla may well have passed without remark, were it not for the actions of some journalists in Mexico City. However, various national newspapers reported the events, noting that the governor had taken part in the bishop's funeral and, in doing so, had violated the separation between church and state as prescribed in the Reform Laws of the liberal Constitution of 1857. Hoping to circumvent "scandal," President Díaz penned a note to his "friend" Cahuantzi requesting that he lay low, because "there was no doubt [that Cahuantzi] had broken the law."<sup>83</sup> But it was too late. Many newspapers ran the story that Cahuantzi had defied the Reform Laws.<sup>84</sup> Worse, they were asking that the case be brought before the Gran Jurado de la Cámara de Diputados del Congreso.<sup>85</sup>

Cahuantzi stood accused of three crimes: "1. Allowing the burial of a body in a temple; 2. Participating in acts of Catholic worship in an official capacity; 3. Allowing a religious act of Catholic worship to take place in public, outside of a church."<sup>86</sup> Prosecutory and defense testimonies were given over the course of two months. Ultimately,

83. Colección Porfirio Díaz (hereafter CPD), Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City, 23 Sept. 1896, L. 21, C. 31, d. 15160–15161, letter written on paper with official presidential seal.

84. See for example: *El Imparcial* (Mexico City) 17 Sept., 20 Sept. 1896; *El Tiempo* (Mexico City) 24 Sept. 1896; *El Mundo* (Mexico City) 14 Oct. 1896. See also: CPD, 2 Oct. 1896, L. 21, C. 36, d. 17598–17599.

85. The Gran Jurado de la Cámara de Diputados investigated political crimes. For more on the court system during the Porfiriato, see Timothy M. James, *Mexico's Supreme Court: Between Liberal Individual Rights and Revolutionary Social Rights* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2014), 1–26.

86. Próspero Cahuantzi, *Dictamen formulado por la segunda sección del Gran jurado nacional y presentado a los miembros de este tribunal que conocio de la acusación contra el gobernador del estado de Tlaxcala Coronel Prospero Cabuantzi atribuyendole la infracción de algunas leyes de reforma* (Tlaxcala: Imprenta del Gobierno del Estado, 1896), 5–6.

Cahuantzi was acquitted. In light of Cahuantzi's strong relationship with Díaz, the case's outcome was unsurprising. Historians have shown how Díaz influenced juridical outcomes.<sup>87</sup> Díaz also controlled the press to some degree.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, under Díaz, the government's previously hardline anti-clerical stance had softened.<sup>89</sup> Notably, Díaz himself had walked in a public Catholic procession only a few years before Cahuantzi did.<sup>90</sup>

Given the likelihood of Cahuantzi's exoneration, what is interesting about this case is the fact that Cahuantzi and his defense team composed hundreds of pages of depositions to establish and explain his innocence. Significantly, the Tlaxcalan state press published these depositions, disseminating four total depositions—three from diputados who defended Cahuantzi as well as Cahuantzi's own rebuttal.

I assert that each deposition's length, thoroughness, and rhetoric indicates how the defense team used the case to solidify Cahuantzi's image as a deserving and rightful representative of Tlaxcala, while also distancing him from depreciatory impressions of Indianness. The depositions contained rhetorical strategies designed to absolve Cahuantzi by avowing his ties to "pueblos civilizados."<sup>91</sup> In other words, they sought to convince congressional representatives, and, more valuably, the court of public opinion, that the governor's involvement in Bishop Vargas's funeral (as well as his rule more generally) were the actions of a "civilized" rural leader rather than those of an anti-modern Indian.<sup>92</sup> Just as Cahuantzi had claimed to represent Tlaxcalans during patrimonial celebrations, such as the Congress of Americanists, so too did Cahuantzi attempt to inculcate an authentic and representative image and fashion

87. See James, 1–26.

88. Paul H. Garner, *Porfirio Díaz* (Harlow, England: Longman, 2001), 123–7. For more on the role of the press during the Porfiriato see Pablo Piccato, *The Tyranny of Opinion: Honor in the Construction of the Mexican Public Sphere* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

89. For a summary of Díaz's reconciliation with the church see: Garner, 117–123.

90. Alonso Rodríguez Miramón, *Discurso pronunciado por el C. Diputado Licenciado Alonso Rodríguez Miramón el 26 de noviembre de 1896, ante el gran jurado nacional que conoció del proceso instruido al gobernador del estado l. y s. de Tlaxcala, Coronel Próspero Cabuanti acusado de violador de la Leyes de Reforma, por algunos periodistas de la Capital de la República* (Tlaxcala: Impr. del gobierno del estado, 1896), 21. It is also noteworthy that Cahuantzi's gubernatorial predecessor had seen his hopes for re-election dashed when he violated the Reform Laws in the early 1880s. This, in turn, opened the door for Cahuantzi's candidacy. See: Cosío Villegas, 1, 595; Guerra, 1, 228.

91. Rodríguez Miramón, 17.

92. *Ibid.*

a space where he could legitimate his rule during the case before the Cámara de Diputados.

In the proceedings the diputado representing Cahuantzi's accusers recounted their descriptions of what had happened: Cahuantzi had led a procession of 600 women who carried various Catholic insignia, including a large cross; Immediately after the procession, Cahuantzi had helped to bury the bishop in the Ocotlán chapel.<sup>93</sup> The accusers called out the governor for believing himself above the law, bemoaning that, "it seems that Mr. Cahuantzi has violated all divine and human laws; his actions endanger freedom and its institutions."<sup>94</sup> Cahuantzi's accuser laid bare Cahuantzi's hypocrisy: not only had the governor violated the Reform Laws, but his own administration had also imposed fines on residents for similar acts (and they continued to do so after the case was resolved).<sup>95</sup> The diputado's reproach resonated well beyond the scope of the case: Cahuantzi, like so many other Porfirian officials, ignored or changed laws when it behooved him.

Cahuantzi and his defense team could not refute the argument that the governor had broken constitutional law. So, instead, they built a defense that mocked the journalists for their ignorance of rural customs, thereby upholding Cahuantzi as the archetype of a civilized rural leader. They began by addressing the first charge: that Cahuantzi had permitted Bishop Vargas to be laid to rest in a church. They noted that, had the journalists been familiar with Tlaxcala and Ocotlán, or at least taken the time to visit, they would have known that the bishop had not been buried in the chapel itself, but rather in a sacred and separate space in the Ocotlán cemetery designated for people of note.<sup>96</sup>

Repudiating the second and third charges proved trickier, though the defense pursued the same strategy. They argued that

93. Indalecio Sánchez Gavito, *Defensa del gobernador del estado libre y soberano de Tlaxcala, Coronel Próspero Cabuantzi, hecha ante la Cámara de Diputados, erigida en gran jurado el día 26 de noviembre de 1896* (Tlaxcala: Impr. del Gobierno del Estado, 1896), 4, 8–9; Cahuantzi, *Dictamen*, 4.

94. Cahuantzi, *Dictamen*, 4.

95. See for example AHET, Sin clasificar, Siglo XIX, 7 Dec. 1886, C. 5, Exp. 16, fs. 3; AHET, Ayuntamiento, 23 Mar. 1897, C. 211, Exp. 3, fs. 124; 24 Mar. 1899, C. 221, Exp. 4, d. 2, fs. 146–8. On the tensions between local Catholic movements and the Porfirian state see: Paul J. Vanderwood, *The Power of God against the Guns of Government: Religious Upheaval in Mexico at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); Edward Wright-Rios, *Revolutions in Mexican Catholicism: Reform and Revelation in Oaxaca, 1877–1934* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

96. Cahuantzi, *Dictamen*, 10–13.

being governor did not preclude a private life, one that was separate from gubernatorial duties. Cahuantzi should be held to the standard of other officials, citing the case in which President Díaz had similarly attended a Catholic burial and noting that his presence went undisputed because he bore no signs of his “official character.”<sup>97</sup> Cahuantzi reasoned that, “It is perceptible, very clear, and very easy to distinguish the duality that makes up the Governor of Tlaxcala and the individual.”<sup>98</sup> As he had gone alone to the event, unaccompanied by other members of his administration, he therefore was in a position to pose the following question to the court: “Should a governor not attend other Catholic rituals such as wedding ceremonies or baptisms?”<sup>99</sup> After all, these rituals were part of the fabric of provincial life.

In emphasizing this final point, the defense described how public rituals were essential to the functioning of “pueblos civilizados.”<sup>100</sup> The journalists, who were not judges—as one diputado stressed—were not fit to pass judgment on their legality.<sup>101</sup> Cahuantzi’s infractions should be arbitrated by “competent authorities, according to the laws common in every locality,” one diputado averred.<sup>102</sup> Issues of “civil registry,” such as church-related ceremonies, were not the federal government’s domain, he insisted, although legally they were.<sup>103</sup> But, perhaps, most vitally, the act of a funeral procession in and of itself was not religious; a fact that was lost on the urban journalists unjustly leveling the accusations. Even the great Athenians honored their dead, claimed one diputado, quoting a line in Greek historian Thucydides’s *History of the Peloponnesian War* that explicated how the dead became immortal like the Gods.<sup>104</sup> The diputado implied that such ceremonies were simply part of “dignified” town life.<sup>105</sup>

While explaining how “pueblos civilizados” valued rituals that honored the dead, another diputado disclosed a latent attitude of

97. Rodríguez Miramón, 14, 21.

98. Cahuantzi, *Dictamen*, 15.

99. Cahuantzi, *Dictamen*, 14–15; Adalberto A. Esteua, *Discurso pronunciado en la cámara de diputados el día de 26 de noviembre de 1896 por el diputado miembro de la segunda sección del gran jurado, Lic. Adalberto A. Esteua en pro del dictamen de Tlaxcala Coronel Próspero* (Tlaxcala: Imprenta del Gobierno del Estado, 1896), 7.

100. Rodríguez Miramón, 17.

101. Sánchez Gavito, 25.

102. *Ibid.*

103. *Ibid.*

104. *Ibid.*, 5.

105. *Ibid.*

disdain towards the indicters' lack of rural acumen, admonishing that, "In the capital of the Republic, it would be very difficult, if not impossible" for hundreds of "mujeres de humilde clase" to assemble a procession.<sup>106</sup> Women in the capital would never endure the "harsh sun, the dirt on the street, or the subsequent fatigue" in order to undertake such a "very long journey on foot."<sup>107</sup> Cahuantzi's defenders indicated that the funeral procession had less to do with Christianity per se than local practice: it was simply what was done. Furthermore, one diputado noted that, by debating the validity of local customs, the court was imposing "judicial despotism."<sup>108</sup> A guilty verdict would endorse bourgeois journalists' allegations instead of defending "the noble efforts of the oppressed pueblos."<sup>109</sup> To vindicate Cahuantzi, the defense advocated on behalf of an "oppressed pueblo" to continue with its deep-rooted cultural practices, explaining that Cahuantzi should lead their efforts, even if this was not a policy that the Porfirian administration arbitrated consistently, not even in Tlaxcala.<sup>110</sup>

When comparing the language the defense utilized in the court case to that of Cahuantzi in patrimonial forums, it becomes evident that Cahuantzi constructed his Indigenous image to conform to non-Indigenous persons' discriminatory criteria. In the court case, Cahuantzi and the defense team used terms like "oppressed pueblo," "civilizado," and "mujeres de humilde clase"—terms that conveyed rurality without the derogatory sentiment that "Indio" implied. Cahuantzi and those defending him built upon ideas that Cahuantzi had already begun to publically affirm about Tlaxcala before 1896—that Tlaxcalans were historically less "barbaric" than other Indigenous peoples. During the court case, the defense tried to make the case that Tlaxcalans, with Cahuantzi as their leader, should be extolled for continuing to engage with practices that had historically distinguished them as honorable rural peoples, rather than explicitly "Indigenous" peoples. Whereas, during the Congress of Americanists, speaking in an Indigenous language was acceptable in order to examine its "scientific" bearing, in contrast, during the court proceedings, Cahuantzi did not speak in Nahuatl because to do so outside of the nation-building contexts would have been viewed as imprudent and anti-modern.

106. Rodríguez Miramón, 16.

107. *Ibid.*

108. *Ibid.*, 18.

109. *Ibid.*

110. *Ibid.*

Many elements of the record offer suggestions as to why Governor Cahuantzi decided to participate in Bishop Vargas's funeral procession and burial. Indeed, historian Ricardo Rendón Garcini has maintained that Cahuantzi was attempting to appease Tlaxcalan hacendados who (for a multitude of reasons that Rendón Garcini discusses) were not satisfied with Cahuantzi's leadership.<sup>111</sup> Given the closeness between Puebla and Tlaxcala, Cahuantzi may have had a relationship with the bishop. It is also possible that Cahuantzi wanted to demonstrate to Tlaxcalans that he believed such ceremonies had value. While few Tlaxcalans were likely to read the published court transcripts, many more would have witnessed Cahuantzi's actions. Had Cahuantzi been absent from such a major event, many Tlaxcalans surely would have taken notice. Although Cahuantzi was born in Tlaxcala, Tlaxcalans had not elected him to office—like all governors, Cahuantzi was appointed by Díaz. So, Cahuantzi may well have been using the funerary procession as a platform to appear to genuinely represent his constituents and their interests and thus to better his standing at home.

### Indigenoussness and Local Support

In conclusion, through his participation in the bishop's funeral, as well as his extensive contributions to nation-building campaigns, Governor Cahuantzi of Tlaxcala aimed to convince Porfirian notables, as well as Díaz himself, that he was a worthy representative of his region's past and present. Cahuantzi's engagement with national patrimony raises a crucial question: did Cahuantzi claim his Indigenous heritage as a way to ingratiate himself with Tlaxcalans? In other words, did it matter to Tlaxcalans that—in contrast to most other Porfirian governors—Cahuantzi had a similar background to the majority of his constituents?

An analysis of rhetoric surrounding Cahuantzi's last two bids for governor, in 1905 and 1909, suggests that the political strategies Cahuantzi pursued to distinguish himself among patrimonial actors did not prove as effective at inculcating support at home. In various newspapers, Cahuantzi's supporters reminded readers of the governor's native heritage. *El Popular*, based in Mexico City, ran a story insisting that Tlaxcalans were "lucky" to have one of their "native sons . . . born in this very pueblo, familiar with its customs and needs" leading their state.<sup>112</sup> In Tlaxcala, pro-government newspapers *La*

111. Rendón Garcini, 56.

112. *El Popular* (Mexico City), 8 Aug. 1906.

*Antigua República* and *El Periódico Oficial* similarly touted Cahuantzi as “un hijo de Ixtulco” and “un indígena descalzo,” portrayals that invoked a romanticized humility befitting of a local representative.<sup>113</sup> The same articles linked Cahuantzi’s identity with his longevity and the stability of Tlaxcala under his watch, contrasting Tlaxcala to places like Oaxaca, where its many caudillos caused constant political turnover.<sup>114</sup>

However, in spite of Cahuantzi’s supporters’ efforts, many Tlaxcalans protested the governor’s policies. Landowners, especially small property holders, were particularly incensed about Cahuantzi’s recent property tax hike.<sup>115</sup> Notably, articles that underlined Cahuantzi’s heritage and nativeness only materialized in Tlaxcala as anti-governmental movements gained traction in the early twentieth century.<sup>116</sup> As such, these pieces appear more as desperate, last ditch strategies employed by Cahuantzi’s and Díaz’s supporters to subdue opposition rather than as a regular means to court political support.

At various moments throughout his twenty-six-year tenure, and for different reasons, some Tlaxcalans disagreed with Cahuantzi’s leadership. In addition to his taxation policies, locals had railed against how the governor managed natural resources.<sup>117</sup> They also called out the rampant municipal corruption under his watch, to name a few prominent examples of why some Tlaxcalans contested Cahuantzi’s regime.<sup>118</sup> Although records do not indicate as much, my research leads me to suggest that Tlaxcalans cared less about Cahuantzi being “a native son” and more about how his political decisions affected their day to day lives.<sup>119</sup> Turning again to language, Cahuantzi’s use of Nahuatl may well have facilitated his governing abilities and improved relations with his constituents, for

113. *La Antigua República* (Tlaxcala), 8 Aug. 1909; 27 Dec. 1908.

114. *La Antigua República* (Tlaxcala), 15 Aug. 1909.

115. Rendón Garcini, 19–20.

116. Anti-governmental movements in Tlaxcala against Cahuantzi and Díaz’s regimes had many different manifestations, causes, and leaders. Tlaxcala’s role in the Revolution is comprehensively examined in Raymond Buve, *El movimiento revolucionario en Tlaxcala* (Tlaxcala: Universidad Autónoma de Tlaxcala, Secretaría de Extensión Universitaria y Difusión Cultural, 1994).

117. Rendón Garcini, *El Prosperato*; Jaclyn Sumner, “National Autocracy, Regional Governance: Tlaxcala, Mexico, 1885–1909” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2014). See especially Chapters Two, Four, and Five.

118. *Ibid.*

119. Tellingly, within Mexican records, the few who did attack Cahuantzi because of his Indigenous background were hacendados from Puebla or Mexico City or foreign investors who had settled in the state. See for example CPD, Sept. 1900, L. 25, C. 29, d. 11334; AHET, Sin clasificar, Siglo XIX, Dec. 1901, C. 1, Exp. 13, fs. 39–55.

it is likely that he spoke in Nahuatl when conducting day to day business. However, his linguistic choices are not frequently noted in archival documents, in all probability because it was not remarkable that Cahuantzi, or any Tlaxcalan, would speak bilingually. Just because Cahuantzi spoke in Nahuatl, or presented himself as a spokesperson for Indigenous heritage at patrimonial events, did not mean that he would endorse policies that aided Tlaxcala's rural majority. After all, Cahuantzi was a loyal Porfirian steward.

Despite Cahuantzi's relationship with Díaz, my evidence demonstrates that Cahuantzi was a significant exception to the pattern that Earle has discussed: that "preconquest Indians were good to build nations with, but contemporary Indians were not."<sup>120</sup> Cahuantzi's identity as a person of Indigenous heritage became his political life preserver in a context that glorified an Indigenous past but disparaged the Indigenous present. Paradoxically, however, when Cahuantzi contrasted himself and his region to *indios bárbaros* in order to fashion this image, he reinforced discrimination against peoples categorized by this characterization. Yet, Cahuantzi also concurrently challenged Porfirians' Eurocentric ideals by inserting Tlaxcala into Mexico's patrimonial narrative, forcing these elite politicians to consider how Indigenous groups shaped Mexican history, and, in at least one case, influenced the Mexican present. Cahuantzi also made Tlaxcala a more identifiable place to outsiders when he reminded international visitors of Tlaxcala's historic legacy. Finally, by positioning himself as a paradigm of his region's rich culture—one that honored its past while simultaneously asserting its adaptability and forward-facing ambitions—Cahuantzi suggested that progress could also be a defining marker of Indigenous identity in the late nineteenth century.

120. Earle, 183.