Ethnogenesis, Pueblo Status, and Corporate Identity:
Nahua & Afro-Mexican Relations in
Central New Spain’s Indigenous Communities

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“The people here in New Spain, the people of old, said: ‘These rivers come- they flow- there from Tlalocan; they are the property of, they issue from the goddess named Chalchiuhtlicue.’ And they say that the mountains were only magic places, with earth, with rock on the surface; that they were like ollas or like houses; that they were filled with the water, which was there. If sometime it were necessary, the mountains would dissolve; the whole world would flood. And hence the people called their settlements altepetl.”

- Fray Bernardino de Sahagun

In the late colonial period of Mexico, indigenous communities who wished to continue to utilize the privileges protected by imperial law had to be legally recognized with “pueblo de indio” status. Generally, the communities that pursued this status were those whose physical sites were linked to the pre-Columbian. However, those I label as non-traditional communities, without a physical link, also applied and, in some cases, succeeded. These groups include permanent workers living on haciendas, mining camps¹, and runaway slave communities. Pueblos were legally intended to be settlements composed of indigenous peoples alone. The fact that these settlements gained pueblo status shows a clear discrepancy between the crown’s official legislation and the implementation of the law. This raises several questions about the assumed roles of race and ethnicity in community formation. Specifically, it begs the questions: What are the discernable factors that affected communities’ pursuits of pueblo status, and what does this reveal about the roles of race and ethnicity in community identity?

There is a clear ideology of micro-patriotism and corporate consciousness visible in past studies of the formation of traditional pueblos. This is a pre-Columbian notion that has been shown to have been remodeled through a form of adaptive ethnogenesis in the colonial period. This same ideology played a role in the desire for these non-traditional settlements to become autonomous pueblos. However, there are clearly other motivations
and responses to colonial policy that would encourage or discourage communities to join the *república de indios*.

Specifically, this paper endeavors to examine how non-traditional communities negotiated their role in society via pueblo status application as compared to pre-established native communities. These non-traditional communities present a unique opportunity to see how peoples of different ethnic backgrounds interacted within a community and to assess what roles Afro-Mexicans had in certain communities and their level of connectedness. Susan Kellogg and Norma Angelica Castillo Palma have noted that, “Afro-Mexicans and Nahuas enjoyed each other’s company and could interact with men of all socioracial categories without conflict much of the time. When violence did occur, racial and ethnic stereotypes quickly emerged.” This narrative of conflict demonstrates how peoples thought of as subaltern manipulated colonial policy to not only better their situations, but to actively formulate an identity that bypassed Spanish imposed labels derived from racial appearance.

Eric Van Young has noted two somewhat contradictory trends within colonial pueblo society: The first being an increasing internal social differentiation and concentration of wealth derived from economic change in the broader society, which gained momentum during the late colonial period; the second being the continuing “survival and rigor” of the corporate, landholding pueblo at the same time. Within Guadalajara, his region of study - but also throughout New Spain - there was increasing pressure on land resources caused by the growth of a commercial agricultural economy and livestock-raising haciendas, alongside the increasing demands on the pueblo for labor, concurrent with a substantial increase in the overall regional population. The
increased economic chafing within individual pueblo communities catalyzed intragroup tensions and created potential for open conflict. This dysfunction would reduce group solidarity and was conducive to the general weakening of the pueblo system. Utilizing social conflict theory, Van Young finds that this contradiction was solved through the deflection of intragroup conflict onto the world outside the pueblo. Where a growing internal differentiation threatened the structure of the community, one practicable alternative for the village as a whole was to displace its internal aggressions onto external objects. This displacement achieved the primary goal of relieving internal social tensions and the secondary gain of reinforcing in-group solidarity through conflict with outsiders.\(^5\)

Van Young’s model of intragroup conflict and displacement does explain a way in which communities upheld their corporation’s territorial base, promoted community autonomy, and fended off demands from the outside. However, it does not necessarily specify who these outsiders are exactly. It implies that anyone non-indigenous would fall into that category. However, my study demonstrates through examples seen in Veracruz, Morelos - Cuernavaca specifically - Cholula, the Toluca Valley, and Guadalajara, that community borders remained somewhat permeable and that, through ethnogenesis, communities rearticulated their notions of pueblo membership, and managed to substantially maintain a corporate identity as a social and economic entity.

**Ethnogenesis Model**

Over the past thirty years, ethnohistorians of Central Mexico have looked at questions of community and ethnic spaces in terms of continuity from the pre-conquest era into the colonial period. In the past, community persistence was considered part and
parcel to continuity in cultural practices and traditions. However, this concept does not place indigenous peoples within the context of their full historical experience under Spanish rule. Ethnic entities have survived; but the political, economic, and social dimensions of their cultural identity were radically changed through their relations with the dominant society and through the internal articulation of their communities. This instead, implies that communities were not survivals of a pre-Columbian past, but groups that had undergone ethnogenesis, which Cynthia Radding says, “denotes birth or rebirth of ethnic identities in different historical moments…and rather than trace the longevity of certain cultural traits or practices from pre-Hispanic to late colonial times, underscores the changing historical quality of culture itself.”

Although her text, *Wandering Peoples*, refers solely to the ethnic spaces of the Sonoran highlands, I argue that this model can be applied to indigenous communities throughout central Mexico. This model acts to question, as many scholars have, the assumption of continuity, rather than creative ingenuity, as the main criteria of community persistence. Although the mechanisms employed to configure communities varied radically due to regional differences in demographic, cultural, and social shifts, the practice of ethnogenesis was essential to the survival of indigenous communities as corporate aggregates.

In Central Mexico, part of that ethnogenesis was the inclusion of non-Nahaus, specifically Africans or those of African-descent, into communities. A large scholarship has developed which focuses on the experiences and lives of these peoples, known as Afro-Mexicans. However, many scholarly works tend to essentialize the relationships
between these ethnic groups by categorizing these peoples into either a relationship of amity or one of enmity, without recognizing the dynamic nature of interaction.

Noting the absence of Africans in ethnohistory, Mathew Restall has said, “because the majority of Africans arrived as slaves, and because of their subordinate status in the increasingly ethnocentric Castilian worldview, the widespread and central role of blacks was consistently ignored by Spaniards writing about the conquest. Subsequent historians consolidated this marginalization.” While Restall was speaking specifically about the writings on the early post-conquest, this trend of marginalization has certainly persisted into the late colonial period as well.

In Susan Kellogg’s work *Law and Transformation in Aztec Society*, she mentions that social identity, which she clarifies as being constructed from three factors: status position, racial and ethnic identification, and gender, could influence the outcome of litigation, specifically in terms of land. Though she concludes that, “law alone could offer concrete protections in the increasingly racially charged atmosphere of the later colonial period,” the ethnicities she implies do not include African-descendants. Her larger text generally ignores these peoples’ roles, and by omission implies their absence from indigenous affairs. However, Kellogg has published elsewhere specifically on urban African and Nahua interactions, highlighting her knowledge of their presence. So it is likely that her omission in *Law and Transformation* is a prime example of a growing concern in ethnohistory about perceived gaps in the archival record.

Many scholars have come to describe black-indigenous relations as generally hostile in nature due to a preponderance of records highlighting interethnic conflict.
However, others now recognize that these ideas overlook more subtle and mundane documentary evidence that suggests the contrary. William Taylor has noted that in ecclesiastic records, Spanish policing institutions created documentation preoccupied with order and orthodoxy. These courts would be more likely to record unorthodox behavior, which skews the records toward the unusual. Patrick Carroll suggests that similar motivations occurred with civic record keeping and that, in general, colonial authorities would react more to unusual or illegal behavior than normal or legal behavior. He has also noted that in urban zones, where supposedly the segregation laws were strictest, there was interracial contact and relationships, and yet no higher incidence of recorded conflict. This underscores the higher probability of generally peaceful relationships between the two groups in these spaces than previously thought.  

**Ethnic Communities: Altepelt to Pueblo**

Before further analysis, it would be beneficial to briefly consider the origins of the “pueblo community.” In pre-Columbian Nahua society and the early post-conquest era, the provincial unit of central Mexico was organized into an *altepetl*, an ethnic community, with a specific territory and clearly defined boundaries. Generally, it consisted of self-contained households organized into subdivisions called *calpulli* or *tlaxillacalli*. Each unit had a central temple and paid tribute in labor and goods to the *tlahhoani*, the ruler of the *altepetl*, who was responsible for land allocation, tax collection, and redistribution of goods. Each *calpulli* had its own leader and smaller temple, acting in a way as a microcosm of the larger whole.
Altepeme, however, were more than a collection of landholdings. In his 1571 dictionary, the Franciscan lexicographer Fray Alonso de Molinia defines “altepetl” as “pueblo,” meaning “people,” which accurately expresses how each altepetl imagined itself as a radically separate group.\(^{12}\) For the most part, they shared a similar belief system and language, but also had their own history, customs, and individualized practices with structures dedicated to patron deities who shared in a universal human-supernatural covenant that ensured the regeneration of their world.

The \textit{calpulli} are thought to have originally been a division of an earlier unitary group of people, and most \textit{altepeme} were imagined to have an ethnic identity that went back to “un-remembered times”.\(^{13}\) After the conquest, various factors including feelings of pride, economic independence, and extensive dynastic intermarriage worked to keep larger units together. However, while altepeme that had conglomerated into confederations came and went, micro-ethnic solidarity enabled the smaller constituent states to survive in some form through the centuries.

In the 1520’s, aware of the elaborately organized and strongly territorial altepetl units, Spanish officials began to organize indigenous institutions around the altepetl, including the encomienda, rural parishes, Indian municipalities, and initial administrative jurisdictions. Encomiendas were issued in terms of the altepetl leaders, or \textit{tlatoque}. Parishes were generally organized to encompass at least two closely associated encomiendas, but a few larger groups would often be divided into more than one parish. Due to increasing pressure from would-be \textit{encomenderos}, sharply defined moieties, often with two distinct \textit{tlatoque}, could be split into two encomiendas.\(^{14}\)
In the 1530’s, officials began reshaping the indigenous rulership to fit the model of Spanish-style municipalities. *Altepeme* functioned as a confederation of equal sub-entities, and while they weren’t required, they sometimes maintained an urban nucleus or dominant settlement. However, the Spanish municipality-province was based on a dominant center with subordinate subdivisions scattered around the core. In an attempt to impose this framework upon the altepetl, they called the area wherein the tlahtoani resided a *cabecera* “head town” and the surrounding units *sujetos* “subject towns”.¹⁵

Though initially encomiendas maintained altepetl borders and constituent parts, with the massive demographic decline in the mid 16th century, community borders were dramatically altered with redistributions of settlements. In the 16th century, the Spanish economy depended greatly upon the mechanisms of the entire provincial unit for labor and tribute arrangements. However, as private estates came to rely more on informal labor arrangements that bypassed the tlahtoani, Spaniards grew to be less concerned about the distinction between towns, allowing sujetos to become cabeceras. Although never fully abandoned, the cabecera-sujeto model gradually gave way to the trend for communities to become “pueblos” by the 18th century.¹⁶

**Colonial Forces and Legal Consciousness**

Various colonial policies were instituted that offered obstacles but also opportunities for communities to claim independence. These include resettlement programs such as the *congregacion, mercedes* (Spanish land grants), the *composiciones generales*, and the various laws designed to segregate and protect the longevity of self-sustaining Indian towns.¹⁷ Communities actively responded, taking advantage of
protective imperial legislation, maintaining possession as long as possible, and pursuing legal confirmation of the town site, or fundo legal, to increase size and status of their towns. Using their own historical accounts in lieu of corporate land titles, pueblos antiguos, sujetos, congregaciones, and regenerating pueblo despoblados fought for legal pueblo status and its corresponding privileges. The development and pursuit of pueblo status is evidence of the determination groups had to defend and enhance their corporate status and autonomy. However, independence varied in intensity and effectiveness with predictably divergent results in different regions.

**Defining Pueblo Status**

The pursuit of pueblo status was generally presented in terms of becoming “Pueblos formales y gobierno independiente” (formal towns and independent governments) with the license to “erigirse una republica separada” (constitute their own separate council). To petition for this status, a community needed a minimum population of forty families, enough land for the town site (2 ½ caballerias/ 600 varas), a functional church, and the means to pay the fee for a land title. The greatest appeal of the pueblo was land rights. Through their experience in the Reconquista, Spaniards adapted the Islamic tradition of dhimma, a pact of protection that encouraged defeated wealthy, often agricultural, communities to accept rather than resist Islamic rule, which allowed Iberians who surrendered to retain ownership of their farmlands and water resources. This tradition theoretically allowed Indians to retain traditional surface and land rights. This system allowed the crown to tap an existing source of tribute, which it highly relied upon for revenue, but also kept colonists from accumulating large landholdings, which could become a threat to royal authority. This was such a priority that natives were not
permitted to sell their land to non-Indians without official interferences. To monitor this, officials were charged with preventing Spaniards from coercing Indians into selling their land. While the crown protected this system for self-serving purposes, pueblo members did not hesitate to manipulate these concerns for their own benefits.

Other motivating factors included the protection of the town site, or *fundo legal*, political and religious independence, and, not always represented in the historiography, prestige. Different types of communities applied for pueblo status for various reasons. The most common types were existing sujetos of cabecera towns who wished to break away and form their own pueblos. Sujeto leaders cited multiple reasons as to why they should be allowed their own town charter. One of these reasons was the alleged distances between their site and the head town. At times, the distance was considered too great, and the spiritual and civic concerns of the sujeto could be more adequately met in the closer town.

However, the main concern was tribute collection. One of the primary responsibilities of the cabecera leader was the delegation of labor appointments to members of his community. Through a draft system, laborers would work at a low wage for local employers, usually hacienda owners or mining captains. Payment would be issued to the cabecera leader, who would retain a portion for the tribute due to the crown, and remit the remainder to the workers. However, leaders would often abuse their power and force sujeto members into service, while keeping the remainder of the earned wages for their own coffers. Municipal leaders would also confiscate goods, such as maize, for personal use without remuneration, such as in the town of Aculco in 1765 in Toluca.

Seeking to reform tribute collection and labor appointments, sujeto leaders would then...
petition the General Indian Court to separate from their cabecera. The more evidence that a sujeto could gather to prove municipal mistreatment meant the greater the likelihood of success.

A smaller contingent applying for pueblo status were communities displaced through *congregacion*. This was the practice of concentrating indigenous peoples for the purposes of more effective civil and religious administration of colonial authorities. Contrary to what was popularly accepted in past years, Stephanie Wood has shown that large-scale congregacion programs in the mid 16th century were not likely. Instead, scattered evidence shows that the majority of these efforts pursued by the mendicant orders settlements comes primarily from remote areas characterized by far lower population densities and accordingly in greater need of nucleation. These areas include the region between Tehuantepec in South Oaxaca and Panama from 1528-1563, the Chiapas area in 1540’s, and the West-Central coast of Mexico in the 1550’s. While congregacion began as a primary mendicant concern, it evolved into a primarily secular drive in the later 16th century early 17th century due to the massive drops in population from disease.

Most relocated townspeople were incorporated into existing cabeceras, but there were those who were nucleated into sujetos. This was meant to encourage Indians to live in towns and conduct themselves following a Spanish model of society. This process rarely occurred without negotiations, adjustments, or compromises of a sort, but nevertheless, it had a significant psychological impact on the people involved, whose ancestral homes were often absorbed into adjacent haciendas. It also had a large economic impact. New locations often meant new resources and changes in lifetime
occupations. This need to learn new skill sets increased the already existing pressure to produce tribute, let alone subsistence.29

The high degree of resistance during the implementation phase suggests a clear indication of indigenous views towards this program in most towns. However, natives in larger centers, receiving new residents of various sujetos might be more amenable to the reorganization. This type of reaction can be seen in the example from the town of Capulhuac in the Toluca Valley, whose leaders provided a capsule history in Nahuatl. In 1604, a Mexico City judge came to issue house lots into four designated barrios. This meant an increase in population growth and tribute payers for the leaders, but also prestige for the town, whose corporate integrity led it to be considered important enough to be the relocation site.

Generally, the groups affected by congregacion that had the most success achieving pueblo rank were those who regenerated *pueblos despoblados*. When they did have problems in litigation, it was generally caused by neighboring estates that had absorbed their vacated land. These peoples often quietly reoccupied their original sites and gradually repopulated their towns.30 The new population could consist of the original town members and their families, but also migrants from other areas looking to secure subsistence. With this, the Capulhuac event also sheds light on the demographics of the resettled population. A certain population was assigned to each barrio, without consideration of their ethnicity, and so Otomi, Mexica, and Mastlatzincas were forced into wards amongst ethnic strangers.31 Congregacion clearly increased the pressure very early in the colonial period for communities to rearticulate their sense of identity to maintain their corporate status.
“Pueblos de Indios” were legally created for indigenous communities, and so of course, it is no surprise that those communities with a physical link to the Pre-Columbian past would have a high success rate of achieving pueblo rank. The New Laws, a response to the rapid decline in the indigenous population in the early 16th century, attempted to remove natives from abuse at the hands of white colonists and their black slaves. This was not motivated by any particularly altruism, but because natives provided valuable resources of labor and tribute, political validation through an increased vassalage for the Crown, and also potential converts for the shrinking Iberian-Catholic Church. Part of this royal act was the creation of two separate residential zones, the república de españoles and the república de indios. After 1549, the only Europeans who could reside legally within the indigenous communities were crown officials and ecclesiastic clerics.\(^{32}\) Clearly, this did not eliminate interactions. So given the initial purpose of the pueblo, why would the colonial state authorize pueblo charters for settlements that included non-indigenous peoples? To begin with, let us first look at these types of communities and possible motivations to leave their home pueblos, and eventually form their own.

**Non-Traditional Settlements**

After 1635 and the break down of the repartamiento system, the crown imposed a head tax on the indigenous population as a method to raise further revenue for the crown and encourage more productive labor. The church followed suit with their diezmos (one tenth of the value of an individual’s yearly production payable in specie, or coin).\(^{33}\) This was meant to encourage laborers to need accumulated funds, not simply toil for a specified amount of time. Some natives escaped draft labor by becoming directly dependent upon Spaniards as personal servants or laborers. Settlers built different
methods of mobilizing indigenous labor, including wage-based labor, indebtedness, and direct coercion.\textsuperscript{34}

**Hacienda Settlements**

Originally, most indigenous workers on estates were temporary unskilled laborers still living in their nearby pueblos, earning wages that would be paid to their cabecera leaders for distribution. However, in some cases, tribute requirements were too steep, and natives increasingly fled their original communities to escape economic burdens. In the Toluca Valley, in the Eastern and Southern regions, *haciendados*, or hacienda owners, relied on plentiful day labor from nearby pueblos.\textsuperscript{35} By 1620, there were only a small number of permanent laborers, who were then still relatively recent newcomers that still identified with their towns of origin. Most came from nearby pueblos, but others came from as far as Michoacan and Tacuba. These settlements served as a refuge for landless Indians. In the Zinancantepec district, further out from Toluca Valley, permanent labor communities were larger. Similarly sized communities also existed on larger estates, which could afford more live-in workers. Estates that required more skilled labor, such as high-grade stock raising, would be more likely to encourage permanent workers.

John Tutino has found that in the Chalco and Toluca regions, ten percent of the indigenous population lived in hacienda communities, which would be a significant force for pueblo application. Permanent settlements within the hacienda offered many benefits. Often hacendados would provide loans in advance for payment and although taxes to the church and state were higher, estate owners were required to cover these costs for laborers living on-site.\textsuperscript{36} However, permanence was relative. They might be dismissed
during slack periods, between harvests, or during an agricultural crisis, which was common in the highlands because of off-season frosts.

Oftentimes laborers would slip between their original pueblo and hacienda settlement, much to the chagrin of tax collectors, who were unsure of where their taxes were coming from. A major influence in this behavior was epidemics. Disease often opened up resources and made Indians less dependent on estates. They could derive subsistence from landholdings inherited from pueblo relatives. After an epidemic, there was generally an exodus to return to pueblos. This was the case in a hacienda in Zinacantepec in 1700, Temoaya in 1740’s, Jocotitlan in 1760’s, Ixtlahuaca and Atlacomulco in 1770’s, Temascaltepec in 1780’s, and Totoltepec and again in Ixtlahuaca in 1790’s.

Hacendados attempted to entice workers to return, offering use of their land for livestock and cultivation and access to timber and firewood. They even offered increased wages and sometimes even offered to agree to a legal town site for the community on the estate. This certainly appealed to those who didn’t have access to corporate landholdings within their pueblos. The estate offered higher security for those excluded from corporate benefits, and those whose settlements were larger, older, and more permanent had a better chance of becoming a legal pueblo. If they could prove the existence of a *pueblo despoblado* in the vicinity, they had a further advantage.

**Palenques**

Palenques, “fortifications,” were communities formed by runaway slaves, or *cimmarones*. Scholars have shown that maroonage was a relatively effective form of
slave resistance, and that Africans were able to negotiate the right to freedom and ability to establish free towns through a myriad of ways. Many communities took advantage of their local circumstances to achieve pueblo status. Often sites were only authorized after an attempt to defeat them militarily. Because of this, the more successful palenques tended to occupy terrain that was difficult to infiltrate. The towns of Mandinga and San Lorenzo de los Negros in Veracruz and Santa Ana Tepetitlan in Jalisco meet these criteria.

Patrick Carroll, a historian of Veracruz, has studied one of the most infamous palenques, known as Mandinga or it’s pueblo name, Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de los Negros de Amapa. He has noted that, “the intervening demographic and economic change, plus the shifting social relationships between the members within the settlement and the relationships between the community and the larger surrounding population without, suggest a great deal about the nature of the general experiences of other runaway communities throughout the Western Hemisphere.” True of Mandinga, and most palenques, original members were men who sought subsistence through raiding. With an uneven sex ratio, raiders would often steal women, usually Indians, for “mountain marriages.” However, this practice eventually led to a balanced ratio. This balance meant that the group was no longer as mobile as it had previously been. Women and children could not flee so easily as unattached males, nor conduct the guerrilla raids and ambushes for which the maroons were so notorious. Cimmarones were now supplementing the provisions they obtained directly or indirectly from plundering by planting their own agricultural crops. Adopting the local Indian method of milpa plots on the slopes of the
mountains, they grew local crops and sold them to travelers as they passed through the district along the royal roads.\textsuperscript{43}

In 1762, the government was preparing to defend the coast against an imminent British naval attack. The viceroy sent out a call for men, and the maroons seized the opportunity to bring a petition for freedom directly to the highest authority in New Spain. They rode to the port of Veracruz and volunteered. The tactic worked, and the viceroy gave them licenses of freedom in recognition of their service during the crisis. However, after they were no longer needed, officials saw no need to enforce their decision over the objections of their former slave masters. Persistently, they petitioned and in 1769, they were finally given their freedom and permission to establish a town on the site they had chosen on the Amapa. The town swore allegiance to the king, vowed to obey the district authorities, pledged to serve in the coastal militia, and promised to pay the tribute, which the crown imposed on free blacks. In exchange, they were required to patrol for, catch, and return any future runaway slaves to their masters for a bounty. Using a set of census manuscripts for the town, Carroll found that by 1827 they had lost their racial distinctiveness, and became racially and ethnically indistinguishable from other settlements that dominated the area.\textsuperscript{44}

Bernardo Garcia Martinez found similar results for the Jalisco town of Santa Ana Tepetitlan, noting, “how diffuse and misleading racial and ethnic boundaries of colonial indian corporations could have been…[that a settlement] founded with slaves as a defensive town, constantly populated by mulattos, that it eventually acquired the status and designation of a pueblo de indios.\textsuperscript{45}” However, Trey Proctor’s work with the town of San Lorenzo de Los Negros has slightly different results. It reached pueblo status in the
1630’s when slavery was much more heavily relied upon, especially in Veracruz, where sugar production was the dominant industry. The town leader was a man name Gaspar Yanga, who from the extant records, appears to be the most militant resistor to have formed and successfully sustained a palenque. His demands for peace included official town recognition with their own cabildo (town council), justicia mayor (appeals judge), that a Franciscan friar be sent to minister, that the crown pay for the ornamentation of the church, and that no Spaniard could reside within the town, but would be permitted to visit on the market day. All of these, with the exception of the ornamentation costs were standard practices for native towns. According to Proctor, later census material reveals that the population consisted of, “80 warriors, 24 black women, and ‘unspecified number of Indian women and Afro-Mexican children’. “

Andrew Fisher has shown that at times Afro-Mexicans looked to divorce themselves from pueblo life and establish a third space between Indian society and the ranches and mines of the Hispanic elite. Such was case of the migrant hamlet of Cacalotepeque in the Tierra Caliente of Guerrero, a farming community known as the village of Tetela del Rio in the 1720’s. It succumbed to attacks in Jan 1783 by villagers of the pueblo Apaxtla, and because it lacked official titles, the community members suffered eviction by both pueblos and estates. Fischer does not mention any attempt for the community to acquire a legal land title, but given the many requirements of pueblo ranking, it is logical to assume that they did not have the funds to pay for the title or the infrastructure required by authorities.”
**Pueblo Cultural Identity**

Pueblos presented a social outlet for Afro-Mexicans. In some ways existing Indian pueblos were less accepting than Spanish communities; however, native communities provided an escape from limited conditions available elsewhere. There was an increased possibility for higher sociopolitical status, female companionship, and community belonging through marriage. However, native communities risked their rights to communal lands if authorities judged a population to have a “heavy mulatto infiltration,” as was the case in a 1773 land dispute by Don Juan de Izazaga against the two settlements of San Pedro Churumuco and San Agustín Coahuayutla in Veracruz. So why then did the indigenous population allow black outsiders into their communities when they had the legal means to expel them? Patrick Carroll observes that within a pueblo, identity and membership was determined by cultural ethnicity, not racial appearance. So then, when Afro-Mexicans were seen as “ladino” rather than “natural” they were not culturally accepted. Natives did not bring culturally assimilated blacks to the attention of authorities, so there is little trace of them in colonial documentation. So it isn’t that surprising that many African-descendants overcame legal obstacles and located themselves within or near indigenous communities throughout the colonial years.

The state of Morelos offers a unique perspective on pueblo life, in that the area remained an important indigenous center even after the establishment of sugar estates. Hacendados imported massive numbers of African slaves, whose Afro-Mexican descendants moved into Indian towns when the opportunity arose. Cheryl English Martin notes that because municipal leaders did not have hereditary holdings, as opposed to other regions (she specifically cites Oaxaca), they were more likely to abuse their power
here more so than elsewhere. Their personal fortunes were due to their skill at converting community assets into private patrimony and cultivating alliances with those who could do them favors. This led to a slightly different arrangement than is seen elsewhere in Central Mexico.

_Gobernadores_ compromised the “Indio” identity of their community by making concessions to hacendados or other peoples. The main form of concession was the renting of communal lands to outsiders, who would pay to continue cultivating on the land. Documents in 16th and 17th century are replete with references of mestizos and _espanoles_ who identified themselves as _vecinos_ in these pueblos. While most of them were farmers, others provided products and services to the haciendas and their fellow townsmen. As the colonial period advanced, more and more mulattoes joined them in towns.

Morelos was one of the colony’s most lucrative sugar producers, and with the added proximity to the capital, land and resources were surely scarce. Given this pressure, it is not surprising that pueblo leaders would be motivated to offer land to paying renters rather than distribute it to pueblo members. This is especially true for the low lands, where value of land and water provided inducement for hacendados to take these resources for their own. Often, they would seize pueblo lands, absorbing their villages. This generally occurred with small villages, predominantly Indian in population, where the interests of the _gente de razon_ would not be upset. The more mestizos, and even poor _espanoles_, occupying land, the less likely it would be taken illegally. This was surely a motivating factor to rent and accept these outsiders as community members.
In Cuernavaca, the capital of Morelos, Robert Haskett has found that ultimately, racial ethnicity seems to have made little difference as far as social status and access to political office were concerned. Mestizos who were culturally part of the Indian ruling group, and who belonged to families counted among the Indian social elite could obtain the same kind of offices as their ethnically "pure" colleagues. The presence of mestizos and other mixed peoples within the jurisdiction's officer class does not seem to have been unduly disruptive nor socially destructive. It was a change, but one that had been successfully absorbed by the jurisdiction's indigenous people.54

Mestizo caciques were not uncommon, even though a law of 1576 had stated that such people could not claim this status. As might be expected, the presence of mestizos within the ruling group was most common in towns with a significant non-Indian population. He notes that, only when the fact of mixed ancestry could be used to discredit rivals, as has been seen in the case of election disputes, was it mentioned in the indigenous record. And even here mixed ancestry was invariably only one of a variety of faults imputed to an unpopular opponent.55

Susan Kellogg and Norma Angelica Castillo Palma have observed that in Cholula, when conflicts arose between Nahuas and Afro-Mexicans, they grew often out of social closeness, not from distance.56 Cholula was the site of the development of important textile workshops, or obrajes. Outside of sugar production, this was one of the earliest economies that sought to use African labor. As part of the residential separation, in 1623, a don Diego de Coca y Rendon complained that there were mestizos and mulattos living as vagabonds in Cholula. He suggested that they register to prove that a Spaniard employed them, and if they could not, then they should be forced to leave the town.
Complex patterns of interaction among groups that the Spanish wished to segregate led to interpretations and worldviews that underlay the dramas of daily life. It is clear from Kellogg and Castillo’s work that social identity entailed what they call a “flexible consciousness.”

This consciousness is seen in a case from 1639, issued by the indigenous governor Don Joseph Franquez, who complained that native women in his district were not paying due tribute. The Viceroy Cadereyta responded that because these specific women were married to mestizos, had abandoned indigenous attire (and now wore shoes and jewelry), and relied on their Afro-Mexican husbands for their livelihood, they were no longer responsible for paying tribute. It is well established that the Spanish saw identity in terms of racial appearance. The emphasis placed on clothing, both by the women and the viceroy, shows how flexible identity really was. Ambiguity in designated racial categories for Afro-Mexicans meant that they could try to be recognized as predominantly indigenous rather than of African descent as well.

Attachment to and identification with the subdivision had always lent itself to a strong separatism within each part of the altepetl, and this feeling endured well into the colonial period. As James Lockhart and Stuart Schwartz have noted, “every smallest province…was forever inclined to split off from any larger unit of which it was, willingly or unwillingly, at the moment a part.” Throughout the colonial period, the vast majority of Indians in Central Mexico continued to live in and identify above all else with their particular indigenous communities. Strength and independence of the pueblo, the longevity, and contentment of its inhabitants, and the preservation of community boundaries were inseparable goals. Each community that became a pueblo did not pursue
the same means, instead, groups made up of peoples with different heritages, identities, and loyalties utilized their given circumstances to uphold the corporation’s territorial base, promote community autonomy, and fend off demands from those they perceived as outsiders.
End Notes:

1 Stephanie Wood, Corporate Adjustments in Colonial Mexican Indian Towns: Toluca Region, 1550-1810, Thesis (Ph. D.) (UCLA Press, 1984) 267. A brief mention is made in regards to mining camp laborers and their desire for autonomy. No other documentation on this specific subject was found, but this provides a particularly interesting path for future research. For information about indigenous life in Central Mexican mines, see: Robert Haskett, "Our Suffering with the Taxco Tribute: Involuntary Mine Labor and Indigenous Society in Central New Spain," in The Hispanic American Historical Review, Vol. 71, No. 3 (Aug, 1991) 447-475. New work that Focuses upon identity politics and indigeneity is being done on Northern New Spain, which due to the wide differences in cultural and historical contexts, are outside the scope of this paper. However, more information can be found in Dana Murillo Velasco, (PhD. Diss.) Urban Indians in a Silver City : Zacatecas, Mexico, 1546-1806. Los Angeles: UCLA, 2009. Other scholars have begun to analyze Afro-Indigenous labor arrangements and subsequent relations in mining areas, but do not offer any observations about formal pueblo pursuit: See Dana Velasco Murillo and Pablo Sierra Silva. “Mine Workers and Weavers: Afro-Indigenous Labor Arrangements and Interactions in Puebla and Zacatecas, 1600-1700,” In City Indians in Spain’s American Empire: Urban Indigenous Society in Colonial Mesoamerica and Andean South America, 1521-1830 (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2012)

2 The term “Afro-Mexican” is admittedly polemic, given the anachronistic nature of categorizing a group of colonial peoples according to a nation-state that did not yet exist. The district surrounding the capital city was known as the Kingdom of Mexico, and perhaps for the African-descendants living within this area, this label is not as problematic. However, there is also the dilemma of imposing an identity marker that was surely not heralded by all of the variously defined black folks that lived during the colonial period. However, within the colonial Latin American historiography, this term grown to include all African and African-descendants living in what is modern Mexico, and is the most accepted by scholars within this particular field.


5 Ibid., 6.


7 Matthew Restall, Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest, (Oxford University Press, 2003) 53.


9 Ibid., 219.


12 Miguel Leon-Potrilla, ed. Vocabulario en lengua castellana y mexicana y mexicana y castellana, Alonso de Molina, 1585 (Mexico: Editorial Porrua, 1970) 4; the term was used by Spaniards for any indigenous polity, regardless of settlement size. The connotation with a particularly small unit or village arose with changed conditions later in the colonial period.

13 James Lockhart, The Nahauas After the Conquest, 29.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 18; Charles Gibson, Aztecs Under Spanish Rule (Stanford University Press, 1964)
16 Ibid., 57.
17 Wood, Corporate Adjustments, 363.
18 Ibid., 209.
20 Wood, Corporate Adjustments, 197.
21 Ibid., 198.
22 Ibid., 198, 202.
23 Ibid., 208.
24 Ibid., 24.
25 Ibid., 25.
27 Wood, Corporate Adjustments, 214.
28 Ibid., 26, 27.
29 Ibid., 58.
30 Ibid., 15.
31 Ibid., 33
34 Seed, American Pentimento.
35 Wood, Corporate Adjustments, 238.
36 Ibid., 242, 250.
37 Ibid., 244.
38 Ibid., 245.
39 Ibid., 246.
40 Ibid., 261.
41 Frank T. Proctor, Damned Notions of Liberty: Slavery, Culture, and Power in Colonial Mexico, 1640-1769 (University of New Mexico Press, 2010); Carroll, Blacks in Veracruz; Ben Vinson and Matthew Restall, Black Mexico: Race and Society from Colonial to Modern Times (University of New Mexico Press, 2009); Herman Bennett, Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole consciousness, 1570-1640, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005) This list is certainly not exhaustive.
43 Ibid., 15.
44 Ibid., 12, 16.
50 Ibid., 166.
51 Ibid., 156.
52 Ibid., 164.
53 Ibid., 156.
55 Ibid., 138.
57 Ibid., 118.
58 Ibid., 119.
Bibliography


