

Nahua Fighting Words: War-like Language in Nahuatl Manuscripts

(Abstract)

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"Conquest," in English, and "conquista," in Spanish, are words that conjure up a massive and definitive defeat, one that can symbolically stifle and run counter to recent studies showing indigenous cultural continuities, survivals, and Native agency in moderating the effects of colonization. Questioning the appropriateness of the term conquest as it applied to the Nahua experience with colonization in early Mexico can be extended to the Nahuas themselves, to their thinking about their own experience with the Spanish and their own roles as potential conquerors in expanding their own empire or assisting with the expansion of the Spanish empire in America. This project asks, in analyzing Nahuatl texts of New Spain, can we find evidence that Nahuas saw themselves as conquerors? Did they see the Spaniards as conquerors? How did they express themselves about their involvement in wars that resulted in colonization programs? What was truly meant by *tlalpoloani*, *tlalmaceuhqui*, or *tepehualiztli* (and more)? The focus here is the language and vocabulary of war—and its translation challenges—as found in Nahuatl-language manuscripts of New Spain across the centuries.