

## Pre-Columbian Pasts and Indian Presents in Mexican History

This essay is the first in a series of studies on how the pre-Columbian past has been collected in different moments in Mexican history and what has been the relationship between these forms of knowledge and policies toward Indians. On the one hand, these studies examine forms of ordering the pre-Columbian past (that is, modes of knowing, organizing, and interpreting artifacts). On the other, they study forms of containing disorder in the corresponding Indian presents (that is, modes of subordination, control, and counterinsurgency). Idealized perspectives of the pre-Columbian period have had contemporaneous views that denigrate and undermine historical Indians (the many recent pages on the political insufficiency of the Zapatistas is one of the many instances). Indian resistance includes both passive forms of rejecting Westernization as well as armed rebellions. In studying forms of creating order and containing disorder, we must keep in mind what I call “writing violence in colonialist discourses.”

This concept suggests a definition of Latin American Subaltern Studies that would develop an inventory of the Culture of Conquest that continues to produce subalternity, while simultaneously defining the terms of a discourse that could dialogue with other rationalities to those dominant in the “West.”<sup>1</sup> Subaltern studies therefore would retake the histories of uprisings, insurgencies, rebellions, and national identities without subjecting them to the criteria that privilege moments where elites have organized them according to their political programs. This perspective would enable us to break away from teleological schemata that situate the meaning of the past in terms of approximation to (a questionably more developed) modern present. We would thus avoid

privileging an elite “third world” intellectual cadre that would have immediate access to subalterns. Quite the contrary, it would register the signs that inscribe “me,” the “third world” intellectual (or, for that matter, the “first world” sympathizer) as a collaborator of colonial discourses. As John Beverley has put it: “Subaltern studies begins with a critique of the adequacy of any intellectual construction of the subaltern since, nolens volens, the constitution of the intelligentsia itself and intellectual discourse and its institutions is not unrelated to the production of subalternity itself.”<sup>2</sup> Colonialist writing practices, then, do not just pertain to the (early) colonial period; rather, they inform contemporary modernization programs that folklorize forms of life and deplore the loss of old—thereby confining Indian cultures to the museum and the curio shop.

In the span of a decade after the conquest of Mexico, Mesoamerican civilizations came to be conceptualized as a form of antiquity by missionaries and crown officials. War, the burning of books, the persecution of spiritual leaders forced a way of life into clandestinity. Indigenous cultures, in the lingo of the early missionaries, became *antiguallas* (ancient history, old customs)—an array of cultural practices that Indians held in esteem regardless of their proscription by the Catholic Church. Paradoxically, the missionary’s impulse to eradicate (to extirpate idolatries and superstitions) was intimately bound to a will to preserve (to resurrect the grandeur and moral order of old). Mexican historiography of the pre-Columbian period has been from its inception Janus-like: it at once has preserved a memory of old and severed contemporary Indian “presents” from history. (This exclusion from history should be understood as constituting a mode of “living history” rather than as verifying a recalcitrance to modernity). Ancient Mexico is conceptualized as *dead*—which does not exclude a ghostlike continuity that forevermore threatens the social order or progress—and becomes a patrimony of the *patria* (the fatherland) as early as Fray Diego de Durán’s *Historia de las Indias de la Nueva España e islas de Tierra Firme* (ca. 1580) and of the *nación* (the nation) since the Independence from Spain in 1821. It is not so much a question of Indians having historical significance only insofar as they could be integrated into the Church or the nation, but of using *their* history against them. Colonialist discourses first proscribe Mesoamerican cultures and then reduce the effects of the destruction—the Indian “presents”—to shadows of the ancient grandeur.<sup>3</sup>

Mexico’s *Clio*, from the reconstruction of the pre-Columbian world in the Codex Mendoza (ca. 1540) to the collection of past and present indigenous artifacts in the Museo Nacional de Antropología e Historia in Mexico City (1964), has tended to privilege antiquarian historiography. Antiquarianism, I must add, does not preclude building monuments to better preserve the meaning of its findings. Those familiar with Friedrich Nietzsche’s *The Use and Abuse of History* will not fail to recall his preference for the term “polypsest” over

“palimpsest” in his discussion of antiquarian history. Antiquarian historians would not only read the scribbles of the past but also reconstruct the past from its multiple rubbings (erasures). The antiquarian identifies the history of his town, the nation, with the history of the self: “He greets the soul of his people from afar as his own, across the dim and troubled centuries.” But the antiquarian also brings about one more erasure as it “undervalues the present growth.”<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, collections of the pre-Columbian pasts have had corresponding subaltern Indian presents. The story of the collection of past and present indigenous artifacts tends to be told in progressivist terms that privilege the emergence of the social sciences.<sup>5</sup> Against a monumental history that reads the past to find a kernel of the present and projects a present mentality into the past, I seek to elaborate an archaeology of the historiography of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica and its effects on the indigenous population. This archaeology does not pretend to have access to a more objectivist view of the past, however, but it is fully motivated by a desire to understand how indigenous people have been and continue to be marginalized through the expropriation of their cultures and history. These are the tasks of a book-length project that goes beyond the scope of a single essay.

Here I illustrate my project with two instances of writing violence in Mexican history: (1) the production of the Codex Mendoza in the mid-sixteenth century and (2) Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora’s account of the 1692 riots in Mexico City and Tlaxcala in *Alboroto y motín de los indios de México*. Examining the Codex Mendoza enables us to trace how the *tlacuiloque* as writers of history were subordinated to Spanish historiography by a Spanish interpreter. Looking at *Alboroto y motín de los indios de México* enables us to isolate forms of subaltern insurgency in spite of, perhaps because of, Sigüenza y Góngora’s racist phantasms.<sup>6</sup> Choosing these unique texts enables me to address two related and distinct modalities of collecting and recollecting the past. Their readings here are intended as examples of the type of work my research envisions, rather than finished studies of either text or historical moment. They exemplify two archaeological tasks implicit in the definition of subaltern studies on which I elaborate: (a) drawing an inventory of the systems of thought that have informed the collecting of the pre-Columbian past; and (b) identifying life forms and rationalities in documents whose purposes were not to record them as such but to provide information for their eradication or neutralization.<sup>7</sup> By conceptualizing “pre-Columbian pasts and Indian presents,” I seek to define a terrain for reading Mexican history against the grain. It is no longer a question of opposing the masses (Indian presents and their representation) to the great men (pre-Columbian pasts and their collectors), nor simply of writing history from the bottom up, but of avoiding—indeed, destroying—the grounds that privilege *up* in interpretation.

Although this work bears similarities to that of Enrique Florescano's *Memoria mexicana* and Serge Gruzinski's *Conquest of Mexico*, it differs from theirs in that I do not aim to document degrees of acculturation or describe processes of occidentalization as consequences of literacy. Rather, I seek to examine forms of life that are often seen as undeveloped or historically ineffective. If one fetishizes the letter of the alphabet by positing it as the most evolved system of writing, for example, one also fetishizes the alphabet by defining the meanings that it produces as univocal—for there might be several pictographic versions of an event in any given community, strictly defined rules of what can be said about a pictograph, alphabetical inscriptions of oral texts that do not erase their own logic, and writers and painters who know not what they write and paint. But who would lack some form of acculturation or hybridity after contact? Subalternity cannot be thought outside colonialism or capitalism. As Dipesh Chakravarty has argued, "Stories about how this or that group in Asia, Africa or Latin America resisted the 'penetration' of capitalism do not constitute 'subaltern' history, for subaltern histories do not refer to a resistance prior and exterior to capital."<sup>8</sup>

#### The Codex Mendoza and the *Encomienda*

The Codex Mendoza (figure 2.1) consists of three parts, providing a pictographic account of (1) the history of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, (2) Mexico-Tenochtitlan's tributaries, and (3) the life cycle of the average Aztec at the time of the conquest. It is important to note that the third part also contains information regarding personal services and labor tribute. Scholars have generally agreed that the Codex Mendoza was produced by several *tlacuilos* (painter-writers) and that it is representative of the best colonial school of painters. Prototypes for the historical and tribute components have been identified by Elizabeth Hill Boone and Frances Berdan.<sup>9</sup> Gordon Brotherston, however, has pointed out that the "[Codex] F é j é r v á r y exactly anticipates the Mendoza Codex, which deals first with the conquest and levying of tribute items and then with birth, growth, and the duties of the citizen of Tenochtitlan."<sup>10</sup>

The different components abide in different degrees to pre-Columbian writing conventions. It is generally agreed that the historical components do not contain formal deviations from similar pre-Columbian texts. Berdan, following the research of Donald Robertson, has pointed out that the scribe of the Matrícula de Tributos, a pre-Columbian prototype of the tributary section, composed the sequence of town glyphs and the corresponding tributes "against the direction of reading," while the Mendoza scribe wrote them with or toward the direction of the reading."<sup>11</sup> Brotherston's observation that the Codex F é j é r v á r y anticipates the third section of the Codex Mendoza, the so-called ethnographic part, is not self-evident from a perusal of the pictographic

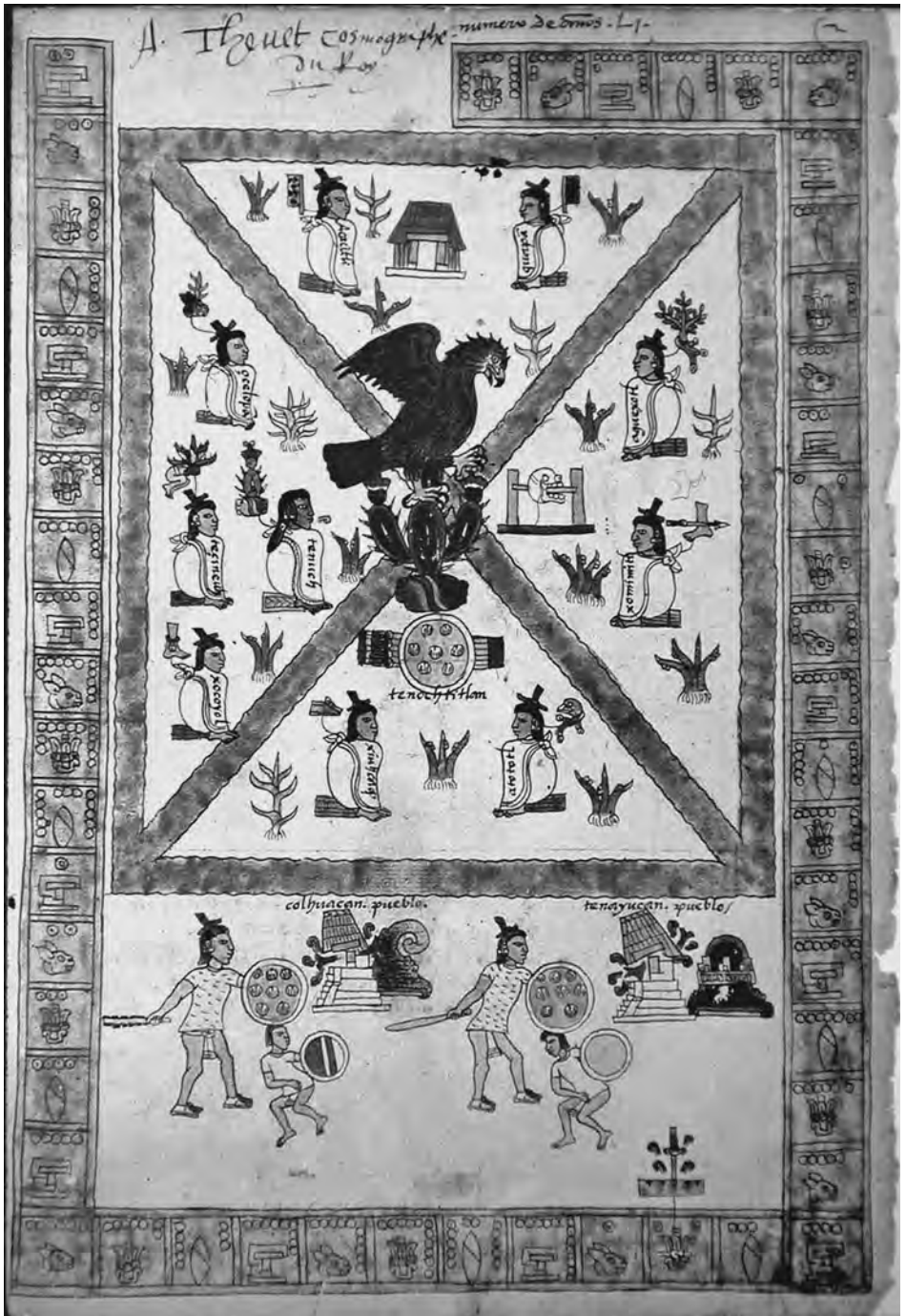


FIGURE 2.1. Tenochtitlan. Codex Mendoza. Folio 14. MS. Arch. Selden. A1. Courtesy of the Bodleian Library.

conventions in the F $\acute{e}$ j $\acute{e}$ r $\acute{v}$ ary. But even if there were no pre-Columbian prototypes for this section, the use of (what would at least be interpreted as) an indigenous form of writing would authenticate the information regarding personal service and labor tribute. Rather than isolating this section as ethnographic, we ought to see the whole Codex Mendoza as the result of an ethnographic project and as an example of the rhetorical use (in this case by the Spaniards) of pictographic writing.<sup>12</sup>

The Codex Mendoza testifies to the continuation of a pictographic tradition as well as to the epistemological need to fill in the gap created by the burning of books in the early missionary campaigns of the 1520s and 1530s. The Mendoza is an imaginary elaboration that at once provides historical information *about the past* and reproduces, as it were, a document *from the past*. It marks a turning point in colonial history when ethnography fulfilled an ancillary function to define governmental policies, to aid judges, and to inform missionaries. The Codex Mendoza, however, was produced for a European audience rather than to solve legal disputes among Amerindians or to identify superstition and idolatry.

After the conquest *tlacuiloque* became indispensable to the information-retrieval project of reconstructing the pre-Columbian past in such documents as the pictorial section of Bernardino de Sahag $\acute{u}$ n's Florentine Codex, the tribute records in the Codex Osuna, and the account of the Tlaxacalan participation in the conquest in the Lienzo de Tlaxcala. Iconic script, moreover, recorded information from within the indigenous cultures that a purely alphabetical text could not contain. Spanish missionaries and authorities were concerned with creating a code to understand the Indian mind from within and thus further its occidentalization. Beyond this will to objectify and extirpate indigenous cultures, indigenous people used alphabetical writing and "European-style" painting in forms that were not directly and explicitly part of the colonial order meant to repress them. Contemporary scholars, however, tend to emphasize degrees of purity in their classification of indigenous pictographic documents. In this regard, studies of the strokes of the main *tlacuilo* of the Codex Mendoza indicate an adoption of cursive line that manifest acculturation.<sup>13</sup> But rather than seeing the Mendoza as a more or less authentic example of pre-Columbian writing or evaluating the "correctness" of the information it contains, here we observe how the production of texts in the native tradition fulfills the rhetorical function of authenticating data—pictographic texts would seem to contain more reliable data about the pre-Columbian social order.

We lack detailed information regarding the production of the Codex Mendoza. We also ignore the interests that informed its production as well as the identity of the interpreter who wrote glosses, supplemented the pictographic



text with an alphabetical narrative, and provided descriptions and explanations of the nature of iconic script. At the end of the alphabetical narrative, the interpreter complains that the *tlacuiloque* have taken too long to produce the text: “diez dias antes de la partida de la flota se dio al ynterpretador esta ystoria para que la ynterpretase el qual descuydo fue de los yndios que acordaron tarde y como cosa de corrida no se tuvo punto en el estilo que conuenia ynterpretarse” [the interpreter was given this history ten days prior to the departure of the fleet, and he interpreted it carelessly because the Indians came to agreement late; and so it was done in haste and he did not improve the style suitable for an interpretation.]<sup>14</sup>

These remarks are extraordinary for the light they shed on the seriousness of interpretation in colonialist discourses. The interpreter underscores the accuracy of his translation into Spanish: “Y aunque las ynterpretaciones ban toscas no se a de tener nota sino a la sustançia de las aclaraciones lo que significan las figuras / las quales ban byen declaradas por ser como es el ynterpretador dellas buen lengua mexicana” [and although the interpretations are crude, one should only take into account the substance of the explanations that explain the drawings; these are correctly presented, because the interpreter of them is well versed in the Mexican language].<sup>15</sup> The interpreter implies that the substance of his comments—the facts, as it were—are correctly documented in his glosses and alphabetical narrative. It is a question of style, of the appropriate historical genre, that is at stake in this commentary.

The interpreter confesses that his use of Moorish terms like *alfaqui* and *mezquitas* rather than *sacerdote* and *templo* was a mistake: “fue ynadevertancia del ynterpretador poner tales nombre que son moriscos” [it was a mistake for the interpreter to use the Moorish words]. But more problematic than these misnomers is the style he was forced to adopt because of the rush: “porque no se dio lugar al ynterpretador de nyngun vaga / y como cosa no acordaba ny pensaba se interpreto a uso de proçeso” [because the interpreter did not take time or work at all slowly; and because it was a matter neither agreed upon nor thought about, it was interpreted according to legal conventions].<sup>16</sup> Legal accounts or *relaciones* as a genre would approximate a zero degree of emplotment insofar as the writer limited himself or herself to stating the particulars and abstained from drawing their universal significance—that is, from historical interpretation. Furthermore, the “uso de proçeso” points to the legal framework in which pictographic documents were used.

But the passage also insinuates that the interpreter did not know why the text was solicited in the first place: “como cosa no acordada ny pensada.” Clearly he was a latecomer in the chain of production. Given the structural similarity with the Codex Féjérvváry, we need not assume an active Spanish agency organizing the content of the text according to a set of questions.

From a legal perspective, the information regarding who paid tribute is relevant; however, the specific kind (such as warrior suits made of feathers) lacks relevance given Spanish needs. But from a political perspective, the record of labor tribute in the third section was crucial. The value of this data for the Spaniards would reside in its form rather than its contents: who paid tribute to whom and in what kinds? The interpreter complains of not having had enough time to reflect on the contents of the pictorial text, but also, perhaps more important, not enough time to provide a proper narrative because he ignored the purpose of the text.

We are asked to supplement the limitations: “El estilo grosero e ynterpeçacion de lo figurado supla el lector” [The reader must excuse the rough style in the interpretation of the drawings in this history].<sup>17</sup> (The English translators have chosen “to excuse” (that is, to dissimulate, to pretend that it is not there) as the meaning of the Spanish word *suplir*. But this verb also means “to integrate what is missing” as well as “to put oneself in the place of other.” (The definition is, according to the *Diccionario de la Real Academia*: “Cumplir o integrar lo que falta en una cosa, o remediar la carencia de ella. // 2. Ponerse en lugar de uno para hacer sus veces.”) The reader is called to take the place of the interpreter and thus supplement his faulty interpretation. In the horizon of interpretation, an oral test (that is, the deliberations by those who know or will make sense of why the text was produced) will supplement writing, will add material, and will take the place of the interpreter. The differentiation of pictographic from alphabetical writings as requiring an oral interpretation, as not containing a univocal content, would seem to be breached (in spite of the interpreter’s views on the question) in this appeal to the reader to supplement.

Although the style of the Spanish commentary resembles legal conventions, the intent and nature of the interpreter’s alphabetic text is to draw out the significance of the contents. The generic constraint of the *relación* to an account of particulars does not mean that the genre did not lend itself to *allegoresis* (stating one thing and meaning another); in this case its “rough style” was circumstantial. The interpreter calls for more interpretation rather than a zero degree of emplotment. Given that the text contains a history, he suggests an implicit narrative resolution with universal significance. One wonders, however, whether the historical nature of the text resides in the pictographic account or in the alphabetical section that needs to be supplemented by the readers. If the pictographic text is *a* history, the interpreter’s deficiency would merely consist of a weak *reading*.

But then what was the purpose of glossing and translating? To simply facilitate a reading for King Charles V? But what was the urgency, if the purpose of the text was simply to interpret iconic script for the king? Why produce a text that approximates the writing convention of pre-Columbian traditions? Was



this a mere rhetorical effect to reinforce a political argument? My guess is that the Codex Mendoza was part of a series of documents produced to legitimize the *encomienda* in New Spain either on the eve of, or in the immediate years after, the promulgation of the New Laws of 1542 that outlawed the institution of Indian tribute to Spaniards. The New Laws abolished the *encomienda*, but they were not accepted passively. Viceroy Blasco Núñez de Vela was killed when he attempted to enforce the New Laws in Peru. In New Spain there was a series of protests and a vast number of letters were written by members of the religious orders to defend the legality and economic value of individual *encomienda* as well as of the system as a whole. Since the Codex Mendoza was lost to a French corsair on its way to Spain (eventually becoming part of André Thevet's collection of American artifacts), we ignore what effect it would have had either before or after the promulgation of the New Laws. By 1546, however, the New Laws had undergone a series of amendments that revoked laws that had prohibited the inheritance of *encomiendas* and dissolved the disposition that took Indians away from *encomenderos* who mistreated them.

The Codex Mendoza's description and account of the tribute paid to Tenochtitlan establishes a tradition where the *encomienda* would be a continuation of and not an alien structure to the Amerindian world. By documenting rigorous order in the third section, the reader may supplement both iconic and alphabetical texts with a reflection on how the exercise of colonial domination and exploitation were not alien to the pre-Columbian order. Clearly, the Codex Mendoza validates tribute paid to *encomenderos* in the form of labor and personal service. The history of Mexico-Tenochtitlan gives us a clue to its ideological elaboration. As the narrative moves into the last Mexican ruler, Moctezuma (there is no mention of Cuahutemoc, whom Cortés hanged after the fall of Tenochtitlan in 1521), the history of Mexico-Tenochtitlan surreptitiously turns into the history of New Spain. The validity of New Spain as a political institution is grounded in a past that it destroyed: "y estando en el dicho señorío amplio mas en todo extremo el ynperio mexicano / dominando sobre todos los pueblos de desta Nueva España en que le dauan y pagavan grandes tributes y de balor de mucha Riqueza" [and during his reign he greatly extended the Mexican empire, ruling over all the towns of this New Spain, so they gave and paid large and richly valuable tributes].<sup>18</sup> Rather than merely seeing the capitalization of *Riqueza* as an isolated calligraphic anomaly, we ought to observe that it recurs with other "R"-words such as in "muchos estremos y Respetos," "majestad que les Representaua," and "Reconocimiento de vasallaje."<sup>19</sup> Thus the history of Mexico-Tenochtitlan becomes the antiquity of New Spain and legitimates the new political order while subordinating the indigenous population to the new Spanish lords. The colonial order must impose the discipline that gave Moctezuma *Respeto* (respect), *majestad que Rep-*

*resentaua* (sovereignty that he represented), and *Reconocimiento de vasallaje* (recognition of vassalage).

The subordination of the Indians can best be grasped in the summary mention that the interpreter makes of the *tlacuilos*: “el qual descuydo fue de los indios que acordaron tarde” [because the Indians came to agreement late].<sup>20</sup> We must avoid the temptation of reducing the *tlacuilos* to mere artisans that knew not what they wrote; this position would reiterate the interpreter’s undermining of the *tlacuilos*. In doing this, we collaborate with the culture of conquest that informed the production of this text. Rather than pressing the *tlacuiloque*—that is, their text—to deliver the goods, to read it as a source of data, we ought to put its silences into play with the power dynamics that inscribed the *tlacuiloque* as incompetent. This statement ultimately foregrounds the new intellectual elite that claims authority “por ser como es el ynterpretador dellas buena lengua mexicana” [because the interpreter of them is well versed in the Mexican language].<sup>21</sup> We can read in the *tlacuiloque*’s disagreements a lack of stable information (that is, the old books had been burned), but more interesting—at least to me—is a cautious reserve (for example, clandestine cultural practices).

Sixteenth-century efforts to reconstruct life before contact not only had the administrative and ideological implications of the Codex Mendoza, regarding the *encomienda* and the payment of tribute, but also responded to a lack of knowledge regarding the everyday life of the Indian present. Franciscan missionaries such as Andrés de Olmos, Toribio de Benavente Motolinía, and Bernardino de Sahagún, the Dominican Diago Durán, and the Jesuit Juan de Tovar justified collection information about the pre-Columbian period on the void of knowledge caused by the systematic burning of books and censorship of religious practices that drove native leaders into clandestinity. Durán’s *Historia de las Indias de la Nueva España e islas de Tierra Firme* is a particularly good source to analyze historical antiquation as a will to eradicate Nahuatl culture (that is, subjecting indigenous knowledge as superstition and idolatry) and to appropriate the institution of history (constituting the Nahuas as incapable of writing their own history). A “reading in reverse” of Durán and other missionary ethnographies, however, would allow us to observe forms of resistance to processes of occidentalization. *Alboroto y motín de los indios de México* establishes connections between passive resistance and insurrection. The antiquarianism of the Codex Mendoza resides in the production of a document from the past that legitimates the Spanish colonial order and its oppression of Indians. In the case of *Alboroto y motín*, histories of the pre-Columbian past and the conquest locate places of memory in the city and provide a code for interpreting an Indian present. *Alboroto y motín* is a long, detailed letter to

the admiral Don Andrés Pez that described the heavy rains that destroyed the crops, the food shortages that followed, and the eventual uprisings.

### Of Books and Rage

A classic site where a pre-Colombian past and an Indian present are juxtaposed is the scene, on a July afternoon in 1692, in which Don Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora abandoned his desk and books to look out the window at a multitude of rebellious Indians in the streets of Mexico City.<sup>22</sup>

A nada de cuanto he dicho que pasó esta tarde me hallé presente, porque me estaba en casa sobre mis libros. Y aunque yo había oído en la calle parte del ruido, siendo ordinario los que por las continuas borracheras de los indios nos enfadan siempre, ni aun se me ofreció abrir las vidrieras de la ventana de mi estudio para ver lo que era hasta que, entrando un criado casi ahogando, se me dijo a grandes voces:—¡Señor, tumulto! Abrí las ventanas a toda prisa y, viendo que corría hacia la plaza infinita gente a medio vestir y casi corriendo entre, los que iban gritando: ¡Muera el Virrey y el Corregidor que tienem atravesado el maíz y nos matan de hambre!, me fui a ella.<sup>23</sup>

[I was not present at any of the events of this afternoon because I was at home over my books. Although I had heard part of the noise on the street, it did not occur to me, since ordinarily on account of the habitual drunkenness of the Indians we are continually disturbed by uproars, to open the glass partitions of the window of my study to see what it was about until a man servant came in almost choking with excitement and shouted to me: “Sir, a riot!” I opened the windows in all haste and seeing that an infinite number of people were running toward the Plaza, I also went half-dressed and almost running amidst those who kept shouting, “Down with the Viceroy and the Corregidor who have stopped our corn and who are killing us with hunger!”]<sup>24</sup>

Here we have the tranquility of the Creole savant, the collector of pre-Colombian artifacts and precious histories from the sixteenth century being disturbed by a “mob” of subalterns who were assaulting the deposits of corn and setting the city in flames. Our consummate antiquarian rushes to the palace to rescue the archives of the nation from the fires. He describes himself in heroic terms: “ya con una barrata, ya con una hacha, cortando vigas, apalancando puertas por mi industria, se le quitaron al fuego de entre las manos no solo algunos cuartos del palacio sino tribunales enteros y de la ciudad su major archivo”<sup>25</sup> [with a bar and with an ax I cut beams and pried open doors by my own efforts and not only some apartments of the Palace but whole halls and the best archives of the city were rescued from the fires.]<sup>26</sup> This passage has given place to readings of Sigüenza y Góngora that tend to either highlight his love for the nation (Zarate) or denounce his lack of solidarity with the Indians

(Iglesia). Others have seen in the *Alboroto y motín* a brand of *criollismo* (Paz), a pro-Spanish defense of privilege (Cogdell), and even a resistant carnivalesque text (Moraña).<sup>27</sup>

The task of subaltern studies, however, would consist of recuperating the strategies of mobilization, the interracial allegiances, the role of women, the anticolonial positionings, and the tactics of rumor that remain sedimented in Sigüenza y Góngora's text. But in doing this sort of reading, we should remain careful not to forget that we are dealing with an ideological elaboration; we should therefore avoid claiming access to reality itself. For we witness Sigüenza y Góngora's phantasms, not the uprising itself. It is not a love of Indian things that Sigüenza y Góngora loses in the rebellion of 1692. We should trace instead his fear of insurgency by people of color (along with marginal Spaniards) and racial hatred. And in this respect Sigüenza y Góngora's denunciations of the unruliness of the "Indians"—as well as denunciations in the other versions of the story that blamed the uprising on the Spanish authorities—would manifest typical/tropical modes of containment and semantic control. Ranajit Guha's essay "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency" has isolated the rhetorical strategies used not only by colonial officials but also by nationalist historians to delimit the meaning and significance of subaltern insurgency. These range from condemnations of their tactics to negations of their political nature. Dismissals of the political character of the 1692 uprising can be traced in the work of such conservative critics as Octavio Paz, but it is also endemic to Gramscian readings that would highlight the limitations of peasant revolts.

Although the book *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*—Guha borrowed the title from a passage by Gramsci—tends to attribute a lack of sufficient political development to subalterns (without defining peasant rebellions, however, as prepolitical), this book lays out the practice of "writing in reverse" as a mode of reading the specific rationales that inform peasant insurgency.<sup>28</sup> Thus Guha's book traces rebellion in the use of language; differentiates insurgency from crime; maps out forms of struggle in burning, eating, wrecking, and looting; analyzes the language used to understand transmission; and critiques the territorial constructs of the local, the ethnic, the nation, and so forth. These conceptual rearrangements prove invaluable for a reading of Sigüenza y Góngora's account and other documents pertaining to the 1692 riots in Mexico City and Tlaxcala.

The populace (the *plebe*) was composed of "indios, negros criollos y bosales de diferentes naciones, de chinos, de mulatos, de moriscos, de mestizos, de sambaigos, de lobos y también de españoles que en declarandose zaramulos (que es lo mismo que pícaros, chulos y arrebatacapas) y degenerando de sus obligaciones, son los peores entre tan ruin canalla."<sup>29</sup> [Indians, Creoles, *bozales* from various nations, Chinese, mulattoes, moriscos, mestizos, *zambaigos*,

*lobos*, and Spaniards as well who, in declaring themselves *zaramullos* (which is the same as knaves, rascals, and cape-snatchers) and in falling away from their allegiance, are the worst of them all in such a vile rabble.<sup>30</sup>] Along with the mestizos and mulattoes, Sigüenza y Góngora identifies *zambaigos* (Indian and Chinese) and *lobos* (Indian and African). In this impulse to classify races and their miscegenation, the Spaniards are the worst lot because they do not assume the responsibilities of their race to the colonial order.

If all the castes were yelling, “¡Muera el virrey y quantos lo defendieren!” [Death to the Viceroy and all those who defend him!], it is the Indians who yell, “¡Mueran los españoles y los gachupines (son los venidos de España) que nos comen nuestro maíz!” [Death to the Spaniards and the Gachupines (applied to those who have come from Spain) who are eating our corn!]. But it is the Indian women, however, who play a particular role in the circulation of rumor and the definition of an anticolonial agenda: “¡Ea señoras!—se decían las indias en su lengua unas a otras—¡vamos con alegría a esta guerra, y como quiera Dios que se acaben en ella los españoles, no importa que muramos sin confesión! ¿No es nuestra tierra? Pues ¿qué quieren en ella los españoles?”<sup>31</sup> [Ah, señoras!—the Indian women kept saying to each other in their own language—let us go joyfully into this war. If God wills that the Spaniards be wiped out in it, it does not matter if we die without confession! Isn’t this our land? Then what are the Spaniards doing in it.<sup>32</sup>] The Indian women denounce the colonial situation and defy any threat of punishment in the afterworld, “no importa que muramos sin confesión” [it does not matter if we die without confession].<sup>33</sup>

Sigüenza y Góngora does not comment on this anticolonial shout, which records the uprising as a godless act. And, of course, he does not see himself as a colonized subject, but he does concede that as far as the Indians are concerned, the Spanish occupation of the New World is a colonial situation.<sup>34</sup> By singling out the Indian women as emitting this cry in their tongue, he would seem to suggest that the castes and the marginal Spaniards could not identify themselves with this specific articulation of anticolonial sentiment. Their plight and source of unrest resulted from socioeconomic injustices and obviously, as far as the castes were concerned, from the racism of the dominant peninsular and Creole Spaniards. As such, the castes’ rioting must be understood in terms of racial differentials prevalent in what Mary Louise Pratt has called contact zones.<sup>35</sup> Sigüenza y Góngora seems to make a distinction between white Spaniards and people of color: “reconocí con sobrado espacio (pues andaba entre ellos) no ser solos indios los que allí estaban sino de todos colores sin excepción alguna.” [I readily recognized (for I walked right among them) that not only Indians were present but all the colors without exception whatsoever.]<sup>36</sup>

Although the term *todos colores* could include Spaniards, the emphasis on color highlights the gravity of the events in that the castes solidarized with the Indians. Sigüenza y Góngora goes on to add that the Indians gained the following of the other castes (of all those who frequented the *pulquerías*) by carrying around an Indian woman who pretended to be dead. The display of the “corpse” served to mobilize the masses in the market. Looting ensued and the main governmental buildings were set in flames. The rioters targeted buildings that were locations of power or residences of officials as the viceroy and the *corregidor*. Although the stands at the marketplace were ransacked, there was no indiscriminate burning of private residences.

Let us now look into the role of rumor in mobilizing the crowd and the phantasms it generates in Sigüenza y Góngora’s text. He wonders about the discourses that circulated among the Indians during the night: “¿Quién podrá decir con toda verdad los discursos en que gustarían los indios toda la noche?” The rumor prompts the phantasm of Indian women calling a drunken mob to kill the viceroy, to loot, and to take over the city: “Creo que, instigándolos las indias y calentándolos el pulque, sería el primero quitarle la vida luego el día siguiente al señor virrey; quemarle el palacio sería el segundo, hacerse señores de la ciudad y robarlo todo.”<sup>37</sup>

Whether this is exactly what the Indians said in the midst of the night should not concern us; what is important here is that Sigüenza y Góngora conveys the efficacy of rumor by wondering about other worse inequities: “otras peores iniquidades.” Rumor suggests the phantasm of an irrational mob: “y esto, sin tener otras armas para conseguir tan disparatada y monstruosa empresa sino las del desprecio de su propia vida que les da el pulque y la advertencia del culpabilísimo descuido con que vivimos entre tanta plebe, al mismo tiempo que presumimos de formidables” [and they had no other weapons to succeed in such a foolish and monstrous undertaking than those of the indifference to their own lives, which *pulque* gives them, and the consciousness of the exceedingly culpable carelessness with which we live among a great populace which, at the same time, we suspect of being dangerous].<sup>38</sup>

Rumor circulates information that terrifies the Spaniards with the prospect of a city ruled by Indians. But by signaling the efficacy of rumors, my analysis borders with a justification of the worst fears regarding the “irrationality” of the Indians. My point, however, is to evoke a cry that says, “Enough!”—a threatening “*órale!*” as exemplified by Subcomandante Marcos in a September 22, 1994, communiqué: “El México de abajo tiene vocación de lucha, es solidario, es banda, es barrio, es palomilla, es raza, es cuate, es huelga, es marcha y mitin, es toma tierras, es cierre de carreteras, es ‘no les creo!’, es ‘no me dejo,’ es ‘órale!’”<sup>39</sup> This popular language cannot be translated without distortion. For instance, *banda* or *palomilla* would call for “gang,” but Marcos emphasizes a



vocation for solidarity. The “no les creo” [I don’t believe you], “no me dejo” [I will not take it] sums up the “órale!,” which something like “enough!” would hardly do justice.<sup>40</sup>

Sigüenza y Góngora’s account seems to dismiss the feasibility of taking over the city, but it expresses the determination of the Indians to engage the Spaniards. *Pulque*, writes Sigüenza y Góngora, is to be blamed for arousing the Indians. The difference between the efficacy of rumor and its phantasm is that the hysteria of Sigüenza y Góngora leads him to imagine a generalized and indiscriminate violence. But there is no evidence of an indiscriminate murder of Spaniards in his text. On the contrary, Spaniards do murder Indians to take away stolen merchandise. Sigüenza y Góngora partially blames the uprising on the vulnerability and ostentatiousness of the Spaniards, who live in a city without walls separating them from the Indian quarters. In the aftermath of the rebellion, Sigüenza y Góngora recommended that Indians should be forbidden from living in the center of Mexico City and be confined to several barrios on the periphery. The viceroy ordered on July 11, 1692, that within twenty days all Indians should move to their barrios.<sup>41</sup>

Murmur was also a preferred mode of communication. At Mass a few days before the uprising, “al entrar [el virrey] por la iglesia se levantó un murmullo no muy confuso entre las mujeres (pues lo oyeron los gentileshombres y pajes que le asistían, ¿cómo pudo su exelencia dejar de oirlo?) en que feamente le execraban y maldecían, atribuyendo a sus omisiones y mal gobierno la falta de maíz y la carestía de pan” [a not very indistinct murmur arose among the women (if the gentlemen-in-waiting and the pages who were in attendance heard it, how could His excellency fail to do so?) as he entered the church; they were execrating and cursing him in an ugly fashion, attributing the shortage of corn and the high price of bread to neglect and poor management on his part].<sup>42</sup>

For Sigüenza y Góngora the viceroy did nothing more than pretend not having heard the grumble, the “órale!” Women had been murmuring and circulating rumors since the seventh of April. This “secret” (hence, illegitimate) communication eventually developed into a public outcry. Sigüenza y Góngora gives us a version of the riot’s origins in which he accuses the Indian women of monopolizing corn for tortillas and then buying *pulque* with the money. The men, seeing that their women were favored over Spanish women (Sigüenza y Góngora specifies that Indian women were the only ones who knew how to make tortillas), attributed the preferential treatment to Spanish fear of Indian wrath. Thus a strategic frightening of the Spaniards preceded the rebellion: “se determinaba [la plebe] a espantar (como dicen en su lengua) a los españoles” [(the populace) made up its mind to scare off the Spaniards (as they say in their own language)].<sup>43</sup>

There are several issues to sort out in this passage. Why did Sigüenza y Góngora emphasize that the Indians say “*espantar en su lengua*”? One wonders whether he was translating or simply documenting the use of the Spanish word in Nahuatl. He also underscored that the Indian women used their language when they contested the Spanish colonial claims over their lands. These specifications on the use of (most likely) Nahuatl implies that Spanish might not have been the common language to communicate across racial and ethnic lines, or at least that Nahuatl was generally understood. Anthropologists and linguists have documented that Indians in both the Andes and Mexico tend to speak Spanish when drunk. Indeed, drunkenness goes hand in hand with the use of Spanish to condemn colonial regimes, as can be witnessed in a passage from Reginaldo de Lizarraga’s *Descripción breve del Perú*:

y cuando están borrachos entonces hablan nuestra lengua, y se preguntan cuando los cristianos nos hemos de volver a nuestra patria, y porque no nos echan de la tierra, pues son más que nosotros, y cuando se ha de acabar el ave maría, que es decir cuando no les hemos de compeler a la doctrina.

[and it is when they are drunk that they speak our tongue, and they ask each other when are we the Christians going to go back to our fatherland, and why don’t they throw us out of their land, since they are more than us, and when will the Hail Mary end, which means when will we not compel them to hear the doctrine.]<sup>44</sup>

This is the same colonial situation and anti-Christian sentiment that we find in Sigüenza y Góngora, but the use of Spanish has a specific political motivation: to make sure that the Spaniards know how they feel about their oppression. The difference might reside in that in this instance violence remains exclusively on an imaginary plane, whereas in Sigüenza y Góngora’s account the Indians are already rioting. Although riots are both an actualization and an imaginary of violence, as a “place of rage” they are not limited to verbal attacks but also include burning buildings, looting, drinking *pulque*, and *espantar* the Spaniards with the threat of racial warfare.

In their observations on the consumption of alcoholic beverages, colonial officials and missionaries usually juxtaposed statements about a democratization of drunkenness after the colonization. From the very early colonial period, drunkenness, moreover, was associated with idolatrous practices. These commonplaces also recur in Sigüenza y Góngora. For instance, he describes the consumption of *pulque* in one day as greater than the amount that was consumed in one year in the pre-Columbian past: “abunda más el pulque en México solo en un día que en un año entero quando la gobernaban idólatras” [*pulque* is more plentiful in a single day in Mexico City than in a whole year when the capital was governed by idolaters].<sup>45</sup> More souls, according to

Sigüenza y Góngora, were sacrificed to the devil in the *pulquerias* of colonial Mexico than bodies in the temples of old. Thus ancient Mexico remained a paragon of morality, if not an object of desire in relation to the degeneracy of the contemporary Indians. There were, nevertheless, some Indians that retained the nobility of the past in their support of the prohibition of *pulque*: “y aun de los propios indios los pocos que conseruaban algo de nobleza Antigua” [and even by a few of the Indians themselves who had kept something of their former nobility].<sup>46</sup> Here he seems to privilege an Indian elite that tended to look after its own interests rather than feel solidarity with Indian subalterns. It is an elite concerned with retaining privileges that would keep them from labor drafts.<sup>47</sup>

Given that this nobility was subservient to the Spanish order, it is hard to understand Sigüenza y Góngora’s remarks about an Indian conspiracy. His account is only a brief version: “Las armas falsas, los miedos, las turbaciones de todo México . . . pedía para su expresión relación muy larga” [The false alarms, apprehensions and excitement in all Mexico . . . would require a very long account for adequate expression].<sup>48</sup> Other Spaniards trusted that the Tlaxcaltecas would come to their aid, but Sigüenza y Góngora discounted an assumed continuous fidelity to the crown since the Tlaxcaltecas rebelled the week after. The letter by an anonymous witness documents the exclusively subaltern nature of the Tlaxcala riots: “fué sola la plebe é indios *masaguales* los que hicieron la hostilidad, estando de parte de su Alcalde Mayor los caciques y nobles” [it was only the populace and the *masaguale* Indians who created the hostilities, for the caciques and the nobility were on the side of the Alcalde Mayor].<sup>49</sup> This letter also confirms Guha’s observation on how the specter of a conspiracy “has its source in the psychosis of the dominant groups.”<sup>50</sup> For example: “y esto que fue sola sospecha, llegó a cobrar fuerza, diciendo estaban convocados muchos pueblos y que tenían determinado el incendio de la ciudad” [and this that was only a suspicion, grew in force, saying that many towns had gathered and had the determination of burning the city].<sup>51</sup> The momentum did build up; however, the organizing principle should not be understood as a secret confabulation but as resulting from the same conditions of exploitation and oppression.

An aspect of this oppression was the subjection of native religions and knowledges. Idolatry and magic played an important role in the imaginary of violence, at least Sigüenza y Góngora’s phantasms. In this account Sigüenza y Góngora describes effigies of Spaniards in clay that were pierced with knives and lances also made of clay, bearing signs of blood on their necks as if their throats had been cut, which would manifest the anticolonial feelings that preceded the riots. These figures were found, according to Sigüenza y Góngora,

in the same place where Hernán Cortés's forces had been destroyed on the night he fled Tenochtitlan in 1520. Here Sigüenza y Góngora alludes to Indian histories that recorded this event and dedicated it to their major god, Huitzilopochtli, the god of war. This recollection of the defeat of Cortés's forces as they fled the siege of Tenochtitlan manifests a memory continuum in the Indian's historical consciousness.<sup>52</sup> This site of historical remembrance, if ominous to the Spaniards, was a source of joy for the Indians: "como ominoso para nosotros y para ellos feliz."<sup>53</sup> Indians retained a memory of old in present practices of their beliefs.

And here Sigüenza y Góngora reconnects the scene of reading the books of old with the current events and an ethnography of the present: "no habiéndoseles olvidado aún en estos tiempos sus supersticiones antiguas, arrojan allí en su retrato a quien aborrecen para que, como pereció en aquella acequia y en aquel tiempo tanto español, le suceda también a los que allí maldicen. Esto discurrí que significaban aquellos trastes por lo que he leído de sus historias y por lo que ellos mismos me han dicho de ellas cuando los he agregado."<sup>54</sup> This has been translated as "since they had not forgotten their ancient superstitions even in these days, they throw there in effigy those whom they hate in order that the Spaniards, whom they now curse, may suffer the same fate as those of the earlier date who perished in the canal. I inferred that this was the significance of those objects, judging by what I have read of their histories and by what they themselves told me about them when I have gathered them up."<sup>55</sup> Sigüenza y Góngora underscores the authority of his interpretation by alluding to his historical readings ("he leído de sus historias") and ethnographic research ("lo que ellos mismos me han dicho").

To Sigüenza y Góngora's credit, he preferred the version—actually he testifies as an eyewitness—that traces the beginnings of the uprising to the Indians themselves and not the castes or the poor Spaniards. The mobilization of the multitude presupposed an accurate analysis of the lack of corn: "No discurrían estos sin fundamento" [The latter were not without some basis]—moreover, a strategic use of "palabras devergonsadas" [lewd words], "pleitecillos que entre si trataban sin lastimarse" [petty quarrels among themselves in which they did not hurt each other], and "grandes corrillos" [large groups of loungers] were like "premisas de algún tumulto" [portents of a mob].<sup>56</sup> This letter testifies to the strategic deployment of noise (*Ruido*) in building an uprising. Obviously, Sigüenza y Góngora did not sympathize in the least with the insurgency initiated by the Indians, but despite his disapproval, perhaps because he intended to record its logic for counterinsurgency, his version of the events exemplifies and complements the rebellions studied by Guha in *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*. Traditional readings of insurgency in Latin America have tended to emphasize a lack of a political program and have raised the political

acumen that the leaders of independence movements displayed in the nineteenth century when they were able to regulate the mobilization of subalterns who by then had a long history of insurgency. One of the tasks of subaltern studies, however, is to retake these histories of uprisings, insurgencies, rebellions, and national identities without subjecting them to criteria that privilege moments where elites have organized them according to their own political programs.

#### In the Manner of a Short Conclusion

The Codex Mendoza has enabled us to trace the production of a document that not only represented the pre-Columbian past but also reproduced a text that would be taken for an authentic native document. If the *tlacuiloque* were copying from pre-Columbian prototypes, why did the viceregal authorities bother to produce a “copy” rather than send a pre-Columbian text? My guess has been that the production of the text by postconquest subjects would have a greater impact, since the subjects affected by the *encomienda* would seem to ratify its compatibility with ancient structures. In the end it did not matter what the Mendoza said about the kinds of tribute; what mattered was the fact that the system existed—especially in the form of labor tribute and personal services. The *tlacuiloque* in not agreeing among themselves suggest a form of silence of eschewing inquiry by missionaries, of “resisting the heat”—as Doris Sommer would put it.<sup>57</sup>

As an ethnographic document, however, the Codex Mendoza is not concerned with documenting idolatries and superstitions for their eradication—or, for that matter, resistance—but with establishing a socioeconomic precedent that would legitimize the *encomienda*. This collection of the pre-Columbian past therefore bears an immediate relationship to policies toward Indians. But the Indian present is not only subordinated to Spanish rule politically and economically but also intellectually. The interpreter casts the *tlacuilos* as inept and thus appropriates the institution of history. The key to recollecting the past—the task of interpreting the collection itself—now pertains to the Spanish specialist who presumes to understand pictographic writing and to be fluent in Nahuatl. In this text we witness how the constitution of an intellectual elite is inseparable from the production of subalternity.

Sigüenza y Góngora belongs to a later, fully consolidated intellectual elite that takes as a given—as a natural order—the subalternity of the Indian population; his commendation of the remains of an indigenous nobility strikes me as paternalistic. Sigüenza y Góngora collects pre-Columbian artifacts and early histories as an end in itself. He is an antiquarian in the strictest sense of the term; the preservation of old documents informs his will to collect the past. It is the pre-Columbian past as the antiquity of New Spain that fasci-

nates Sigüenza y Góngora, and not its significance to his contemporary Indians, who are perceived as an unruly mass with no (positive) resemblance to the ancient grandeur. But recollecting the past also enables him to decipher idolatrous and magical practices as well as the significance Indians gave to specific locations within the city. Beyond the archival Spanish written sources, these places of memory testify to living indigenous oral histories. Both the Codex Mendoza and *Alboroto y motín* provide materials for an inventory of the Culture of Conquest that produces subalternity, but *Alboroto y motín* also documents other rationalities to those dominant in the “West.” Sigüenza y Góngora’s text suggests how forms of passive resistance became fully articulated in the numerous rebellions that broke out in different parts of New Spain during the seventeenth century.

Scholars have tended to see these acts of insurgency not as political, as eruptions of violence without rationality, as sources of energy that had to wait for the political leadership of the Creole elites of the independence movements. If the meaning of history always comes from the future, the emergence of the nation in the nineteenth century privileged these readings of insurgent movements as undeveloped. The Zapatistas today function as a return of the repressed that reminds us that other rationalities could have very well informed other insurgencies in other times.