

## **The Staging of the *Fatalidad lastimosa* or the Creole Nation's Unviability**

Francisco A. Ortega  
Director, Centro de Estudios Sociales CES  
Associate Professor  
Department of History  
Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá

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### **Abstract**

Late in the afternoon of June 8, 1692 a violent uprising took place in Mexico City and underscored the frailty of colonial domination. The uprising, mostly by urban Indians and poor castas (Mestizos, blacks, and mulattoes), raised the worst possible fears within elite colonial circles as the rioters attacked, vandalized and set fire to the institutional centers of political control (the City Hall, jail, local archives, and the Viceroy's private quarters). Though riots and rebellions were rather common in New Spain, the events of 1692 were felt and articulated as catastrophic by colonial elite and several narratives were produced in the attempt to make sense out of them and to restore moral –if not social— order. Despite the fact that recent scholarship has produced a new approximation to the riot's social composition, the fundamental question of what did the elite see in these events that made them so utterly uneasy has not been properly addressed yet. In this essay I follow the historical account of the disturbances produced by Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora in a letter to his Spanish friend, the admiral Andrés de Pez. Combining discourse and textual analysis, I compare the document with other accounts of the riots, explore its rich figurative language, scrutinize its many allusion to past historical events and sources, and use an approach inspired by contemporary trauma theory in order to tease out what he found startling about the riots.

## Work in Progress

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*“Con la entrada de la noche fue creciendo la confusión y horror de los españoles y la libertad en los indios...”*

Antonio de Robles, “Relación del tumulto”<sup>1</sup>

### I. Introduction

In the late afternoon of June 8, 1692 a violent uprising took place in Mexico City that underscored the frailty of colonial domination. The revolt was the culmination of a calamitous chain of events that began one year before. Heavy rain, hailstorms, and floods had destroyed crops and caused many deaths. In addition, a thick blanket of humidity swamped Mexico's central valley; dense fog covered the sun for several weeks and blight ruined the wheat and the corn harvests. Food –especially bread and meat— became scarce and expensive. Furthermore, many of the city's inhabitants suspected that steep costs were largely due to government speculation and monopoly. Tensions with peasants and prominent Creole *hacendados* (ranchers) from neighboring provinces rose as the central government forced them to sell their cereals to the capital. Finally, a solar eclipse completely obscured the city, causing great fear, and served as an ominous sign for the general chaos eventually expressed in the massive riots. During the uprising Indians, mulattos, mestizos, blacks, and Spaniards (up to 10,000 according to one observer) sacked and burnt the Viceroy's quarters, the Corregidor's (district magistrate) house, the Cabildo (the municipal archives housing the bound books and judicial records), the Alhóndiga (public granary), and the jail, and forced the Viceroy to take

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<sup>1</sup> - In Antonio de Robles, *Diario de sucesos notables (1665-1703)*, 3 vols. (México: Editorial Porrúa, 1946): 252. I'd like to acknowledge the generosity and kindness of those who have read previous versions of this essay. In particular, I am grateful to José Antonio Mazzotti, Patrick O'Connor, Doris Sommer, Ricardo Padrón, and Liliana Obregón.

refuge in the distant Convent of San Francisco. Following the Viceroy's example, other official authorities also abandoned attempts to protect the city and its governing institutions. The riots and looting lasted for about five hours and the buildings burnt for several days after the incidents.<sup>2</sup>

The Spanish American colonial period was marked by repeated and violent disturbances. The area of New Spain (present day Mexico) was especially susceptible to such disturbances. José Rojas Garcidueñas, for instance, writes that in 1660

[...] se rebelaron los indios de la Villa de Guadalcázar [...] llegando hasta matar al Alcalde Mayor que les ofreció resistencia, nombrando luego autoridades de por sí [...]. Mucho más grave fue la rebelión de los tarahumares del año de 1684 [...] en 1690 [...] estalló en el norte una sublevación que puso en muy serio peligro el escaso control que las autoridades españolas ejercían ....<sup>3</sup>

In Mexico City there had been two major urban disturbances, one in 1624, which almost killed the Viceroy, and one in 1642, with strong separatist overtones.<sup>4</sup> But even for a region accustomed to such periodic social disturbances, the events of 1692 reached

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<sup>2</sup> - The principal sources for my account include the following: Irving Leonard, *Don Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora: A Mexican Savant of the Seventeenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1929); Douglas Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660-1720* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1994); and Antonio Lorente Medina, *La prosa de Sigüenza y Góngora y la formación de la conciencia criolla mexicana* (México: FCE, 1996): 143-55. Leonard transcribed a number of documents found in Seville's Archivo General de Indias pertaining to the disturbances (*Patronato*, leg. 226) and published them in Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, *Alboroto y motín de México del 8 de junio de 1692*, ed. Irving Leonard (México: Talleres Gráficos del Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Historia y Etnografía, 1932).

<sup>3</sup> - José Rojas Garcidueñas, *Don Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora: Erudito Barroco* (México: Ediciones Xochitl, 1945): 104-105. For a list of uprisings during the seventeenth century, see Chester Lyle Guthrie, "Riots in Seventeenth Century Mexico City," in *Latin American History. The Colonial Experience*, ed. Lewis Hanke and Jane Rausch (New York: Markus Wiener, 1993), 289-99, and Agustín Cue Canovas, *Historia social y económica de México, 1521-1854* (México, 1972), especially 183-87. Also, of related interest William Taylor, *Drinking, Homicide & Rebellion* (Stanford (CA): Stanford University Press, 1979): 113-51, and the collection of essays Susan Schroeder, ed., *Colonial Native Resistance and the Pax Colonial in New Spain* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press).

<sup>4</sup> - For details on both disturbances, see J. I. Israel, *Race, Class and Politics in Colonial México, 1610-1670* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975): 135-160; 209-216. An interesting primary account of the 1624 disturbance is found in Bernardino Urrutia, "Relazion del tumulto de Mex[i]co de 14 de henero de 1624. acaecido governdo. el exmo. sor. Dn. Diego Osorio Pimentel conde de Gelves. Marques de Priego. Virrei de aquel Reino. Para el exmo. Sr. Duq de olivares," in *Newberry Library, Ayer Collection, 1246* (Puebla de los Angeles, 1625), 422 Leaves.

alarming levels of violence and animated one of its many chroniclers to call the uprising “The [sorrowful fatality], by which the night of the 8<sup>th</sup> of June of this year of 1692 will remain infamous for many centuries.”<sup>5</sup> Today we know of several legal and personal accounts of the events, but none as vivid, complex and suggestive as the one written by the Royal Cosmographer, Don Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, in his letter to the Spanish Admiral Andrés de Pez in August of the same year.

In the following pages, I will focus on this letter’s articulation of the sorrowful fatality in order to explore the local elite’s understanding of the events. Though my reading takes into account what we know of subaltern perceptions of the events (through legal testimonies or by reading in-between lines) and though these subalterns certainly experienced the events as violent and catastrophic, I have decided not to assess their experience in this essay in order to better get at the mechanisms on charge of elite perception –in this case, Sigüenza’s—of subaltern subjects during times of social crisis. The examination of Sigüenza y Góngora’s letter is part of a broader manuscript examining Creole patriotic cultural politics titled “The role of the Creole Colonial Intellectual during times of crisis (1692-1825).”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> - In Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora, "Letter of Don Carlos de Sigüenza to Admiral Pez Recounting the Incidents of the Corn Riot in México City, June 8, 1692," in *Don Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora: A Mexican Savant of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Irving Leonard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1929), 210-277: 210. I have replaced Leonard’s translation of “*fatalidad lastimosa*,” “dismal misfortune,” for “sorrowful fatality,” which despite being awkward more forcefully and accurately conveys the original sense of an event-centered experience. The original reads “*La fatalidad lastimosa con que quedará infame por muchos siglos la noche del día ocho de junio*.” Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, “Alboroto y motín de México del 8 de junio de 1692,” in *Relaciones históricas*, ed. Manuel Romero de Tereros (México: Ediciones de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma, 1940). In order to facilitate its reading, parenthetical references to the Spanish 1940 edition (and occasionally to the 1929 English translation by Leonard) will be included within the main text. In addition, I have included the translation of the longer passages in a footnote following the main Spanish citation. Unless specified, the translation is from the already cited edition of the letter by Leonard. In the preface to the 1932 edition Leonard writes that: “Es ésta, sin duda alguna, la [relación] más detallada e interesante de todas las descripciones o relaciones que se hayan consignado en la época colonial no solamente del tumulto de los indios de México en el año 1692 sino de todos los disturbios ocurridos en el reino durante aquel siglo.” Sigüenza y Góngora, *Alboroto y motín de México del 8 de junio de 1692*: 12.

<sup>6</sup> - In this project, I critically outline and define the terms under which the cultural production of patriotism took place in two Spanish American societies by elite intellectuals during the eighteenth and

Sigüenza y Góngora (1645-1700), arguably Mexico's most important intellectual during colonial times, embodied the figure of the colonial *letrado*, a lettered man.<sup>7</sup> He was a poet, a philosopher, astronomer, antiquarian, a historian, and mathematics professor at the city's Royal University.<sup>8</sup> He descended from distinguished Spanish and Creole (i.e., Americans of Spanish descent) families that served as tutors and advisors to the Spanish Prince Balthazar Carlos and the Mexican Viceroy for over fifty years. Despite his closeness to the imperial administrative power, Sigüenza played a "key role in the spiritual revolution" that took place in New Spain during the seventeenth century.<sup>9</sup> The spiritual revolution proposed a harmonious continuity between the Aztec past and Imperial Spain, with the intent of establishing a foundational act that legitimated the Creole's emerging awareness of his own difference and political interests. Though Sigüenza never openly articulated a program of formal independence, his narrative project constituted a search for symbolic autonomy and progressive European

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early nineteenth centuries. I focus on the role of Creole (self-identified whites born in the Americas) intellectuals during the late colonial period, both in relation to institution building efforts and to the presence and pressure exerted by social unrest caused by *Castas* (people of mixed origins) and other non-European colonial subjects (blacks and Indians). Provisionally, the project is structured in five sections, an introduction, three chapters (centered on late seventeenth century Mexico, mid eighteenth century Peru, and early nineteenth century Gran Colombia), and a conclusion.

<sup>7</sup> - The term *letrado* refers to local public figures that developed in close association with the colonial bureaucratic apparatus. As Angel Rama writes "In the center of every [colonial] city, according to different degrees that achieved its fullest expression in the capital of the Viceroyalty, there was a *Lettered City* that composed the protective ring of power and was the executor of its orders: a wide variety of religious persons, administrators, educators, professionals, writers and a multitude of intellectual servants, everyone who used the pen was closely associated with the functions of power, and formed ... the model country of public servants and bureaucracy." Angel Rama, *La ciudad letrada* (New Hanover (NH): Ediciones del Norte, 1982): 33.

<sup>8</sup> - Several biographies exist of Sigüenza y Góngora in both Spanish and English. The best are Francisco Pérez Salazar, *Biografía de D. Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora* (México: Antigua Imprenta de Murguía, 1928); Leonard, *Don Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora: A Mexican Savant of the Seventeenth Century*; Rojas Garcidueñas, *Don Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora: Erudito Barroco*; Lorente Medina, *La prosa de Sigüenza y Góngora y la formación de la conciencia criolla mexicana*; and Kathleen Ross, *The Baroque Narrative of Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora* (Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> - Jacques Lafaye, *Quetzacóatl and Guadalupe*, B. Keen trans. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976): 61.

displacement, “the very expression of Creole society’s will to power.”<sup>10</sup> This narrative was carried out with unusual intensity, but in the same subtle subversive way in which the Colonial Baroque is said to be “the art of the counter-conquest.”<sup>11</sup>

At the beginning of the seventeenth century two major Spanish political projects coexisted in New Spain: the *encomenderos* (grantees who had rights to Indian tribute and labor) and the mendicant friars (millenarian religious orders who regarded American Indians as Edenic souls awaiting conversion).<sup>12</sup> The Crown, concerned by the *encomenderos*’ growing power, used the mendicant’s legislative initiatives to weaken the *encomenderos*’ political power and access to Indian labor.<sup>13</sup> Well before the beginning

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<sup>10</sup> - Ibid. , 66.

<sup>11</sup> - José Arrom defined the Colonial Baroque as the double practice of pledging allegiance while undermining metropolitan domination. See José Arrom, *Esquema generacional de las letras hispanoamericanas. Ensayo de un método.*, 2nd ed. (Bogotá: Instituto Caro y Cuervo, 1977): 67. In *Baroque Narrative*, Kathleen Ross defined Sigüenza y Góngora’s writing style as largely defined by such strategy. Further, it was within this baroque dynamics of power relations that, Octavio Paz writes, “Not content with being and feeling different from Spain, [New Spain] invented a universal destiny with which it confronted and countered Spanish universalism. New Spain wished to be the Other Spain: an empire, the Rome of America.” In “The Flight of Quetzalcóatl and the Quest for Legitimacy,” in *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of the Mexican National Consciousness, 1531-1813*, ed. Jacque Lafaye (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), ix-xxiv: xii.

<sup>12</sup> - For a discussion of the political vision of the mendicant orders, see John Leddy Phelan, “The Problem of Conflicting Spanish Imperial Ideologies in the Sixteenth Century,” in *Latin American History: Identity, Integration, and Nationhood*, ed. Frederick Pike (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1969). I have based my discussion of New Spain’s social milieu on the following historical accounts: Peter Bakewell, *Silver Mining and Society in Colonial México* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); Leslie Byrd Simpson, “El siglo olvidado de México,” in *El siglo de la depresión en Nueva España*, ed. Woodrow Borha (México City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1975), 141-54; Israel, *Race, Class and Politics in Colonial México, 1610-1670*; John TePaske and Herbert Klein, “The Seventeenth Century Crisis in New Spain: Myth or Reality?,” *Past & Present* 90 (1981): 116-135; Cope, *Limits of Racial Domination*. For the dynamics of cultural change, see Irving Leonard, *Baroque Times in Old Mexico: Seventeenth Century Persons, Places, and Practices* (Ann Arbor (MI): The University of Michigan Press, 1959); Charles Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule. A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519-1810* (Stanford (Ca): Stanford University Press, 1964); James Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest. A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Seventeenth Through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); Lafaye, *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe*; David Brading, *The Origins of Mexican Nationalism* (Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press, 1985); and Anthony Pagden, “Identity Formation in Spanish America,” in *The Language of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press, 1987), 51-93.

<sup>13</sup> - James Lockhart, “Encomienda and Hacienda: The Evolution of the Great States in the Spanish Indies,” in *Readings in Latin America History*, ed. Peter Bakewell, John Johnson, and Meredith Dodge (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985), 51-66: 64-65.

of the seventeenth century, as the Indian population in the Central Valley dwindled to 10% of pre-conquest time and the last of the mendicant friars died, a process of creolization was taking place whereby the *encomenderos*' descendants and other Spaniards turned settlers felt an acute sense of difference from *Peninsulares* (Spaniards).<sup>14</sup> This Creole sense of difference found its first important literary outlet in Balbuena's panegyric *Grandeza Mexicana* (1604)—“... If beauty is part of Heaven/Mexico may be the Heaven of the world,/ for here grows the best that the world enjoys ...” (V, 79)—and peaked during the second half of the seventeenth century with the popular flowering of the worship of the Virgin of Guadalupe, and Sigüenza's historical narratives, political treatises, and secular and sacred poetry.

While the Crown maintained political power through the bureaucratic apparatus (to which Creoles had only marginal access<sup>15</sup>), the latter preserved economic power through their tenure of large landholdings.<sup>16</sup> The result was the development of an incisive dialectic of mutual dependency and resentment. As Octavio Paz writes, the “Creoles scorned and detested the Indians as violently as they envied and hated the

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<sup>14</sup> - For estimates of native population during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, see William Sanders, "The Population of the Central Mexican Symbiotic Region, the Basin of México, and the Teotihuacán Valley in the Sixteenth Century," in *The Native Population of the Americas in 1492*, ed. William Denevan (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 76-150.

<sup>15</sup> - In fact, the political ideology of Creole patriotism and political posturing first emerged as a reaction against the Crown's reluctance to recognize the *encomenderos*' claim to government and restrictions on their eligibility to occupy government posts. Despite the ruling of the Royal Councilor Juan de Solórzano Pereira in his *Política Indiana*—“There can be no doubt that [Creoles] are true Spaniards, and by this title they should enjoy the rights, honors, and privileges of Spaniards and be judged like them” (1684 244a)—Creoles were barred from holding the most visible and important public offices, and in most respects of public life were spurned by Spaniards. This friction was specially aggravated in New Spain due to several reasons: the relative economic stability of the colony as opposed to metropolitan prolonged economic depression; the financial burden placed on the colony by Madrid; the long-standing conflict between often arrogant Spanish Viceroyes and the Creoles members of the city's Cabildo. See Richard Everett Boyer, *La gran inundación: Vida y sociedad en la ciudad de México (1629-1638)*, Antonieta Sánchez Mejorada trans. (México, D. F.: Editorial Melo, 1975). Their sense of aggravation was increased when the Crown decided to take measures favoring Indians over the *encomenderos*' presumed right to indiscriminately enjoy all local resources, including the natives' labor.

<sup>16</sup> - Enrique Semo, *Historia del capitalismo en México. Los orígenes, 1521-1763* (México: Ediciones Era, 1973): 258.

Spaniards.”<sup>17</sup> These sentiments found a place –though not a very clear one—in the events and dynamics that preceded and followed the 1692 uprising. For instance, in December of 1691, as hunger besieged the city, the Viceroy ordered farmers from Chalco –Mexico City’s breadbasket—to sell “their recent maize crop, then to open up their storehouses, and finally to dispatch the provinces’ entire maize supply, beyond the needed for purposes of survival.”<sup>18</sup> As expected, the Viceroy’s decree further fueled regional resentment and was later used against him in judicial proceedings.

Meanwhile, towards the end of the sixteenth century many indigenous communities collapsed under the effects of conquest, severe epidemics, or land expropriation, and a new social order replaced them—if not legally at least in social practice— as the main source of labor in Central Mexico. The new waged laborers (as opposed to *encomendados*), who worked the mines, the haciendas, and the city, were mostly uprooted Indians, and *castas*; together with a large number of impoverished Spaniards, they constituted Mexico’s growing plebeian society, whose symbiotism defined colonial life more decisively.<sup>19</sup> As historian Jacques Lafaye writes “The whole history of Mexico is a history of the growing role of the [plebeian] who before their assimilation into a society [...] could only express themselves in violence that plunged the country into interminable convulsions....”<sup>20</sup> Thus, the bureaucratic centralism and

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<sup>17</sup> - O. Paz, “The Flight of Quetzalcóatl.” Preface to Lafaye, *Quetzacóatl and Guadalupe*, xvi.

<sup>18</sup> - Cope, *Limits of Racial Domination*, 128.

<sup>19</sup> - Strictly speaking *castas* and plebe refer to different social groups. *Castas* designates those racially mixed people such as mestizos (descendants of Spanish and Indians) and mulattos (of Blacks and Spaniard). Plebes included also uprooted Indians, freed blacks, and poor Spaniards. During the following discussion, however, they will be used interchangeably mirroring usage of the time and reflecting the impossibility of distinguishing one from another. On the topic see Richard Konetzke, *El mestizaje y su importancia en el desarrollo de la población hispanoamericana durante la época colonial* (Madrid: Revista de Indias, 1957); Cope, *Limits of Racial Domination*; John Chance, *Race and Class in Colonial Oaxaca* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978); and Israel, *Race, Class and Politics in Colonial México, 1610-1670*.

<sup>20</sup> - Lafaye, *Quetzacóatl and Guadalupe*, 14.

mercantilism of New Spain is complemented by social relations governed by clientage and the firm belief that racial difference designated social place.

Sigüenza's nationalist project took place as the symbolic counterpart to these events.<sup>21</sup> In the bid to ground its narrative, it deliberately sought to syncretize Aztec mythology into the Creole's sense of communal belonging without ever challenging any racially suspect boundary. The indigenist sentiment which animated Sigüenza and others rested on the assumption that "The Indian [born in 1680] is a dead Indian." In fact, continues Lafaye, Sigüenza's work "is a certified report of the decease of the Aztec empire."<sup>22</sup> In 1681, he designed a Triumphal Arch to commemorate the arrival of the new Viceroy, the Marquis de la Laguna. The arch, which "loudly proclaimed itself to be a radical departure from tradition," represented the political virtues needed by a modern prince as illustrated by (Sigüenza's words) the "Monarchas antiguos del Mexicano Imperio."<sup>23</sup> The symbolic structure, which Sigüenza y Góngora supplemented with his own published commentary, expressed the sentiment that in a not so far future the Mexican monarchs might be "born from the ashes to which oblivion has consigned them, so that, like Western phoenixes, they may be immortalized by fame."<sup>24</sup>

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, writes Pagden, American Creoles felt that "they could truly appropriate a 'national' political tradition whose sources were to be

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<sup>21</sup> - The use of "nationalist" may seem anachronistic in this context. However, various critics have observed that Sigüenza's work represents a crucial moment in the re-direction of cultural energy towards the formation of a "Creole Nation." For a more extensive discussion, see Brading, *The Origins of Mexican Nationalism* and Pagden, "Identity Formation in Spanish America," 73-83.

<sup>22</sup> - Lafaye, *Quetzacóatl and Guadalupe*, 65.

<sup>23</sup> - Anthony Pagden, "From Noble Savages to Savage Nobles: The Criollo Uses of the Amerindian Past," in *The Uncertainties of Empire: Essays in Iberian and Ibero-American Intellectual History* (Great Yarmouth (GB): Variorum, 1994), 93. Sigüenza y Góngora's quote is from "Teatro de virtudes políticas que constituyen a un príncipe: Advertidas en los Monarcas antiguos del Mexicano Imperio," in *Teatro de virtudes políticas*. (México: UNAM-Porrúa, 1986), 3-148, 41.

<sup>24</sup> - As quoted in Pagden, "From Noble Savages to Savage Nobles," 93. Sigüenza probably learned indigenous languages in the Jesuit Colegio de Tepozotlán, where he studied as a child. Rojas Garcidueñas, *Don Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora*, 21-22.

found not only in the 'heroic piety' of the conquerors but more specifically in the civic achievements of the civilization they had overthrown."<sup>25</sup> In addition to these indigenist works, Sigüenza also appropriated imperial history in works such as *Parayso Occidental* (1684), and *Piedad Heroyca de Don Fernando Cortés* (1690), in order to extol the conquistadors' political –rather than military—virtues. *La Nación Criolla*, as Sigüenza called it, presupposed a natural continuity between the mentioned narratives by erasing the social antagonisms that existed among the protagonists. Furthermore, the Creole sense of exceptionalism and providentialism sharply contrasted with the political pessimism emanating from Madrid, though it did not directly threaten loyalty to the Empire.<sup>26</sup> As Paz remarks, it was a matter of two different orders of loyalty (xvi) in which the Creole was in a double bind: though scornful and fearful of the Indian, he appropriated his past; despite his loyalty to the Empire and the Church, he hated and envied the Spaniards

## II. The Letter

Sigüenza's letter has often been read as a stable and reliable repository of information concerning social relations during colonial times. Traditional readings accepted Sigüenza's view on the probable causes for the uprising –which he regarded to be the result of a combination of unwarranted political discontent on the part of Indians and the effect *pulque* (liquor) had over them (see 139-40; 164-66)—and take the letter to

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<sup>25</sup> - Pagden, "From Noble Savages to Savage Nobles," 72.

<sup>26</sup>- Indeed, the optimism that characterized early Creole writings contrasted with the pervasive pessimism articulated by some of the most incisive Spanish writers and political theorists. In 1687 Juan Alfonso de Lancina, a Spanish arbitrista and Sigüenza's contemporary, wrote about the kingdom: "I well know of a monarchy that could have towered over the world, had its planned not been erroneously sketched." In *Comentarios políticos*. Edited by Antonio Maravall. Madrid, 1945, 36. Quote is reproduced and translated in José Antonio Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque. Analysis of a Historical Structure*, Jerry Cochran trans., Theory and History of Literature, Vol. 25 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986): 25.

be a transparent testimony of the uprising.<sup>27</sup> A variant of these readings is that which points to Sigüenza's patriotic project. Kathleen Ross suggests that Sigüenza narrates a "conquista militar del indio por el español [... que efectua] una conquista textual del español por el criollo." This reading, valid for other proto-nationalist texts, has to be seriously questioned in relation to the letter for it is precisely the commitment to displacing colonial authorities what is at stake in the *fatalidad lastimosa*.<sup>28</sup> These types of reading ignore the letter's possible ambiguities, as if its structures of signification were stable and disinterested.

More recent efforts have produced provocative readings that examine the various ways in which the letter inscribes and masks anti-colonial sentiments and agencies. In these readings, the letter documents –in spite of itself—“other rationalities within the colonial sphere.”<sup>29</sup> By juxtaposing the letter with other colonial documents and reading it against itself, these critics seek to better outline the forms of those other rationalities. The uprising is certainly revealed as more than a *fatalidad lastimosa*: it is an important site for the negotiation of the social compact, the social flow wherein marginal memories are boldly voiced once again, and the provisional temporality for subaltern political re-

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<sup>27</sup> - See, for instance, Leonard, *Don Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora: A Mexican Savant of the Seventeenth Century*; Ramón Iglesia, "La mexicanidad de don Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora," in *El hombre Colón y otros ensayos* (México: FCE, 1986), 182-199: 182-198; Octavio Paz, *Sor Juana*, Margaret Sayers Peden trans. (Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1988), 566-581; Ignacio Rubio Mañe, *Introducción al estudio de los virreyes de la Nueva España 1553-1746*, 4 vols., vol. 2 (México: FCE., 1982), I: 37-64; and Lorente Medina, *La prosa de Sigüenza y Góngora y la formación de la conciencia criolla mexicana*, 142-155.

<sup>28</sup> - Kathleen Ross, "Alboroto y motín de México: Una noche triste criolla," *Hispanic Review* 56 (1988): 181-190, 188. Rossana Nofal recently suggested that Sigüenza "cuestiona en este relato el poder virreinal." "La letra y el poder en la colonia: *Alboroto y motín de los indios en México*," *Cuadernos Americanos* 9 (1995): 231-235, 233. However, she does not develop her intuition. The same occurs with Iglesias and Luis González Obregón, *Don Guillén de Lampart, la Inquisición y la independencia en el siglo XVII* (México: Librería de la Vda. de C. Bouret, 1908): 390-414.

<sup>29</sup> - Some of the most representative authors of such new scholarship are Cope, *Limits of Racial Domination*; José Rabasa, "Pre-Columbian Pasts and Indian Presents in Mexican History," *Dispositio/n* XIX (1994): 245-270; and Mabel Moraña, "El "tumulto de indios" de 1692 en los pliegues de la fiesta barroca. Historiografía, subversión popular y agencia criolla en el México colonial," in *Agencias criollas: Las ambigüedad colonial en las letras hispanoamericanas*, ed. José Antonio Mazzotti (Pittsburgh: Biblioteca de América, 2000), 161-175. The quote is from Rabasa, "Pre-Columbian Pasts," 246.

definition. For those reasons and more, these readings are truly innovative and challenging. However, broadly speaking they still tend to take the letter as a fairly transparent medium. New readings must move beyond the dichotomy of viewing the letter as emanating from “la perspectiva del orden virreinal”<sup>30</sup> or as expressing anti-colonial sentiments according to the logic developed in previous patriotic writings.

This study departs from the assumption of the letter’s opacity. Instead of anxiously reaching for the Other, which arguably inhabits the other side of Sigüenza’s writing, I will examine the letter as a response to the riots. The guiding question is not how accurate does the letter represent the events but rather what does Sigüenza’s “sorrowful fatality” names or attempts to name for him? What does it mean for Sigüenza and why –if the uprising is successfully and rapidly put down—does it produce such anxiety? What does the letter suggest that changed amidst the turbulence so that a quick return to the colonial order does not seem possible or evident? In order to address these questions, I need to explore the symbolic categories –the realm of the *imaginaire*, as Serge Gruzinski calls it—that articulate the sorrowful fatality.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, I will carry a careful reading of the letter’s performance by focusing on its rhetorical pattern, the figuration of contemporary and historical characters, and the compulsive return of the past. When examined closely, we realize that the historical reasons that set off the uprising cannot be equated with the view of the riots as the *fatalidad lastimosa*. In fact,

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<sup>30</sup> - Moraña, "Tumulto de indios", 162.

<sup>31</sup> - The *imaginaire* should not “be confused with the imaginary or with imagination. ... [The] *imaginaire* is the ability to represent the real to oneself, to perceive it intuitively and affectively, and to interpret reality, although it is actually only ‘its’ reality. This faculty, the schemata that organize it, and the representations that flow from it make up the *imaginaire*.” Serge Gruzinski, *The Conquest of México: The Incorporation of Indian Societies into the Western World, 16th-18th Centuries*, Eileen Corrigan trans. (Cambridge (UK): Polity Press, 1993): 301. I use the term roughly –but not completely—as an analogue for the Lacanian Symbolic order, the ensemble of symbolic resources that mediates between the Real and consciousness. See Jacques Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, Jacqueline Rose trans. (New York: Norton, 1982): 116-121.

the gap between Sigüenza's perception of the events and what we take to be the historical circumstances that set off the uprising constitutes the dwelling space of this essay.

It is known that Sigüenza was "specially devoted to Viceroy Conde de Galve" and depended on the Viceroy's generosity for his sustenance.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, a closer reading reveals the letter's many contradictions and Sigüenza as an active and anxious participant in the colonial sphere. For example, the Viceroy had been accused by an important group of citizens, the self-styled *Vasallos más leales del rey* (The Most Loyal Vassals of His Majesty), of causing the uprising with his abuses, his tyranny, and his unscrupulous desire for wealth.<sup>33</sup> In fact, the meeting called by the Viceroy on April 29 of 1692 with the social notables was an attempt to reconcile and engage Creoles in the management of the crisis. It is very possible, as Leonard suggests, that the letter to the Admiral de Pez—a Spanish naval officer who had been stationed in Mexico in 1686 and with whom Sigüenza had planned to undertake a surveying trip to Pensacola Bay—was written as a result of the Viceroy's request to promote an "official version" of the events before the Spanish Courts and other official authorities.<sup>34</sup> From this perspective, the letter is not simply an official document, but it is an appeal supporting the Viceroy's capabilities to govern.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> - Irving Leonard, *Ensayo bibliográfico de don Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora*, vol. 15 (México: Monografías Bibliográficas Mexicanas, 1929): 28.

<sup>33</sup> - See the letters and accounts of "Vasallos más leales..." reproduced in Sigüenza y Góngora, *Alboroto y motín*, 131-42. One of the most important objectives of this group is to demonstrate that the Viceroy is a tyrant and, thus, was directly responsible for the disturbances. Aristotle writes that the only possible justification for an uprising to take place is when the prince has become a tyrant (Book V, Cpt. 11; p. 373). Juan de Mariana's *Del Rey y de la Institución Real* (1612) developed and adapted this thesis to the Spanish political and conceptual context. For a more in-depth explication of the legal issues concerning tyranny, see Guenter Lewy, *Constitutionalism and Statecraft During the Golden Age of Spain: A Study of the Political Philosophy of Juan de Mariana* (Geneva: E. Droz, 1960). In addition to being an attack on the Viceroy, whom they perceive too favorable to Creole interests, the letter is also a biting attack on the latter, whom the "*Vasallos más leales*" called "little gentlemen ... who are cape-snatchers, game-cock breeders, and cockfighters, "clearly unfit for a serious military task" (Reproduced in Cope 195f).

<sup>34</sup> - See Sigüenza y Góngora, *Alboroto y motín*, 83f1 and Leonard, *Ensayo bibliográfico*, 47.

<sup>35</sup> - The letter begins with Sigüenza approving possible printed editions of the letter only if complete fidelity to his letter is observed: "Si le paresiera a Vmd. el imprimirla para que, en esa Cortte y en esos Reinos, Sepan ttodos Con fundamento lo que otros abran Escrippto Con no tan individuales y Siertas notiSias, desde luego ConSiento en ello, preSuponiendo el que no Se le añada Ni Se le quite Ni una

### III. The Viceroy's Golden Age

It is precisely around the figure of the Viceroy de Galve, however, that ambivalence appears most saliently in the text. Sigüenza's praise might be essentially honest—that is not the question—but the text does not simply repeat the official version and it often takes advantage of baroque phrasing to skillfully create an aura of ambiguity around the figure of the Viceroy. In this narrative flow, irony becomes structurally important. The *Vasallos más leales* are not mentioned in the letter. Though we do not know what Sigüenza's private opinion was regarding the events, it is possible to infer from the text that the uprising could have been prevented and that the colonial administration was responsible in important ways (by omission and lack of courage). Only a reading that lends special attention to this 'performance' around the figure of power could adequately account for this text's complexities and understand the nature of Sigüenza's textualization of catastrophe.

Ambiguity and alternation will structure the text throughout.<sup>36</sup> Though Sigüenza sets out to tell the story about the uprising (*alboroto y motín*) only one-third of the narrative is devoted to the events of June 8. The first part of the letter constitutes a panegyric to the Viceroy, the Count de Galve (1688-1696). The intermediate section tells the effort on the part of the Viceroy—and progressively on the part of Sigüenza himself—to contain the effects of the calamities before the night of June 8. At the end of this second part, Sigüenza figures as the protagonist of a heroic narrative while the Viceroy is relegated impotently to the background. The letter's last section corresponds to June 8.

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palabra, y Sino fuere deste Modo, No Salga a luz." Sigüenza y Góngora, *Alboroto y motín de México del 8 de junio de 1692*: 82.

<sup>36</sup> - As mentioned before, ambivalence is already inherent to Sigüenza's nationalistic project (through its relationship with Spaniards and Indians) and it is a constitutive element of what has been called the *Barroco de Indias* or Colonial Baroque. See Arrom, *Esquema generacional de las letras*: 67.

In it Sigüenza narrates in detail the events that took place often by appealing to suspense and the picaresque. In the epilogue, he lists a series of recommendations to avoid future disturbances (a ban on *pulque*, limiting the circulation of Indians within the city limits, forced relocation of Indians living in the *traza* or Spanish quarters, compulsory wearing of traditional garb, etc).

I will begin by pointing out the first tension in the text's structure. Within the framework of Aristotelian rhetoric the goal of the text (and its audience) determines the form to which it belongs: exhortative (or legislative), forensic (or judicial), epideitic (or panegyric). No text, according to Aristotle, should participate in more than one branch of rhetoric if it is to succeed. From this domain, Sigüenza's text exhibits a proliferation of conflicting discourses as it simultaneously participates in all rhetorical modes: it is forensic in its evaluation of past events; it is legislative in manufacturing of proposals to prevent future disturbances; and it is epideitic in the praise to the Viceroy.<sup>37</sup> These tensions –at the very heart of the panegyric—begin a pattern of ambiguities and alternations that promote a system of multiple significations. Pointing briefly to some of those patterns, one sees that the story is chronologically structured between two dates: the representation of Carlos II's wedding as the happiest day in Mexico (reaffirming the colonial order) and the uprising of June 8, the sorrowful fatality. Additionally, extreme emotions alternate to organize the narrative and serve as intensifiers of expectations. These go from supreme happiness due to Mexico staging Charles II's marriage with Doña Mariana de Neoburgo: "... teatro augusto donde, con acciones magníficas,

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<sup>37</sup>- Aristotle, *The "Art" of Rhetoric*, John Henry Freese trans., The Loeb Classical Library ed. (Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1994) 1357a. More broadly, the letter exhibits a peninsular rhetorical tradition of historiography with "nociones de control social y civilidad americana refinadas en el contexto colonial e implementadas por el aparato de poder administrativo, político y religioso que había afirmado su poder en el Nuevo Mundo desde la conquista." Moraña, "Tumulto de indios," 163. Less instrumental but more crucially to the point developed here, what type of writing is that which purports to narrate disaster but begins with praise? Conversely, how does it affect our perception of an apologetic discourse when a narrative of disaster follows it?

representó la fidelidad española ..." (93) to the "alarido tan uniformemente desentonado y horroroso que causaba espanto" heard at the beginning of the uprising (148). The text oscillates between day and night, between the picaresque and the solemnity of a bureaucratic tone, from praise to accusation, and so on.

The exordium preceding the acclaim for the Viceroy explicitly inscribes this narrative project. In it, Sigüenza writes that it is "verdad irrefragable" "...ser inseparable compañera de la alegría la tristeza, de la felicidad el infortunio y de la risa el llanto" (93).<sup>38</sup> Significantly, Sigüenza brings together, by means of prosopopeia, terms that by definition are excluded: "Inseparable *compañera* de la alegría la tristeza"—implies not only that sorrow follow happiness but that a new temporality and spatiality are inaugurated in which both terms coexist simultaneously. Indeed, the prosopopeia suggests a relation between opposing values whose specificity we find in the generated excess due to its simultaneous operation. The stated prosopopeia authorizes us to read the text ironically, acknowledging both codes at once, that of happiness and of sorrow. Furthermore, this alternation and coexistence might be inferred from historical accounts ("*con voz entera nos la proponen uniformes las historias todas*"), but it also structures the field of daily life ("*la advertimos cada día en los sucesos humanos*"). Such distinction suggests that the alternation does not only constitute an aesthetic principle, but an ethical one as well, as it gives moral meaning to the excess, the space in-between the beginning and ending, the Golden Age and the degraded present, the existence of praise and the *fatalidad lastimosa*.

Given that the letter has been read as a semi-official account unequivocally aligned with the Viceroy, I will begin by examining the figuration of the Viceroy's

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<sup>38</sup> - "That sadness is the inseparable companion of gaiety, misfortune of happiness, and weeping of laughter, is so irrefutable a truth that not only do all histories consistently suggest it to us but we note it in a practical way everyday in human affairs"(210).

actions in the letter. If it is true that “beginnings” as Edward Said writes, are always the textual place where purpose coexists with arbitrariness and factuality with fiction,<sup>39</sup> then Sigüenza initiates enthusiastic praise for the Viceroy precisely at the moment that his inefficiency, and arbitrariness is most strongly suggested. This occurs because the panegyric is offered one month after the *fatalidad lastimosa*, the event in which, writes Octavio Paz, the Viceroy "... lost his control and his courage, and with them his authority and reputation."<sup>40</sup> Even more tellingly, the apologetic invocation of the Viceroy's rule occurs in a discourse motivated, paradoxically, by the narration of the events that overwhelmed his authority. This double contradictory gesture (the self-conscious affirmation of an undermined authority in a narrative whose cost is precisely such authority) turns the text into a project in crisis, a tension that becomes manifest at the beginning of the narrative. Sigüenza writes:

Sin poner en parangón con sus predecesores al Exmo. Señor Conde de Galve [...], es voz común de cuantos habitan la Nueva España haber sido el tiempo de su gobierno un remedo del que corría en el siglo de Oro. Todo sucedió en él como el deseo quería, porque sólo le asistía el deseo de acertar en todo.(95-96)<sup>41</sup>

The tension is manifested through the strange usage of verbal tenses. Though the Count is still the Viceroy of New Spain, Sigüenza uses a prefective tense (i.e., one which considers the action finished), the compound infinitive (*infinitivo compuesto*) – “... *haber sido su gobierno...*”. In the following phrase, Sigüenza stresses the temporality of the past when using the simple tenses—“*Todo sucedió en él...*” and “... *porque sólo le*

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<sup>39</sup> - Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978): 4-5.

<sup>40</sup> - Paz, *Sor Juana*, 269. Further, he writes that “The immediate consequence of all this was that the authority of the Viceroy was so diminished that in normal times he would have been dismissed. But the Count de Galves had relatives and influential friends at court, and the war with France was absorbing the full attention of the government in Madrid," 443-44.

<sup>41</sup> - “Without placing the Most Excellent Conde de Galve in comparison with his predecessors, for I do not want to begin by running foul of envy and jealousy, it is the common saying of all of those who live in New Spain that the period of his administration was [*haber sido*] an imitation of that which prevailed during the Golden Age. Everything happened in it just as the heart could desire because his only wish was to do the right thing always” (211).

*asistía...*” – that definitively confines the Viceroy’s government to a past without continuity into the present. In this first instance, the Count’s government uncomfortably oscillates between an explicit past tense and the implicit and referential present.

This verbal strangeness also complicates the literary figure proposed by Sigüenza. The Viceroy’s government is another “Golden Age” which means that, in as much as an epoch of origins and plenitude, it requires a kind of writing different from the *fatalidad lastimosa*. Traditionally, the juxtaposition of narrative codes to distinguish arcadian origins from a degraded present has important antecedents in classical historiography. Sallust begins his history of the *War Against Catiline* : “... life went on without ambition, as every one had enough to be content ....”<sup>42</sup> In the beginning of the text, the writing becomes the moment of origins, marked by the impossible harmony of action and desire –“*Todo sucedía en [during the Viceroy’s government]*”, says Sigüenza, “*como el deseo quería, porque sólo le asistía el deseo de acertar en todo*” (96). Nevertheless, this harmony only exists during the Golden Age. The present –as made evident by the irruption of the *fatalidad lastimosa*—is the time of crisis. The Roman historian Titus Livy expresses such a notion:

Let [the reader] note how, with the gradual relaxation of discipline, moral fits gave way, as it were, then sank lower and lower, and finally begun the downward plunge which has brought us to the present time, when we can endure neither our vices nor their cure.<sup>43</sup>

The process by which Livy fractures the temporal continuum is similar to that which constitutes la *fatalidad lastimosa* in Sigüenza’s letter. In both cases, the present does not allow the perfect conjunction between desire and action since they consider history a

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<sup>42</sup>- See Sallust, *Conjuracion de Catilina/Bellum Catilinae*, Manuel C. Diaz y Diaz trans., 3 ed., Coleccion Gredos bilingue (Madrid: Gredos, 1979): 12.

<sup>43</sup>- Titus Livy, *History of Rome*, B. O. Foster trans., Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1953): I: 3. Frank Kermode calls this present *kairos*, the interval of crisis between beginnings and endings. See *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966): 47.

progressive degradation of the original state. In both cases, the space of writing replaces the space of heroic action.

However, the Viceroy's government is not only another Golden Age. His government is still active and thus it participates of the degraded present, marked by the *fatalidad lastimosa*. Thus, while Titus Livy and Sallust confine the Golden Age to a remote and inaccessible past (identifying beginnings with origins) and juxtapose it to the narrative of a degraded present, Sigüenza establishes a simultaneity between the Golden Age and the *fatalidad lastimosa*. We are confronted with a paradox: the beginning of the text invokes origins (the Golden Age) that by means of a simile are present in the Viceroy's government. However, this textual beginning immediately conjures up its own end since la *fatalidad lastimosa* defines a present (the period when the Count is viceroy) which constitutes the narrative's temporal horizon. In this way, the *fatalidad lastimosa* comes forth in the text's origins (as the reason for its existence), at the beginning of the text (by means of the strange apology to the Viceroy) and at the end of the text (as the point towards which we are narratively propelled). Both codes (that of disaster and of apology, pastoral and history) are not juxtaposed in a coherent narrative of progress, but coexist and operate in permanent friction. The ubiquity of the catastrophic event turns the text into a narrative whose beginnings, middle, and end are in crisis.<sup>44</sup>

It should now be remembered that Sigüenza is most closely associated with a patriotic project that is the exact inversion of Livy's narrative pattern. New Spain's present is the realization of a millenarian utopia (both Joachimite and Imperial, but subsumed under the Creole's), not its degradation; it is –according to patriotic writing—

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<sup>44</sup>- The narrative crisis –expressed in terms of beginnings and endings—brings up the question of traumatic experience. Dori Laub observes that "... survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect. The survivor is not truly in touch either with the core of his traumatic reality or with the fatedness of its reenactment..." Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992): 69.

the realization of the origins that does not take place anywhere else. This narrative pattern, which had dominated Sigüenza's writing, is now abandoned. The progressive ironization of imperial centrality, which characterized his previous writing, is now replaced—at least in this letter—for a pessimistic view of history. But, what does providentialist patriotism have to do with a pessimistic view of History? Is it the result of a contradiction in the Creole patriotic project or the consequence of the *fatalidad lastimosa*, the disaster?

One could even prod further into a chain of suggestive associations. For in writing that the vicerojal government is like a “Golden Age,” Sigüenza makes reference to a past splendor. This referent is double.<sup>45</sup> On the one hand, there is the classical imperial Golden Age, specifically Rome, which Spain's House of Hapsburg (1514-1700) always tried to imitate and supercede.<sup>46</sup> On the other, and of special importance for the Creole elite, the Golden Age refers to the government of Charles I, the conquest of America, and more importantly to Hernán Cortés' settlement and governance of New Spain.<sup>47</sup> According to Sigüenza's praise the Viceroy's government repeats the military and political expansion of Charles I, resuscitates collective aspirations to the Christian imperial throne, and transmits the same military self-assurance and civic heroicism that

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<sup>45</sup> - More broadly the referent is triple, but an important Golden Age is excluded in this reference. The mendicant orders, especially the Franciscans Mendieta and Motolinía, carried out a millenarian utopia during the sixteenth century. The subjects of such utopia constituted the New Indian Church which, in turn, excluded Creoles. However, Creoles borrowed from this utopia the idea of conquest by divine grace in order to assuage the uneasiness caused by the legacies of military conquest. As Paz writes, “If the American patria was to take root in its own soil, it must develop a sense of its identity and it could only find the foundations it sought in the grace of God, not in the disaster of a Conquest that strongly resembled Apocalypse.” Introduction to Lafaye, *Quetzacóatl and Guadalupe*, xxi.

<sup>46</sup> - See Frances Yates, *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1975) and Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the Worlds: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500-c. 1800* (New Haven (CT): Yale University Press, 1995).

<sup>47</sup> - The Creole Golden Age is—as in Jean Bodin's *On Sovereignty* (1561)—the period of the creation of the state. I am grateful to the members of the Harvard Graduate Student Ford Foundation Workshop (1998)—and in particular to José Antonio Mazzotti—for comments and criticism on this passage.

most read into Cortés' conquest. In addition to the self-evident disproportion, the claim is made at the very same moment that the Hapsburg's lineage comes to an end (1700), guided by Charles II's inept governing junta. In the colonies, Leonard writes, the support for colonial institutions "... was pitifully weak [...] while both the heart and the frontiers of New Spain presented problems of increasing gravity to the viceregal administration ...".<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, in Mexico City popular discontent among Creoles and the *castas* was rampant and vociferous. Sigüenza reports that few days before the riots broke out the Viceroy was received with murmurations and hissing upon entering the Cathedral, a situation Guthrie explains, had become routine in the Capital.<sup>49</sup> Sigüenza's Western Paradise was crumbling, vulnerable to Indian attacks on the northern frontier, pirates on the seafront, and convulsed by the social pressures that habitually ended in uprisings.

In case we are still in doubt, the irony in the text is further stated. The government of the Viceroy does not have a relation of identity with the Golden Age. Rather it is a *remedo*, an interesting concept to identify the simile between the Golden Age and the Viceroy's government. In the dictionary of Covarrubias (1611) *remedo* has a double connotation: it is *imitación* (imitation) and *arreglo malhecho* (ill fitted arrangement). Accordingly, the Viceroy's government could be understood both as an imitation and as an unconvincing makeshift of the glory of the Golden Age. The former meaning—imitation of the Golden Age—is doubtlessly intended by Sigüenza.<sup>50</sup> Sor Juana Inés de

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<sup>48</sup> - Leonard, *Baroque Times in Old Mexico*, 202. For more details on the deteriorating situation in Mexico and the colonies, see David Brading, *The First America* (Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press, 1991): 362-390; J. H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain, 1469-1716* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966): 355-380; and John Lynch, *Spain Under the Habsburgs*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964-1969).

<sup>49</sup> - Sigüenza writes that on entering the Viceroy "... por la iglesia se levantó un murmullo no muy confuso entre las mujeres ... en que feamente le execraban y maldecían atribuyendo a sus omisiones y mal gobierno la falta de maíz y la carestía del pan" (120). See also, Guthrie, "Riots in Seventeenth Century Mexico City" and Rosa Feijoo, "El tumulto de 1692," *Historia mexicana* XIV (1965): 656-679.

<sup>50</sup> - The notion of imitation during the seventeenth century does not connote pejorative values. The imperative of originality only appears much later, towards the second half of the eighteenth century. See David H Darst, *Imitatio: polémicas sobre la imitación en el Siglo de Oro* (Madrid: Orígenes, 1985): 7-44.

la Cruz uses the other meaning in her famous "Loa para el Auto sacramental de *El Divino Narciso*" (1691). In the loa, "Religión" tries to persuade "América" to become Christian. América resists and Religión inquires into the divinities América worships. In seeing what América represents, Religión replies frightened:

¡Válgame Dios! ¿Qué dibujos,  
qué *remedos* o qué cifras  
de nuestras sacras verdades  
quieren ser esas mentiras?<sup>51</sup>

In this passage, it is evident that *remedo* means an ill-fitted arrangement of Christian truths. This sense of *remedo* would seem radically different from Sigüenza's use in as much as he underlies the coincidences between identities while Sor Juana refers to an insuperable difference. In the loa the *remedo* not only repeats a truth, it is also an ill-fitted arrangement, a dangerous distancing from the original form. It is a lie that pretends to be truthful, which is why it frightens the interlocutor.

However, underneath the difference between both uses there lies a disquieting continuity. In both cases, the *remedo* ultimately refers to an insurmountable distance. Just as the lies of América cannot pass as truths (though they want to) the period of the Viceroy cannot be the Golden Age (though it wants to). In both cases the *remedo* points to and is conscious of an abysmal distance. The *remedo* belongs at once to the domain of identity (as copy) and of deficient alterity (as ill-fitted arrangement), nervously oscillating between both spaces. This oscillation produces an anxiety that manifests itself textually. In Sor Juana's loa the anxiety produces the frightful reaction on the part of Religion. The *remedo* is condemned to the space of interdiction. In Sigüenza's letter, the oscillation is manifested as the systematic pattern of inchoate ambiguity that structures the text. It

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<sup>51</sup>- See Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *Obras completas* (México: Porrúa, 1992): 387. The translation reads: "God help me! What copies and caricatures of our sacred truth these lies are?" Taken from Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Loa [Electronic version] (Early Americas Digital Archive, 1691 [cited July 14 2002]); available from [www.mith2.umd.edu/summit/anthology1/loaengl.htm](http://www.mith2.umd.edu/summit/anthology1/loaengl.htm).

does not produce the unsayable or the interdiction of a saying, but a plurality of many antagonistic sayings (and silences), which simultaneously offer and withdraw legitimacy. As a result, the letter paradoxically represents a Viceroy that absolutely precludes the heroic but which, nonetheless, in the face of the *fatalidad lastimosa* constitutes the only trace of a legitimate and acceptable authority.

Sigüenza constitutes the apology as a chain of heroic events that attempt to fix the meaning of the *remedo* as restitution of the Golden Age. On the road to Mexico, for instance, a foreign frigate hands itself over to the Viceroy becoming a "feliz anuncio de sus [the Viceroy's future] acciones"(96). Once in government the Viceroy sets out to clean the Pacific Coast of pirates: "Considerable descalabro," writes Sigüenza, "experimentaron estos piratas poco después [de su llegada], cuando, a disposiciones de su *heroico* celo, con dos galeotas, una falúa y no sé que canoas de guerra, consiguió desalojarlos..." (96; my italics). In spite of the heroic language, what stands out the most is the dissonance caused by the abysmal distance between the style and the magnitude of the events. Though Octavio Paz is right on observing that hyperbole plays a fundamental role during the colonial period, there is an uncontroversial awareness of the distance between words and deeds.<sup>52</sup> That distance—which speaks of other, more dangerous distances—cannot be acknowledged; it must at all costs be supplemented with laudatory remarks. Accordingly, the praise does not exist as reflection of superiority, but as the supplement that covers the distance between the insufficiency of the events and the anguishing necessity to claim a heroic content. Sigüenza praises the Viceroy because the

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<sup>52</sup>- Paz, *Sor Juana*: 245-59. Furthermore, Sigüenza already had faced problems with the Inquisition for his excessive and indiscriminate use of hyperbole. A particularly significant case took place when he praised a local poet by comparing him to Saint Augustine's literary style, learning and religious wisdom. A local member of the Augustine community took exception to the comparison (arguing that Saint Augustine's standing was put in question by the hyperbole) and the Inquisition reprimanded Sigüenza and ordered him to strike the phrase from the text. The work in question is Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, *Triunfo Parténico* (México: Ediciones Xochitl, 1945). See Irving Leonard, *Don Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora* (México: FCE., 1984) 290-91 and the reproduction of the Inquisition's "Censura" in 292-293.

latter finally mans military forts "... y éstas [the personnel] sin personas que supiese de lo militar para gobernarlas" (96). The distance between facts and words cannot be traversed without heroism turning into mockery. Furthermore, in the contortions required to maintain the epic tone, one can detect Sigüenza's indulgence in irony. Indeed, after narrating the combat with the pirates, he adds that the removal of the invaders was achieved "con casi nada, pues no fué sino sólo un amago" (98). In an act of masterful magic, he reduces the Viceroy to a figure of *amagos* and *remedos*. More than restoring a Golden Age, the scene makes evident the laughable inefficiency of the colonial administration and displaces the concept of *remedo* to *arreglo malhecho*. We might even say that later in the letter Sigüenza abandons all pretense of praise. The uprising, or at least the magnitude it reaches, is the result of his absence. Faced with the rioters, local officers ". . . no sirvieron de cosa alguna . . . por no tener quien los gobernase y les diesen armas, como ellos dicen; y por último, todo era allí confusión, alboroto y gritos, porque, por no estar en casa Su Excelencia, no había en ella de su familia sino dueñas y otros criados y no era mucho que fuese así ..." (148).

#### IV. The Civic Hero and the Noche Triste

Instead of a heroic Viceroy, the narrative offers Sigüenza as a provisional civic hero. Simultaneously, instead of the epic style announced in the preface, we have a writing of containment.<sup>53</sup> The shift is gradual to be sure. After winning victories against pirates and Indians, the Viceroy concentrates on efforts to alleviate the misery and prevent further disasters. In other words, the military hero is replaced—as announced in the preface—by an imperial authority. Even here, as difficulties increase, the narrative focus shifts from the Viceroy's innate governing qualities to Sigüenza's repeated

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<sup>53</sup> - Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question," in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Padminio Mongia (New York: Arnold, 1996): 47.

interventions at various projects (blight control, sweeping channels, draining ponds, etc). As the narrative progresses, the Viceroy effectively fades into the background and Sigüenza, the Creole intellectual, emerges as a scientist, a civil architect, a historian, and an engineer. However, his efforts are to no avail. Ultimately, the uprising takes him—as everyone else—by surprise and he cannot stop the rioters, suffocate the flames, or prevent the looting. Like Hoffman’s cousin, in Walter Benjamin’s description, Sigüenza sees the crowd from his room and “... is immobilized as a paralytic.”<sup>54</sup> In this way, the *fatalidad lastimosa* is defined by its ability to overwhelm preventive action. Significantly, Sigüenza is able to rescue the books (of Creole and Native history, and of local law) deposited at the Cabildo and with them safeguard local memories. For a text structured around a heroic praise, this letter makes one wonder whether this is a narrative whose hero is as yet unthinkable.<sup>55</sup>

It is precisely as an engineer, while draining the city’s water channels, that he stumbles upon a startling find:

... se sacó, debajo de la puente de Alvarado, infinidad de cosillas supersticiosas. Halláronse muchísimos cantarillos y ollitas que olían a pulque, y mayor número de muñecos o figurillas de barro, y de españoles todas y todas atravesadas con cuchillos y lanzas que formaron del mismo barro, o con señales de sangre en los cuellos, como degollados. [...] Preguntáronme [...] que qué era aquello; respondí ser prueba real de lo que en extremo nos aborrecen los indios y muestra de lo que desean con ansia a los españoles, porque, como en aquel lugar fué desbaratado el Marqués del Valle cuando en la noche del día diez de julio del año de mil quinientos y veinte se salió de México y, según consta de sus historias, se lo dedicaron a su mayor dios (que es el de las guerras) como ominoso para nosotros y para ellos feliz ... . (134)<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> - Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, Harry Zohn trans. (New York: Schocken Books, 1969): 173.

<sup>55</sup> - This writing of containment had a counterpoint in legal inquiry. Don Juan Escalante y Mendoza, the Court Attorney, demanded three days after the riot “to unsheathe the sword of vengeance [on suspected wrongdoers] to contain the unrestrained boldness of a people who have betrayed the faithfulness and loyalty of vassalage with an action so unjust as it was unforeseen.” (Reproduced in Cope 126).

<sup>56</sup> - “... an infinite number of tiny objects of superstition were taken out from the Alvarado bridge. A great number of little pitchers and pots which smelled of *pulque*, and a still greater numbers of manikins or tiny figures of clay, were found. All of the latter represented Spaniards and all were either pierced by

This passage constitutes the emotional center of Sigüenza's letter and suggests that the *fatalidad lastimosa* of 1692 is a re-staging of Cortés' defeat in Tenochtitlan, the *Noche Triste* (Sorrowful Night) of June 30, 1520. That first mythical night had long played an important role in Creole consciousness. As a foundational myth, it inspired the first written cult poetry in New Spain: "*En Tacuba está Cortés/ con su escuadrón esforzado,/ triste estaba y muy penoso,/ triste y con gran cuidado.*"<sup>57</sup> It is through the view of the uprising as the repetition of the original clash between the two Empires to which Creoles have laid claim (Spanish and Aztec), that the uprising acquires a more definite symbolic sense. It becomes the "*Noche triste criolla*," as Kathleen Ross has called it, and attains a dimension of hyper-reality that transcends the immediate network of social signifiers at work.<sup>58</sup>

Sigüenza's textualization of the uprising can no longer be explained by mere reference to the events. One must appeal to the symbolic workings of social catastrophe, with repetition as its preferred method of operation: "Every memory returning from the forgotten past does so with great force, produces an incomparably strong influence [...], and puts forward an irresistible claim to be believed...."<sup>59</sup> In fact, I suggest that the

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knives and lances formed of the same clay or had signs of blood on their throats as they had been gashed. [...] Both Princes [the Viceroy and the Bishop] questioned me as to their significance. I answered that it was proof positive of how utterly the Indians abominated us and an indication of what they earnestly desired for the Spaniards because, having defeated the Marqués del Valle on the night of the 10th of July, 1520, when he left Mexico City they had, as their histories clearly indicate, consecrated this spot to their most important deity (which is the God of War) as a place of ill omen for us and propitious to them" (246).

<sup>57</sup> - In Francisco de Terrazas, *Poesías de Francisco de Terrazas*, ed. Antonio Castro Leal (México: Librería de Porrúa, 1941): ix.

<sup>58</sup> - See Ross, "Alboroto y motín de México: Una noche triste criolla." The concept of hyper-reality is borrowed from Chakrabarty (who himself adapted it from Braudillard) to designate an absolute referent against which all historical events, persons or standards acquire their sense of reality and become intelligible. Just as "America" enjoys a hyper-real dimension in the European imaginary (or Europe is the only place we can know theoretically), the *Noche Triste*, as mythologized by the Mexican Creoles, became the way to see and understand major social conflict involving Indians. See Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?," in *A Subaltern Studies Reader, 1986-1995*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 263-293.

<sup>59</sup> - Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, Katherine Jones trans. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949): 133-134.

return of the “Noche triste” in the letter suggests one of the most compelling modes in which the event must have been understood by elite observers and participants. To begin with, the return of the *Noche Triste* signifies both the inscription of the anti-Spanish rebellion and the promise of an eventual re-conquest.

Two political subjects emerge at this conjunction: Hernán Cortés and the Indian conspirator. The “Noche Triste” appears in Cortés’ letter as the decisive event that forces him to change from a diplomatic discourse as ambassador to a military discourse of conquest. From possible partners, Indians come to be political and military enemies that must be conquered. Days after his retreat from Tenochtitlan, Cortés and his forces regrouped and eventually marched into the Aztec city in August of the same year. Cortés’ letter turns defeat into a legal argument to justify military conquest.<sup>60</sup> In Sigüenza’s letter, on the other hand, the invocation of Cortés signals the ineptitude of the Viceroy and the insufficiency of the Creole. In previous nationalistic narratives, the same invocation had a heroic political subject with sufficient moral capital ready to found Mexican nationalistic prose: the Marquis of the Valley, Hernán Cortés, a second Caesar and another Moses.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the notion of a civic Cortés apparently carried such widespread appeal throughout social groups in Mexico City that the infuriated crowd that over the plaza and burned official buildings respected the Hospital founded by Cortés. Sigüenza himself claims to have been writing the history of this hospital (*La piedad heroyca de Fernando Cortés 1691-93*) when the uprising pulled him out of his studio. As Ross writes, “Making Hernán Cortés the hero of a criollo history converts him into a New World –not a European—figure.”<sup>62</sup> However, Cortés, central hero of the Creole Golden

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<sup>60</sup> - See J. H. Elliott, “Cortés, Velázquez and Charles V,” in *Hernán Cortés: Letters from México*, ed. Anthony Pagden (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), xi-xxxvii. I am particularly grateful to Ricardo Padrón for his comments and suggestions on this passage.

<sup>61</sup> - See Brading, *The Origins of Mexican Nationalism* and John Leddy Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

<sup>62</sup> - Ross, *Baroque Narrative*, 75.

Age, does not appear in the letter as the savior of the *fatalidad lastimosa*. Instead, he is represented at the moment of his most crushing defeat –“...*en aquel lugar fue desbaratado el Marqués del Valle...*”—to deliver the fatal news of a new Indian conspiracy.

## V. Reading the Riots

Several readings of the riot's causes have been made and most of them find some support in Sigüenza's letter. Subaltern participants –as opposed to elite observers—seemed to have viewed the riots as the result of hunger caused by the failure of the corn harvest and government inefficiencies, and by the refusal of the elite to honor the existing social compact.<sup>63</sup> However, elite observers dismissed their complaints as nothing else than unfounded rumors and malicious lies. To these members of the elite, the participants' views do not *state* the reasons for the uprising, but *enact* them as rumors and lies were considered the instigators of panic and violence.<sup>64</sup> However we see these verbal forms (either as cunning phrasings to incentivate the crowd or as genuine expressions of political aspirations) they effected a social panic that is textually recorded. It is precisely through that explicit and implicit panic that we have access to the contours of subaltern subjects.<sup>65</sup>

Another way of reading the disturbances was by articulating them as divine punishment. Sigüenza writes:

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<sup>63</sup> - Cope, *Limits of Racial Domination*, 125-160.

<sup>64</sup> - Douglas Cope points that the Spaniards found incomprehensible the crowd's behavior. “Did not the Indians realize, they asked, that the viceroy had done everything humanely possible to relieve the situation? Why should the Spaniards be blamed for an act of God, quite possibly brought on by the Indian's own wickedness?” *Limits of Racial Domination*, 132; also 142-143.

<sup>65</sup> - Otherwise, these subaltern subjects would completely disappear under the accusations of alcohol and idolatry. Homi Bhabha writes that “The indiscriminate circulation of meaning as rumor or conspiracy with its perverse, psychic affects of panic constitutes the inter-subjective realm of revolt and resistance.” See “In a Spirit of Calm Violence,” in *After Colonialism. Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*, ed. Gyan Prakash (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 326-343: 332-3.

[...] habiendo sido por uno de aquellos medios de que Dios se vale para castigar a los impíos y reducir al camino de la justicia a los que lleva extraviados la iniquidad, yo no dudo que mis pecados y los de todos le motivaron a que, amenazándonos como padre con azote de agua, prosiguiese después el castigo con hambre por nuestra poca enmienda y, si ésta no es absoluta después del fuego en que, en la fuerza de la hambre, se transformó la agua, ¡qué nos espera! (117)<sup>66</sup>

By transforming the riots into a natural disaster (note the transmutation of *water* into *fire*), Sigüenza suggests it was the Creole's own moral disorder which produced the social chaos.<sup>67</sup> These readings, however potentially placating they might have been, did not convince Sigüenza or his compatriots. A third reading –favored by the authorities and Sigüenza himself— concentrated on the role of the Indians. According to Sigüenza, Indians and especially Indian women gained the most from the scarcity of corn as they could charge more for their products.<sup>68</sup> Despite the fact that no year had been better for them (245), they,

[...] gente la más ingrata, desconocida, quejumbrosa y inquieta que Dios crió, la más favorecida con privilegio y a cuyo abrigo se arroja a iniquidades y sinrazones, y las consigue [...], eran, como he dicho, los de mayores quejas y desvergüenzas .... A medida del dinero que les sobraba, se gastaba el pulque y [...] se emborrachaban los indios... Haber precedido todo esto a su sedición no es para mí probable, sino evidente, y [...] me obliga a que así lo diga [...] lo que yo vi con mis ojos y toqué con mis manos. (131-134)<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> - Since it was by one of those means of which God makes use in order to punish the wicked and bring back to the paths of Righteousness those whom Evil has carried astray, I do not doubt that my sins and those of everyone caused Him, first threatening us like a father with the lash of water, to carry out His chastisement by famine because of our scanty improvement. And if this reformation be not complete after the fire into which the water was transformed by the stress of hunger, what now awaits us! (231)

<sup>67</sup> - Toward the end of the letter we get a better glimpse of what Sigüenza and the authorities believe is the government's unforgivable sin: not having previously forbidden *pulque* (274).

<sup>68</sup> - Other observers put forth the same view: "Se preguntó a muchos indios si ese tumulto era motivado por la falta de maíz y dijeron que no, que antes tenían mucho escondido en sus casas. Y diciéndoles que por qué lo habían escondido, respondieron: "Mira, señor, como nosotros queríamos levantarnos con el reino [...] y como la cosecha de maíz se había perdido [...] nos mandaron los caciques que comprásemos mucho más de lo que habíamos menester [...] para que le faltase a la gente pobre y ésta fuese de nuestra parte cuando nos levantásemos." See "Carta escrita por un religioso..." Documentos inéditos para la historia de México (México: Imprenta de J. R. Navarro, 1853).

<sup>69</sup> - "... the most ungrateful, thankless, grumbling, and restless people that God ever created and the most favored with privileges in the abuse of which they cast themselves into all sorts of iniquities and senseless things and succeed in them [...] were the ones, as I have said, with the biggest complaints and the greatest impudence .... *Pulque* was consumed in proportion to their surplus money and [...] the Indians kept

The emerging picture is that of a premeditated political conspiracy which sought—in the words of an Indian woman—to enter “... 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 esta tierra? Pues ¿qué quieren en ella los españoles?” (146)<sup>70</sup>

Sigüenza’s conviction—expressed with Apostolic fervor (*vi con mis ojos y toqué con mis manos*)—is already present in the letter’s heading, “Alboroto y motín.” Both of these concepts are intended to designate the political character of a carefully calculated affair.<sup>71</sup> The recovery of Indian-made figures from under the bridge allows him to present overwhelming and definite evidence —“añado ahora que, siendo el número de figuras mucho y recientes, no fué otra cosa arrojarlas allí que declarar, con aquel ensaye, el depravado ánimo con que se hallaban para acabar con todos”(134)<sup>72</sup>—and to draw on the language of idolatry and religious war. Just as Cortés had described Moctezuma days after he had been driven out of Tenochtitlan in 1520, the rioters in Sigüenza’s letter are represented as traitors.<sup>73</sup> One might say that an important segment of contemporary criticism has accepted Sigüenza’s clear-cut dichotomized reading of the situation. Pagden, for instance, claims that “Real Indians [in the riots] had intruded too far into the

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getting drunk. [...] That all of this preceded the uprising is not merely probable to me but plain. I am [bound] to say this [...] by what I saw with my own eyes and what I touched with my own hands” (244-46).

<sup>70</sup> - “... to go joyfully into this strife. 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 do the Spaniards want in it?” (257).

<sup>71</sup> - Corominas’ dictionary of etymologies provides the following definitions for “Alboroto”: 1. “vocerío, barullo; 2. estrépito, fragor, estruendo; 3. desorden, tumulto; 4. asonada, motín.” Thus, the calling of the event a motín makes explicit the political awareness as the word redirects the riot into a movements with a expressed direction and goal. Corominas continues by saying that it is a “Movimiento sedicioso, rebelión contra las autoridades...” Some of the synonyms are “Agitación, asonada, sedición, tutmulto...” Joan Corominas, *Diccionario crítico etimológico castellano e hispánico* (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1980).

<sup>72</sup> - “And now I add that, since the number of those figures was considerable and many of them had been thrown there recently, it was nothing less than to manifest by that action the vicious state of mind that they were in and their desire to exterminate us all” (246).

<sup>73</sup> - See “Second Letter”. Hernán Cortés, *Letters from México*, ed. Anthony Pagden (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

imaginary spaces ... their ancestors might have helped create...”.<sup>74</sup> However, a view of the riots as simply an extension of previous social conflict, does not explain the anxiety that permeates colonial accounts and is given the name of the *fatalidad lastimosa*. Despite Sigüenza’s efforts to confine it to a repeat of mythic history, there is a definite consciousness that what has become manifest in these event is quite something else. We may find out more about this (self-) concealed realization only by further insisting on the textual performance that takes place in the gap between Sigüenza’s and the elite’s cognitive and emotional perception of the events and what we now know about it.

## VI. Plebe tan en extremo plebe

Conclusive as Sigüenza’s statement might be, Douglas Cope’s recent findings demonstrate that the *fatalidad lastimosa* was a popular rebellion (not a premeditated conspiracy) and cannot be considered as intra-ethnic (Spanish-Indian) conflict. Indians did participate in the riots. Nevertheless, they were mostly artisans (that is to say, independent workers with better pay than most Indians) and overwhelmingly from the more Hispanicized and integrated part of the city called *traza* (Spanish section of the city). Not relying on Creole patronage, they were financially independent and merged with the *castas* to form Mexico City’s vast plebeian society. By contrast, these independent artisans did not have the safety nets guaranteed by the patron-client system, and on times of crisis could only expect help from the few state’s paternalist institutions. Thus, the Archbishop’s denial to hear the crowd and the later unavailability of the Viceroy further infuriated them and created the social conditions for the riot. Cope writes that “The riot of 1692 did not fit into any [...] framework of intra-elite –or traditional

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<sup>74</sup> - Anthony Pagden, *Spanish Imperialism and the Political Imagination: Studies in European and Spanish American Social and Political Theory 1513-1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 97.

intra-ethnic—conflict, seeming rather to reflect pronounced popular anger at the wealthy and at Spanish rule in general: ‘Death to the Gachupines!’ (125; 146).

Sigüenza, of course, is aware of the presence of non-Indian social subjects in the riots. In fact, he spends a great deal of time describing the actors and at some point confesses that he is not quite sure who is truly responsible:

En materia tan extremo grave como la que quiero decir, no me atrevería a afirmar asertivamente haber sido los indios los que, sin consejo de otros, lo principiaron, o que otros de los que allí andaban, y entre ellos españoles, se lo persuadieron. Muchos de los que lo pudieron oír dicen y se ratifican en esto último, pero lo que yo vide fué lo primero. (149)<sup>75</sup>

However, the fact that plebeians could unite over what most separated them (racial and ethnic lines) constituted the Creole’s and the Viceroyalty’s worst possible nightmare. It meant that the system of domination designed to effectively control a population, many times larger than its colonizers was susceptible to breakdown. Furthermore, this social explosion suggested that plebeians were better prepared than Creoles to claim the rights to land and self-government: “¿No es nuestra esta tierra? Pues ¿qué quieren en ella los españoles?” (146). Under those circumstances, the fact that most “elite commentators [...] were inclined to see this riot as an indigenous uprising, a *tumulto de indios*, and thus specially alien and dangerous,” should not surprise us.<sup>76</sup> The description of the riots as Indian conspiracy betrays a desire to return to the neat social and political split of the Noche Triste of 1520. Though the split no longer operated in social practice, it safeguarded Creoles’ privileges based on clearly demarcated ethnic lineage.

Furthermore, the Indians constituted "the most important single element in the Creole interpretation of the history of ‘New Spain’ and thus in the creation of their own

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<sup>75</sup> - In such an extremely serious matter as that which I wish to relate I shall not dare to state positively whether the Indians were the ones who, without the advice of the others, began the riot or whether others, who went about there, among them, Spaniards, persuaded them to do it. Many of those who were able to hear, confirm and corroborate each other in the latter. What I saw was the first. (259)

<sup>76</sup> - Cope, *Limits of Racial Domination*, 125.

national identity...".<sup>77</sup> Without them, Creoles were reduced to a mere *remedo* (ill-fitted arrangement). *Castas*, on the other hand, did not have an ethnic identity and their social behavior was unpredictable:

Preguntarame Vmd. cómo se portó la plebe en aqueste tiempo y respondo brevemente que bien y mal, bien, porque, siendo plebe tan en extremo plebe, que sólo ella lo puede ser de la que se reputare la más infame, y lo es de todas las plebes, por componerse de indios, de negros, criollos y bozales de diferentes naciones, de chinos, de mulatos, de moriscos, de mestizos, de zambaigos, de lobos y también de españoles que, en declarandose zaramullos (que es lo mismo que pícaros, chulos y arrebatacapas) y degenerando de sus obligaciones, son los peores entre tan ruin canalla. (128)<sup>78</sup>

Undoubtedly, this passage constitutes one of the most dramatic inscriptions of the "World-upside-down" of Sigüenza's letter. The *castas* have taken over the Creole polis and the self-assertion of such variegated colors and appearances is the very inscription of social chaos. Furthermore, the very appearance of poor Creoles as part of this social mass—conceivably involved in the attempt to overthrow Spanish and Creole rule—represented a weighty betrayal of ethnic solidarity and of the political principles that sustained the colonial system. Little is left of the "American marvelous," the sense of destiny and exceptionalism that fueled the nationalist project.<sup>79</sup> The knowledge of what Sigüenza has seen exiles him from the city and leaves him unprotected, even uprooted:

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<sup>77</sup> - Pagden, "Identity Formation in Spanish America," 67.

<sup>78</sup> - Your Grace is probably asking me how the populace behaved at this time. I'll answer briefly, well and less well, because they are such an extremely rabble-like mob that they can only be termed the most infamous *canaille*. This is because it is composed of Indians, Creoles, *bozales* from various nations, *chinos*, mulattoes, *moriscos*, mestizos, *zambaigos* ..., *lobos* ..., and Spaniards as well who, in declaring themselves 'saramullos' (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" (240). The words 'Chinos,' 'moriscos,' 'mestizos,' 'zambaigos,' and 'lobos' attempt to designate various degrees of racial mixing. For a broader discussion of the issues involved in the management of social racial diversity see, Stuart Schwartz, "Colonial Identities and the Sociedad de Castas," *Colonial Latin American Review* 4 (1995): 185-201. Notice too that the term Creole, as used in this passage, is ambiguous. In this case, it seems to designate Blacks born in the Americas but it could also refer to Spanish born the Americas. For a discussion of the history and uses of the term, see Elizabeth Anne Kuznesof, "Ethnic and Gender Influences on 'Spanish' Creole Society in Colonial Spanish America," *Colonial Latin American Review* 4 (1995): 153-168.

<sup>79</sup> - Lafaye, *Quetzacóatl and Guadalupe*, 61.

"Al instante que se cerraron las puertas y se halló la plebe sin oposición alguna, levantó un alarido tan uniformemente desentonado y horroroso, que causaba espanto..." (148). In Cathy Caruth's words: "To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or an event."<sup>80</sup>

The 1692 uprising threatened the material, social, and moral order of the colony. Sigüenza's letter can best be understood as an attempt to turn the world back on its feet. To begin with, his narrative constitutes a concrete instance of a more general intensification of collective juridical interpellation. The unusually harsh recommendations at the end of the text suggest the elite's realization of the dangerous political configurations available to *castas* and other social groups that threatened Creole elite political hegemony. Douglas Cope stresses this point: "Now the legal authorities would present a species of counter-theater, 'the world turned right side up again,' publicly reclaiming the city beginning with the 'contested space' at its heart –the plaza mayor."<sup>81</sup> Judicial proceedings were the main tool in the propping up of such dramatic representation. After the riots, Mexico witnessed nine executions and almost thirty public floggings in the space of two and a half weeks, "one of the most concentrated displays of judicial violence in the capital's history."<sup>82</sup> The concluding of the letter with a list of the main juridical measures provides a closure to an otherwise dangerously unstable plot.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> - Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995): 3. Similar references to the plebe appear throughout Sigüenza's text (i.e., 107; 126; 128; 146; 153; 177; etc.).

<sup>81</sup> - Cope, *Limits of Racial Domination*, 154.

<sup>82</sup> - *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>83</sup> - Leo Bersani and Ulysses Dutoit argue that the narrative mode often becomes a vehicle for mastering limit situations such as those caused by unexpected violence. The result, however, is a sado-masochistic process. It turns the staging of violence into a spectacle for consumption: narrative processes are not only inadequate, but also dangerous. See Leo Bersani and Ulysses Dutoit, *The Forms of Violence: Narrative in Assyrian Art and Modern Culture* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985).

Most importantly among the strategies to redress the moral economy, the narrative becomes the necessary spectacle of both intense subjection and self-subjectification. On the one hand, the narrative attempts to eradicate the memory of the events and delete the traces of the subversive subject, or, when this proves impossible, to fix his historical meaning into a typology of colonial domination resembling what Bhabha calls the stereotype.<sup>84</sup> In order to contain the unmanageable, the *plebe* riot becomes an Indian uprising, which in turn re-stages the Noche Triste. Following Bhabha's provocative argument, we could say that Sigüenza's writing refers us "... at once to the site of fantasy and desire and to the sight of subjectification and power."<sup>85</sup> On the other hand, the Creole is staged as insistently re-representing his loyalty to Spain (concerning political power, religious sentiment, and a devotion to the King and King's representative in the colony), even though this self-interpellation is compounded when meshed onto a patriotic historiography. The result is the conflictive silencing –or provisional derailing—of the metropolis-displacing project.

Sigüenza wants to write a heroic project, a continuation of his *Piedad heroyca de Don Fernando Cortés* and *Paraiso occidental*, but the distance between the Western Paradise and Mexican reality is made clear as he encounters plebeian society:

Llegué en un instante a la esquina de Providencia y, sin atreverme a pasar adelante, me quedé atónito. Era tan extremo tanta la gente, no sólo de indios sino de todas *castas*, tan desentonados los gritos y el alarido, tan espesa la tempestad de piedras que llovía sobre el Palacio, que excedía el ruido que hacían en las

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<sup>84</sup> - Wonder, as the paralyzing moment that creates opportunities for new communicative options (Greenblatt 135), does not take place in Sigüenza's letter. Instead, Sigüenza narrates the fatal encounter and his narrative attains what Kermode calls the predictable pattern of apocalypses (see Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, 40-48). In order to ensure its completion, we have the production of a colonial subject "...within an apparatus of power which *contains*, in both senses of the word, an 'other' knowledge –a knowledge that is arrested and fetishistic and circulates through colonial discourse as that limited form of otherness, that fixed form of difference, that I have called the stereotype." See Bhabha, "The Other Question," 47. Rosanda Nofal writes that "No se trata de una historia desde el otro, sino de la historia 'del otro'"(234). Nofal, "La letra y el poder en la colonia: *Alboroto y motín de los indios en México*."

<sup>85</sup> - Bhabha, "The Other Question," 46.

puertas y en las ventanas al de más de cien cajas de guerra que se tocasen juntas.  
(145-146)<sup>86</sup>

Precisely at the corner of *providencia* Sigüenza finds the paralyzing marks of the *fatalidad lastimosa*. It is not fortuitous that both terms call up agencies external to the human realm, since what ensues is the scene of disaster.<sup>87</sup> The repeated references to the *plebe*, as if Sigüenza were possessed by the unsuspecting potency of an unimaginable event, makes us suspect a subject overwhelmed by the magnitude of the event. What was taking place did not fit the Creole's view of the world and the letter reflects a desperate need to apprehend its subject and reassert control over the narrative. Sigüenza has experienced the events as a challenge to Creole survival –socially and symbolically—and at least on paper he will try to fix the broken parts. As Shoshana Felman writes "The accident is [...] 'known,' paradoxically enough, at once precociously but only through its aftermath, through its effects. The accident is known, in other words, both to the extent that *it 'pursues'* the witness and that the witness is, in turn, in pursuit of it."<sup>88</sup> Therefore, he figures himself in the letter as containing the erosion of colonial power. This defensive writing leads us to ask, paraphrasing François Hartog, to what degree the irrationality attributed to Indians is in fact characteristic of this writing?<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> - "In a moment I reached the corner of [Providence] and, without daring to pass on, I stood there thunderstruck. The number of the people was so exceedingly great, not only of the Indias but of all the castes, the shouts and howlings were so raucous, and so thick was the storm of stones which poured down on the Palace that the noise which the missiles made on the doors and windows exceeded that of more than a hundred drums of war played together" (256-257).

<sup>87</sup> - "Fatalidad" comes from *fatum*, "predicción, oráculo, destino." The Spanish lexicographer Sebastián de Covarrubias offers the following definition in his *Tesoro de la lengua Castellana o Española* (1611): "En rigor no es otra cosa que la voluntad de Dios, y lo que está determinado en su eternidad."

<sup>88</sup> - Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 22.

<sup>89</sup> - François Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*, Janet Lloyd trans. (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1985).

## VII. Conclusion

My reading has sought to paid attention to the textual performance of Sigüenza's letter and argued that the account given by the text cannot be taken at face value. It is not a matter of deception or naiveté on the part of the narrator. Rather, its opacity that results from the traumatic excess that structures the narrative and demands a different kind of historical reading.

However, the original question still stands: if the *tumulto* was quickly put down and Viceroyal authority effectively re-imposed, what then is the disaster that haunts Sigüenza? The letter's preamble identifies the *fatalidad lastimosa* as the center of the text, the point towards which the reader is narratively propelled. This center functions as a stable but empty sign. A first glance the letter's heading seems to reveal the exact place of the disaster: it points to an Indian conspiracy. But the text unwittingly insists on its own excesses: "¿Para qué quiero cansarme refiriendo los pasajes [...] uno por uno?"(109). A reading of the letter that takes into account the excess of the *plebe* observes that Sigüenza's letter is a text that does not fit its own discourse. One may see in this unfitting the dynamics of a traumatized utterance.

The letter opens with several erotesis, rhetorical questions, implying but not giving an answer: "¿Quién duda haber sido la confusión y el espanto mucho mayor que el destrozo y la pérdida, aunque fué tan grande?"(106).<sup>90</sup> The letter follows this pattern of privileging the incommensurable (*confusión* and *espanto*) over the narratable (*destrozos* and *pérdidas*).<sup>91</sup> One then is justified in wondering what it is that Sigüenza wants to name when using the term "*fatalidad lastimosa*" or, as he puts it, "¿Qué otra cosa fue la

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<sup>90</sup> - "Who can doubt that the confussion and alarm - was much greater than the destruction and loss, although that was great enough?" (221)

<sup>91</sup> - The figure of inquiry and learning (such as Sigüenza in front of the telescope, drawing up plans for draining the floods, or examining the causes of the blight) gives way to a rhetorical structure expressing the excess. "Lo que se experimentó de trabajos en México en estos trece días no es ponderable" (109).

*fatalidad lastimosa* [...]?” (93). Does he, perchance, mean the *rhetorical* precept that determines the textual alternation of opposites (the narrative form of the *fatum*); the *historical* pattern of a golden age followed by, yet also incorporating devastation; the *ethical* principle that determines the impossibility of human happiness? Alternatively, does he mean the *chain of misfortunes* that affected Mexico since 1691; the *material consequences* wrought by the natural calamities; the *moral degradation* that caused the uprising of the 8<sup>th</sup> of June? Perhaps he refers to the Viceroy’s inefficiency, lack of prevention, and cowardice; or to the pulque’s fueling of Indian treachery in order to re-stage the Noche Triste; or to the *castas* pernicious influence on colonial society? These are more or less valid answers, but they are all insufficient.

We know what was lost in the aftermath of the riots: the illusion of a neatly divided world between Spanish Conquistadors and their Creole descendants and the noble, but conquered Indians. The project of Creole patriotism grew out of such illusion as the Creole represented himself the sole inheritor of both empires. Together with such illusion the effectiveness of the ideological apparatus to justify and legitimate such dominance also vanished. In its place, new symbiotic configurations surged—witness the colony’s dietary dependency on Indian women, the Virgen de Guadalupe cult, or the crowd composition—and the split Spanish/Indians no longer operated. The result is not a conciliation of the conflicts, but the emergence of more complex and unpredictable antagonisms, many of which defined urban conflict during the eighteenth century.<sup>92</sup> In addition, it also carried the realization that the Creole patria had become inviable—or at least unimportant—on the face of a social world turned upside down.

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<sup>92</sup> - On the topic, see the collection of essays edited by Silvia Arrom and Servando Ortoll. *Riots in the Cities: Popular Politics and the Urban Poor in Latin America, 1765-1910* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1996).

The insufficiency is testimony of the particular ways in which the Creole *imaginaire* becomes unable to produce a definite sense of this disabling experience. But it also arises because the *fatalidad lastimosa* uncannily names the realization *and* denial of such loss. In an exceptionally creative reading of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Eric Santner calls narrative fetishism, "... the way an inability or refusal to mourn emplots traumatic events; it is a strategy of undoing, in fantasy the need for mourning, by simulating a condition of intactness, typically by situating the site and origin of loss elsewhere."<sup>93</sup> If a strategy of mourning allows for the healthy reconstitution of the victim's self in the aftermath of the loss, narrative fetishism releases the subject from the burden of having to reconstitute his self-identity. In Sigüenza's letter, however, the *fatalidad lastimosa* maybe nothing more and nothing less than the realization of the loss and the obstinate reluctance to accept it. A stable, but empty sign.

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<sup>93</sup> - Eric Santner, "History Beyond the Pleasure Principle: Some Thoughts on the Representation of Trauma," in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"*, ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 143-154: 144.

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