

# Mexico, central america and the caribbean

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The book, *Victors and Vanquished: Spanish and Nahuatl Views of the Conquest of Mexico*, made use of extracts from an report taken by Bernal Diaz in 1632 regarding the victory of the Spaniards. The book also made use of the statements made by the native Nahuatl survivors which were collected by Bernardino de Sahagun. The book showed how differences of opinion or biases as well as personal interests could play as a major factor in the interpretation of a particular event.

Among the many strong points of the book is the fact that it gave its reader a broad assessment and analysis of the main sources which historians used when describing the events that occurred and the consequences that the conquest of Mexico had entailed. The fact that Schwartz divided the book into two central sections is proof enough that he considered his readers to be primarily composed of students. The book had been divided into two separate sections, "Chronology of the Conquest of Tenochtitlan" and a helpful dictionary which tackles terms used by both the Spanish and the Nahuatl.

Mexica is used as a reference to those people who have control of the Tenochtitlan before the arrival of the Spaniards in 1519. Today's modern day Mexico had been dominated by the Mexica and that is primarily the reason why the people they have conquered speaks their tongue, Nahuatl thus not all those who speaks the language of Nahuatl can be considered as a Mexica. But there are people living in the South (which we now refer to as Central America) who make use of some Mayan dialects in speaking. The Nahuatl's are Native Americans who lives in Central and eastern Mexico.

The first part of the book provided us with an introduction of the history of the Mesoamerica during the conquest. It also showed how diverse those Mesoamericans are during that time. Another important thing that the writer of the book considered is how the difference of ethnicity could affect a retelling of a particular history thus the author made use of the primary sources gathered by both Spanish as well as the indigenous people.

Schwartz gave an illustration of the coming of the Mexica.

He also described how the Mexica build their capital, Tenochtitlan. The book also showed in detail how bitter the relationship of the indigenous people is with their conquerors, the Mexica. It also offered a description of the character of those Spaniards conqueror that inhabited both the Caribbean and the Central America. Schwartz also showed how greatly the Spaniards differ from the Natives especially in recording important events on their history.

The latter made use of hieroglyphic texts which are usually accompanied by dance, tales and songs. Schwartz also made it a point to show how different the stories presented by both sides in recounting the events that occurred during the conquest. It is very puzzling how the same event could be recounted differently, dependent on who is the teller of the said event.

Schwartz said that the primary reason for this difference is the fact that both sides had their own interests they wish to preserve. Those interests includes a mixture of politics, personal as well as cultural things each side wish to protect.

Schwartz analyzed the texts based on the reasons which motivated different writers into writing the event between the indigenous people and the Mexica. He showed some examples on which a particular author made his report not merely because he wants to recount the exact things which happened during that time, but rather because he that author wants to please a certain patron. There are other examples which showed that religion affected the retelling of the said events. It showed that there are people who tried to justify their joining of the conquest in terms of their religion, particularly that of the Roman Catholic Church.

On one particular chapter on the book, Schwartz noted that Diaz Del Castillo (one of his primary sources) had made use of other sources on recounting the events which occurred on the massacre of Mexica aristocrats (Things Fall Apart). Another thing Schwartz pointed out is the fact that previous enemies of the Aztecs (Mexica) had written most of the Tlaxacallan accounts and thus these writers had been biased on their retelling because of their yearning for people to view the Mexica as despicable people.

I would rather make use of the term conquest in defining the relationship between the Nahua and the Spaniards. I have made use of that particular term because that is exactly what happened between the Spaniards and the Nahua. The Spaniards gained the lands the Nahua previously had by conquering its people and everything that goes within it. I mean they did not acquire the land by buying them, did they? The term cultural exchange may also be appropriate in describing the relationship between the Spaniards and the Nahua because it is very common for the conquerors to make those people they have conquered adapt to their cultures.

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This is very evident on the fact that the indigenous people have learned the language of their conquerors and they are using it even up to now. This adaptation could occur because of the length of exposure they have had with each other and mostly because of cross-marriages. Also, as conquerors they would want their religion to be known worldwide and thus they have made use of their power in order to make the natives into Christians. One of the primary reasons the Spaniards have in justifying their conquest is to make the word of their God be known to all and thus it is no wonder that they have made use of their power in order to convert the people they have conquered into Christians. However, religion could be just a tactic the conquerors may have employed for some other ulterior motives which could either be gold or glory or a combination of both.

As I have said the term conqueror would be more appropriate than the term cultural exchange because the change of culture is more predominant to the conquered rather than to the conquerors. Of course, the native may have had influenced their conquerors in one way or another but most of these conquerors view the indigenous people as inferior and thus they would not want these people to influence them in any way. Thus, it is possible that no real exchange of culture really occurred especially since the change of culture is expected only from the conquered.

The Conquest of Mexico City could also be viewed as a war between Spaniards and Spaniards as well as between Natives American and the Native Americans. This is very evident that the recounting of this historical events vary not only between the Spaniards and the Natives, rather the

stories of the Spaniards vary even among themselves and same things can be told between the Natives.

These differences among themselves may have occurred because of their differences of interests. For the Natives for one, some of them have adapted completely with the terms required by their conquerors and they view their being conquered as a blessing thus they support the Spaniards wherein some Natives do not want the conquerors in their lands and they view the things done by the Spaniards as nothing but abused on the Natives and thus they would recount their tales in such a way that the Spaniards would look like a real villain.

To conclude, I think that the book presented both sides of the story well in such a way that the author did his best in order not to pick sides. He recounted the Conquest in a manner which attempted to give his readers a good view to both sides of the parties involved. Thus, all in all, the book is an interesting read and it is very beneficial especially for those who want to gain knowledge about the Conquest of Mexico.

Reference:

Schwartz, Stuart B. *Victors and the Vanquished: Spanish and Nahua Views of the Conquest of Mexico* (2000). Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000.