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Nepantla, Between Mesoamerican Time and Colonial Space: Reflections on the End of the World in Central Mexico

This essay seeks to provide a reflection on a subject that not only captures our imagination in modern times, but has also been at the heart of philosophical debates throughout human history. I refer to the concept of finality, and how it is that death, and ideas about what constitutes the end of the world, become embedded in our collective cognition. Humanity has documented its fascination with these themes over the years as entire genres such as science fiction can attest to with an endless number of novels, as well as many other modern cultural expressions. These explorations have been taking place for millennia, and every representation of the end of the world in culture whether through writing, painting, sculpture, and music acts as an evolving essay on what might happen in the face of catastrophic change, using human creativity as a tool to explore answers to these universal anxieties.

Climate change and the threat of a sixth mass extinction, exacerbated by human activities and capitalist mechanisms, add a layer of urgency to these reflections (Mantilla Osornio, 2024). The exhibition "Imagining the End of Times: Stories of Annihilation, Apocalypse, and Extinction" [Imaginar el Fin de los Tiempos] co-organised by the Centre for Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Studies and the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia invited us to delve into complex questions about what we consider 'the world' and what we mean by 'the end.' In this context, we paused to reflect on how multiple disciplines explore the construction of our reality. Neuroscience, for instance, asks whether reality is a function

of our brain chemistry interacting with the environment, or is it perhaps something deeper? Anthropology, in turn, urges us to reflect on the complex social and cultural entanglements that give shape to our world, questioning what our cosmology entails, and how we construct our worldview. What happens, then, when we are faced with situations that mean the death not only of loved ones, but of the world as we know it?

In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the Americas and their populations were to experience a cataclysmic upheaval without precedent. Contact between the Americas and Europe not only precipitated the formation of modernity and globalisation as we know it today, but also marked for Mesoamerican societies and beyond, what many would perceive and describe as the end of the world. This phenomenon was not simply limited to superficial changes in customs or political structures, but went deep into the indigenous worldview, altering the perception and value of time, natural cycles and the very structure of reality itself. This transformation encompassed all aspects of the everyday life and ceremonial practices of indigenous peoples: from social and political organisation, which was deeply imbricated in the territory and landscape, to fundamental aspects such as language, food, clothing, and even conceptions of gender and interpersonal relationships. The transition between the period that we know today as pre-Hispanic to the viceregal space involved much more than a simple change of rulers or the introduction of new technologies and religion. It was, in many ways, a confrontation between two ways of understanding the world: a cyclical vision, embedded in nature and governed by a cosmology deeply rooted in ritual and ceremony, and another represented by linear thinking with the conception of a past, present, and future driven by the notions of salvation and eternal damnation that characterise Western Christian thought. At the centre of these cultural and epistemological convulsions was the conception of time, which in Mesoamerica possessed a cyclical nature, seen not only as a framework for understanding natural or historical events, but as a reflection of an eternally renewed cosmic order.

The arrival of the Europeans meant the imposition of a linear and progressive temporal framework, typical of Western and Christian thought, which prioritised an eschatological vision of history directed towards an apocalyptic end. This vision was in radical contrast to the indigenous concept of cycles of creation and destruction, where each end is also a new beginning. Accepting this new temporal structure meant, for many indigenous peoples, a form of cultural annihilation, which has sometimes been interpreted literally as the end of their world. In his iconic book *The Colonisation of the Imaginary* (1993), Serge Gruzinski explored how this pro-

cess of cultural imposition attempted to subjugate and eventually replace indigenous ontologies, fundamentally transforming indigenous peoples' relationship to their environment, their past, and their future. This colonisation of time and the imaginary was not only a physical conquest, but an invasion of what we now consider the mind and spirit, where time ceased to be a cycle of eternal renewal and became a linear path towards the end of days. Despite the conclusions we can form from historical evidence and archaeology, it should be noted that the difficulty of understanding Mesoamerican time lies not only in its complexity and the richness of its manifestations, but also in the fact that most of our knowledge comes from sources that were compiled or transcribed decades after the Conquest, in a context already deeply marked by European influence. This historiographical distortion means that any attempt to reconstruct or understand the pre-Columbian worldview is inevitably tinged by external perspectives and prejudices. In this context, the work of researchers such as Gruzinski (1993; 2002), Leon-Portilla (1993; 2003; 2013), López Austin (1961; 1980; 1990; 1994; 2015), Graulich (1999; 2016), and more recently Diaz Alvarez (2018; 2019), Kruell (2012), Ruiz Medrano (2011; 2012), Matthew and Oudijk (2007), Alcántara Rojas and Navarrete Linares (2011; 2019), among many other scholars, becomes essential to unravel how the perception of time has been transformed and how these transformations have influenced the historical and cultural narrative of indigenous peoples. These studies raise crucial questions about the universality of Western-imposed conceptions of time and how these may have silenced or distorted other ways of understanding and experiencing temporality. As Mantilla Osornio (2024, 47) puts it, how can we question the universality of the homogeneous and regular temporal consciousness established in the modern Western matrix? How can we come closer to understanding how this frame of reference, this consciousness, is intertwined with a completely different one, namely Mesoamerican? And how can we create epistemological scopes and concepts that allows us to register the way in which different temporalities would play a fundamental role in the description of the narratives of the 'others' and the legitimation of hegemonic narratives?

The task of decolonising time, therefore, involves not only a critical review of historiographical sources and methods, but also an effort to recover and value indigenous languages and cultural expressions as vehicles of an alternative *cosmovisión* [worldview]. This includes a detailed study of events and practices both during the pre-Hispanic period and throughout the colonial era, in order to observe how these conceptions adapted, resisted or transformed in the face of the imposition of an external temporal order. This profound epistemological shift is not only

of academic interest, but has practical and contemporary implications, as it affects how the descendants of these cultures perceive their past, present, and future. By exploring and eventually understanding the essence of cyclical time in Mesoamerica, we not only illuminate a crucial aspect of the indigenous worldview, but also contribute to a greater understanding of the cultural resilience and adaptability of indigenous peoples. To better understand what was possibly the essence of the conception of cyclical time in Mesoamerica, but especially among the Nahua and those in Central Mexico, we can approach an important archaeological example that can be visited today in the heart of Mexico City.

Tenochtitlan as the Beginning and the End

On the eve of European-American contact, specifically in the Late Postclassic period, the rich worldview of the Nahua world was fully integrated and manifested in diverse social, cultural, economic, and artistic forms. Through oral narrative and poetry, painting, codices, ceramics, sculpture, music, landscape and architecture, profound notions about the structure and meaning of the cosmos were transmitted and experienced. In other words, in Tenochtitlan, the main city of the Mexica (Aztecs) and head of the Triple Alliance, the architecture of the Templo Mayor (Great Temple) was not only a space for religious or social encounters, but an active field where the cosmogonic cycles, the alternation of day and night, and the eternal renewal of the universe were recreated and lived. In 1978, a chance discovery during infrastructure work in the centre of Mexico City by the Luz y Fuerza company led to the discovery of a monolith of colossal proportions (Fig. 1). This event, accidental in its genesis, was crucial to literally and figuratively unearth a piece of great importance from the pre-Hispanic past. The monolith turned out to be the representation of Coyolxauhqui, the dismembered lunar goddess in Mexica mythology, a finding that reconfigured the historical understanding of the city, its cosmovision, and its conception of time and space. This finding would also allow the archaeological identification of the ceremonial centre of Tenochtitlan, the location of the Templo Mayor and many of its surrounding buildings, as well as its eventual excavation.

Figure 1. Monolith of Coyolxauhqui. To give an idea of its dimensions, this monolith is 3.25m in height, a thickness of 30.5cm in and it weights approximately 8 tons. INAH-Mediateca, http://mediateca.inah.gob.mx/repositorio/islandora/object/objetoprehispanico%3A23248

The first chapter of Book III of the Florentine Codex, which deals with the origin of the gods, records the myth in which the story of this goddess appears (Sahagún 2012). The story tells us that one day on the hill of Coatepec, Coatlicue, the mother of the gods, was sweeping when a little ball of feathers descended from the sky. Amazed, Coatlicue picks it up and places it between her breast and belly. When she finishes sweeping, she realises that the feather ball has disappeared and she has become pregnant. In this story, Coatlicue is the mother of the Centzon Huitznahua (the Four Hundred Southerners) and also of Coyolxauhqui, who is her eldest daughter.

Upon learning that their mother is pregnant, Coyolxauhqui and the Centzon Huitznahua are greatly offended because they do not know who the father is. This offence is so serious that Coyolxauhqui incites his brothers to kill their mother, and together they plot her death. When Coatlicue learns of this it gives her great sadness and fear, but Huitzilopochtli, her unborn son, speaks to her from the womb to comfort her, and she is subsequently reassured. Coyolxauhqui and the Centzon Huitznahua then prepare for war and to kill their mother, but Cuauhtlicac, one of the Centzon Huitznahua, secretly communicates with Huitzilopochtli in

his mother's womb, and tells him the route taken by Coyolxauhqui and his brothers. When they are about to reach Coatepec, Huitzilopochtli is born gloriously with his body and face painted ready for war. He is born with his full warrior's attire, including his shield, his dart spear, and with one of his hands he commands the fire serpent, Xiuhcoatl. With it, he attacks Coyolxauhqui and cuts off his head. From the top of the hill of Coatepec, Coyolxauhqui's body rolls down, and, in the process, becomes completely dismembered; lies at the feet of the mountain and Huitzilopochtli. The Centzon Huitznahua attack him together, but they cannot fight him and when they see that the battle is lost, they flee to the south where Huitzilopochtli pursues them, but only some of them escape.

The mythological story involving Coyolxauhqui, Huitzilopochtli, and the Centzon Huitznahua is not a simple tale. Within the tale, Coatlicue symbolises the earth, Coyolxauhqui the moon, Huitzilopochtli the sun, and the Centzon Huitznahua the stars. Huitzilopochtli was the main god of the Mexica and this narrative is emblematic of how they conceived the cosmos and its perpetual creation, capturing a series of elements that structure the understanding of the world. These will include not only the observation of natural phenomena, but also the interweaving of a series of activities that have the function of explaining "reality" and forming a sense of the world. This account provides the explanation of why night and day exist, but also shows us the active creation of cyclical time, and points to fundamental elements within the Nahua worldview regarding the understanding of the nature of this conception of time, as well as the calendar itself.

Coatlicue, the mother of Huitzilopochtli and Coyolxauhqui in Mexica mythology, is the telluric goddess, the goddess of the earth. Her role, cleansing the hill of Coatepec where these events take place, is deeply symbolic (Fernández 1963; Matos Moctezuma 1991; Graulich 2000). Her action not only sets the stage for the birth of Huitzilopochtli—the sun—but also symbolises the constant regeneration of the world, an essential feature of Mesoamerican cyclical temporality. In this context, the fall of the ball of feathers to earth, which will generate the birth of Huitzilopochtli, signals the fertilisation of the earth by the sky, and the cleansing becomes a metaphor for the preparation of the universe for change and renewal. The change in this case will be the hierophanic birth of Huitzilopochtli, i.e. the incarnation of the sun, pursued by the moon—Coyolxauhqui—and the cosmic battle that will take place between them; where the sun must fight every day with the moon and the stars, i.e. the Centzon Huitznahua, thus explaining the cycle of day and night (Johansson 2017).

The appearance of the sun signals the future to come, the change of what was before and of the world where darkness, night, moon, and stars were already present. However, it is suggested by the rejection of change, i.e. the arrival of a new being—Huitzilopochtli—that, before this, the world was relatively static. In the cosmic battle that is to be fought, movement is then generated. The sacrifice of Coyolxauhqui and the death of the gods will give way to the day, but, at the same time, the sun advances creating a future; time returns in regression towards night, establishing a dual rhythm that will be the cause of this movement. As Patrick Johanson (2004, 113) has previously pointed out: "The course of the Sun and that of the Moon generate the space-times successively diurnal and nocturnal, masculine and feminine, evolutionary and involutionary, but above all the space-times of existence and death."[1]

The essence of Mesoamerican time, then, lies in the creation of life out of death, and death out of life. The end and the beginning always accompany each other in a dance that never ends. In the case of the Nahua of Central Mexico, myth, but also time, are not only expressed orally, but are materialised and summoned to the different sensory and cognitive planes through the territorial organisation and the creation of a landscape and architectural narrative. The physical organisation of the Nahua territorial unit, i.e. the *altepetl*, the city and the villages, responded to a recreation of the universe on a scale, where time and mythical space were reproduced in the terrestrial realm (Bernal García and García Zambrano 2006; Fernández Christlieb and García Zambrano 2006). Time is articulated in relation to space, where the temporal units, as Ana Diaz (2019) puts it, acquire spatial connotations that are articulated on the basis of the division of the world into four or five parts that are composed of four directions and a centre. Each day, year, and era then correspond to a physical space, as can be seen in the organisation of the altepetl.

The excavation of the Coyolxauhqui monolith led to the discovery of the steps of the Templo Mayor, the architectural enclosure of the ritual space par excellence of the city of Tenochtitlan (Mundy, 2015). The Templo Mayor is the representation or urban conception of the mountain of Coatepec on the side of Huitzilopochtli, and of Tonacatepetl or the hill of maintenance on the side of Tlaloc. From the top of the mountain, represented by the pyramid and in this case the temple of Huitzilopochtli, the sun triumphantly precedes the dismembered body of Coyolxauhqui represented in the monolith, which has rolled down the side of the hill represented by the steps (Fig. 2). Thus, when the monolith of Coyolxauhqui is found at the foot of what we know today as the Templo Mayor in the centre of Mexico City, we find ourselves in the presence of the very moment

1 My translation from Spanish.

when the sacrifice of the gods takes place, and in the space where cyclical time begins in motion: the creation of day and night (Fig. 3). The monumentality of the monolith of Coyolxauhqui in the Templo Mayor not only marked a place of religious and mythological significance but also served as a perpetual reminder of the cycles of conflict and reconciliation, death and rebirth that formed the basis of the Nahua worldview. This archaeological discovery, therefore, not only broadened the understanding of the pre-Hispanic past, but also reaffirmed the complexity and depth of the indigenous perception of time as a living and dynamic entity.

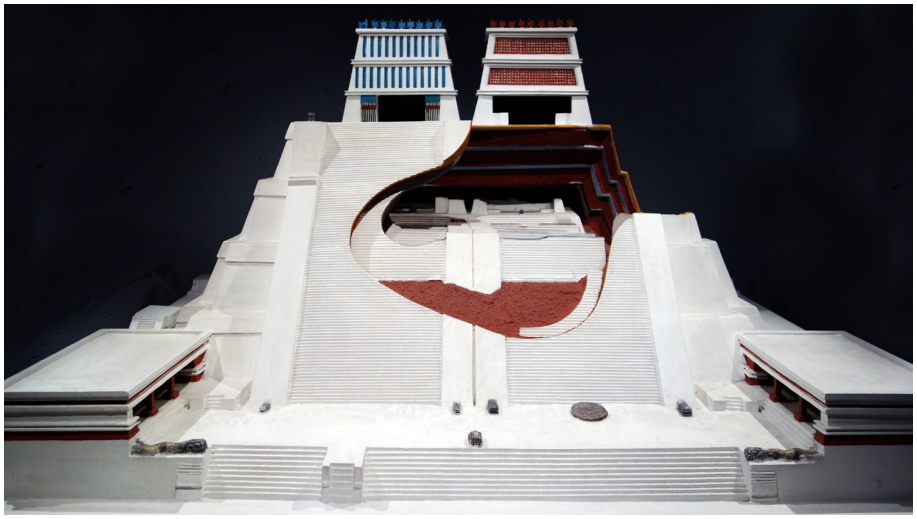

Figure 2. Front view of a model of the Great Temple (Templo Mayor). Viewing it from the front, on the top-left side, we see the temple of Tlaloc (the god of rain), while on the top-right is the temple of Huitzilopochtli. At the feet of the stairs lies the monolith of Coyolxauhqui. The model also depicts the different constructive stages of the Temple that happened across the rise of the Mexica city. Every stage was added to the previous one. Image by Steven Zucker licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.

Figure 3. Archaeological site of Templo Mayor. Front view of the Coyolxauhqui monolith in its original position. Notice the flight stairs that survive of the temple. Image by José Luiz Bernardes Ribeiro licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.

To visualise Mexico City at that time, with the mist descending from the volcanoes, the causeways stucco glowing under sun of dawn, and the vibrant life of its canals and plazas, is to invoke a world where past and present intertwine, where the cyclical time dictated by myths and gods still beats in the heart of what is now a modern metropolis (Fig. 4). To imagine the sound of rattles and the scents of copal in the air is to remember that, in every corner of Tenochtitlan, people lived within a continuous cosmic narrative, one that defined every aspect of life and death, and that even today, continues to resonate with those who seek to understand the depth of our connection to time and space.

Figure 4. A 3D rendering of Tenochtitlan. Image by Thomas Khole licensed under CC BY 4.0.

In the complex tapestry of Mesoamerican history and cosmology, indigenous forms of cognition of the world represent a profound divergence from European perceptions, especially with regard to understanding and interacting with the cosmos. Mesoamerican indigenous societies not only conceptualised the world through visual images, such as those captured in codices, but also used architecture to sensorially immerse themselves in the mythical and historical narratives that defined their existence and worldview. The pre-Columbian cognitive framework allowed its members to be not only spectators, but also active participants in history, myths, and the ceaseless cycle of time. This understanding was reinforced by rituals and, in some cases, the use of entheogenic plants, which facilitated a deep exploration of consciousness and allowed individuals to directly experience elements related to their ancestral wisdom. In this context, time and space were not abstract, but living realities with which people constantly interacted, participating in sacred reality and having the ability

to influence divine designs through their actions and sacrifices. This holistic approach is diametrically opposed to the Christian view introduced by the Europeans, where a central divine will and a linear time leading from Creation to the Last Judgement prevailed. In contrast, for Mesoamerican peoples such as the Nahua, time is cyclical and each calendar period, each ritual, reflects and renews the world and its order.

The fall of Tenochtitlan in 1521 marked a dramatic turning point in the history of Mesoamerica. The devastation of Tenochtitlan meant the end of the hegemony of the Mexica Huey Altepetl and of the political and territorial structure that had a strong relationship with cosmic symbolism. The destruction of the temples and sculptures by the Spanish was not only a physical conquest, but also represented the annihilation of the will of the gods. It is important to remember, as recorded in Mexica history, that it was Huitzilopochtli who ordered the creation of the city of Tenochtitlan on this isle in the middle of Lake Texcoco. In this sense, the ruin of Tenochtitlan would mean the end of sacred space, but also of cyclical time, that is, the structure that supported all the reality known and lived by the indigenous people. As such, it must be considered that sacred time was connected to each and every aspect of everyday life.

The *xiuhpohualli*, or 365-day calendar, allowed for the precise organisation of practices such as agriculture, astronomy, hunting, fishing and gathering, while the *tonalpohualli*, or 260-day calendar, governed the different aspects of sacred and divinatory time that permeated not only these activities, but also events ranging from the birth of a child, rituals, and healing practices, to the celebration of religious festivals. On the one hand, by changing the way space was organised with the establishment of the viceroyalty's territorial organisation, sacred time was being brought to an end in multiple ways. The introduction of new ideas about space and the importance of landscape, as well as the destruction of the physical reproduction of the cosmos represented in the altepetl and the Templo Mayor, would break with the experience of sacred space and time. On the other hand, the imposition of a new calendar system and religious festivals profoundly altered the daily practices and rituals that had defined life in Mesoamerica. Through a new way of conceiving time and the imposition of other customs, the annihilation of practices intertwining with cyclical time, and thus its end, was sought. The characteristics of the names and numbers of the days of the Tonalpohualli determined the course of destiny and, therefore, when to harvest, when to start a war, when to marry, or even the destiny of people (Díaz Alvarez 2019). The influence exerted by the characteristics of the days permeated each individual, because the influence of the date of their birth—as recorded in the calendar—gov-

erned the destiny of their entire life. This was noticed by the European friars very early, as we can observe in the sources. The priests immediately realised that the way of conceiving time was intimately linked to the worldview and therefore to religious beliefs. Baptism with Christian names and the 'Castilianisation' of indigenous names is an example of how they tried to distance indigenous people from the tonalpohualli, and from the processes of prophecy and augury that the act of naming someone entailed. In the same way, the introduction of European food and drink, and particularly the attempt to diminish and sometimes prohibit the use of certain types of plants and foods that were related to religious acts and festivals, such as teonanacatl (sacred mushrooms) or *huautli* (amaranth), also led to the breaking of cyclical time (Aguilar González 2022; González Romero 2023). In the case of medical practices, these were deeply linked to the understanding of the three soul forces of the body, the various sacred influences that mapped directly onto the manifestation of the divine, and the representation of the body as a microcosm. In this way, they were also linked to sacred time and space. On the one hand, indigenous medicine would often be condemned as an idolatrous practice, but on the other, the value of the plants and techniques used would be recognised, an extraction and selection of knowledge would be generated and submitted to the consideration of the European cosmovision. In this way, part of the eventual scientific revolution that takes place in Europe thanks to American plants and whose knowledge and use comes from the indigenous cultures of America, is not only unrecognised, but is claimed as a European discovery (Morales Sarabia et al. 2017; Eudave Eusebio 2021).

Nepantla, In Between Worlds

The processes of cultural annihilation would not happen without resistance, and the persistence of pre-Columbian practices demonstrates that the Mesoamerican worldview did not disappear completely. The indigenous people found ways to adapt and maintain their traditions, often syncretising Christian elements with their own rituals and beliefs, thus ensuring the continuity of their worldview despite oppression and colonisation. Fray Diego de Durán (1995), for example, noted how the populations sought to couple the dates of celebration of the Christian saints they adopted with the feasts of the pre-Hispanic deities, and how, when children were baptised with the Catholic name, the name of the sign of the tonalpohualli in which they were born was added. Durán writes with the idea of warning other religious people of these practices, and these

can be interpreted as a strategy to be able to continue connecting the characteristics of sacred time with the person, and therefore with his or her divine destiny. Sacred time was also deeply tied with the consumption of ritual foods. In the case of *huautli* (amaranth), before the arrival of the Europeans, was used to make *tzoalli*, which was a dough mixed with maguey honey and used to make images of divinities that were consumed in rituals during certain festivals (Velasco Lozano, 2016). This was probably one of the reasons why the Spanish categorised this plant as a worthless herb, but nevertheless, in the seventeenth century, Jacinto de la Serna (1987) still recorded the persistence of this rite. In the case of medical knowledge, healing and divination practices have continued to this day as indigenous and Christian customs are intertwined in complex and profound ways. This can be seen in the petitions for rain that are made today on the volcanoes and hills to Tlaloc and the rain gods. In the seventeenth century the practice was recorded in towns such as San Mateo, Xalatlaco and Tenango in the current state of Morelos where communities paid conjurers with money or pulque to protect their milpas from storms (Lorente Fernández 2009). De la Serna (1987, 290), records incantations that were still performed in the pre-Hispanic manner and others of a more Christian nature. This tradition continues with the Graniceros in the volcanoes of Central Mexico, who, even today, still ritually manipulate the weather (Broda 1997; Lorente Fernández 2009).

These practices demonstrate how indigenous people have kept the legacy of their relationship with the cosmos alive, challenging dominant narratives and reaffirming their place and time in the world. Yet, experiencing such cataclysmic change—and on the brink of the end of time—how did indigenous societies experience these changes?

Historical sources give us some answers. In the *Historia de las Indias de la Nueva España*, Fray Diego de Durán gives an account of the counting of days, and relates how he discovers an indigenous man who had already been evangelised carrying out what he considers to be idolatrous practices. Durán (1995, t. 2, ch. 3) confronts him, and the man responds:[2]

> Father, do not be afraid, for we are still in *Nepantla*.

To which Durán says:

> And when I understood what he meant by that word and metaphor, which means to be in the middle, I insisted again that he tell me in what middle was it in which they were. He told me that since they were not yet well rooted in the faith, I should not be frightened by the way they

2 Both italics and translation to English are the authors.

> were still neutral, that they did not turn either to the one law or to the other, or rather that they believed in God and justly turned to their ancient customs and those of the devil. And this is what he meant by his abominable excuse: that they were still in the middle and neutral.

According to the concept of *nepantla*, a Nahuatl word meaning 'to be in the middle' or 'between something' and in this case 'between two worlds,' a profound feeling emerges in the process of naming the state in which the Mesoamerican peoples found themselves at that time. With Christianity tearing the essence of being from reality itself, and seeking to uproot the ideas and convictions that the elders still practised, the peoples of Central Mexico found themselves at this crossroads, between two cosmovisions; at the edge of a time that was still remembered, but entering a space that they suspect did not entirely belong to them, and that had not finished solidifying itself as a clear, but above all viable, path. In its inflexibility towards other forms of existence, sixteenth century Christianity condemned Mesoamerican people to a category of childishness that it assumed was rooted in the corruption derived from infidelity. Evangelisation, then, emerged as the only form of salvation, and therefore as a just cause for colonisation and subjugation of those whose cultural, scientific, and spiritual transcendence could not be understood, let alone recognised as equal.

The *Libro de los Colloquios*, compiled by Sahagún, narrates a meeting that took place between twelve Franciscan friars and several tlamantinimes, that is, sages of the Nahua culture. In the seventh chapter of this text, the Nahua priests express a profound sentiment (León-Portilla 2008, 79):[3]

Perhaps we are only going to our doom, to our destruction. Or have we acted slothfully? Where would we really go? For we are macehuals, we are perishable, we are mortal. May we not die, may we not perish, though our gods have died.

As Sánchez de Tagle (2022) has pointed out, this passage not only evokes a deep melancholy, but also contains two elements of great significance. First, the term '*macehual*' means worthy of being something, the one who deserves, connoting a principle of reciprocity with the creator gods of the Fifth Sun, who sacrificed their lives to maintain the flow of existence (Towsend 2019). On the other hand, the resigned acceptance of the death of their deities transcends their mere eschatological demise. This aspect represents much more than this. It refers to the end of the very reality in which one lives, and the disappearance of culture in its essence, which, in turn, leads to the extinction of the notion of cyclical time. The new Christian reality and the imposition of the Western cult will

3 The English translation is from the author.

mark the supremacy of linear time, and therefore the death of indigenous time. In the Christian canon, time is conceived in a linear way, where the historical evolution goes from creation and paradise to the apocalypse. Human beings, despite their free will, will always be subject to the divine plan, which is imminent, unidirectional, and immovable.

In the case of the Nahua, the cosmos is in movement and is, as such, constantly recreated, and through rites and myths—as we see in the Templo Mayor—the essence of time is repeated and where the human being is a participant in a reiterative way. In this way, the humanity inhabits not only space, but also sacred time. Furthermore, in this principle of reciprocity, the human being would have influence in the creation of history, where profane and sacred time are reciprocal. In Christianity, time is one, that of God, and has the specific purpose of fulfilling the divine design which is ultimately salvation (Sánchez de Tagle 2022). In the Nahua world, time is recreated, allowing in its cyclical conception, change, movement, and renewal. That is, the constant design of creation and destruction and the dance between life and death. Thus, in my own reading of this passage, when the tlamantinimes declare: "May we not die, may we not perish, even though our gods have died," despite the resignation to the death of their gods and therefore of the known world, the passage also refers to the essence of cyclical time where mortality and the inevitability of the end is recognised, but also the desire and imminence of continuation. By meeting in the middle, in *Nepantla*, indigenous peoples will generate a new reality that, in many ways, still continues.

The mountains of Guerrero house the Lienzo de Petlacala, a document narrating the Nahua migration from the Valley of Mexico to this region, which takes place during the mid-fifteenth century and culminates with the founding of the town (Fig. 5) (Jiménez Padilla and Villela Flores 1999; Villela Flores, 2018). This document, which probably dates from the seventeenth century, is painted in the style of early colonial maps that combine the traditional manner of Mesoamerican codices with European-style spatial information and references. The canvas shows Charles V meeting with three indigenous nobles, who are presumed to be the founders of the town, and surrounding the scene is a map with place names, boundaries, and other elements of the Mesoamerican pictorial tradition.

Figure 5. The Lienzo de Petlacala as part of the petitions of rain. Photo courtesy of Samuel Villela Flores.

The Lienzo not only precedes the municipal elections and, in particular, the act of inauguration, legitimising the transfer of power to the new representative through the communal power that the lienzo confers, but also once a year this lienzo is carried to the altar at the top of Chichitepetl, just before the rainy season where it also precedes the rain petitions (Villela Flores 2018). On the one hand, the act of taking power and the walk in which the lienzo is carried demarcating the borders of the territory, seems to be linked to the possible continuation of the Mesoamerican conception of power, where there is a legitimation intimately associated with genealogical relationships. On the other hand, the lienzo also creates a hierophany by combining the presence of a mythical founder (in this case Charles V), who appears to meet the actual founders of the community, and where the act of determining the borders by walking this lienzo through the territory, creating the territorial demarcation, is also the act of summoning the sacred time of foundation; which renders the space sacred and thus also legitimises it (Jiménez Padilla and Villela Flores 1999; Villela Flores 2018).

As can be seen in this specific case, as well as that of the Graniceros, but also as de la Serna mentions at the time, despite the practice and acceptance of many of the Christian precepts, in the communities there is still the deep connection with the landscape and the sacred and primordial space and time, which in one sense or another will return through

the ritual acts we mentioned. As such, the concept of *Nepantla* can be thought of as a metaphor for survival and creation. The experience of 'being in the middle' was not limited to the direct confrontation between two worlds. It also became a creative process through which indigenous people generated new forms of knowledge and resistance. Faced with the disruption of their temporal and spiritual structures, Mesoamericans not only preserved fragments of their identity, but also forged new cultural expressions that reflected loss as well as adaptation and survival.

Today, the concept of *Nepantla* is still relevant. We must consider that we are constantly imagining and re-imagining both the end and the beginning. We need only look at modern dynamics and the new era ushered in by digital technology to realise that we constantly find ourselves in *Nepantla*. It also reminds us of how cultures confront, adapt, and transform external influences in contexts of contact and conquest. The history of Mesoamerican temporality and its transformation under Spanish rule teaches us about the resilience and adaptability of human societies in the face of fundamental changes. It also shows us that, in the case of the indigenous world, far from being an end and fulfilling what the Tlamatimines wished, "that we should not die, that we should not perish;" in *Nepantla* they found not only continuity, but forged, as they continue to forge, fluid paths to the rhythms and times that their communities build. Finally, the concept of *Nepantla* can offer a space for reflection on how we understand and contextualise the 'end of the world' in diverse cultural traditions and how these interpretations influence our perception of history and culture in the globalised present.

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