Confraternity and community: negotiating ethnicity, gender and place in colonial Tecamachalco, Mexico

Annette Dionne Richie
University at Albany, State University of New York, arichie@albany.edu

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the The Graduate School at Scholars Archive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Legacy Theses & Dissertations (2009 - 2024) by an authorized administrator of Scholars Archive.

Please see Terms of Use. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@albany.edu.
CONFRATERNITY AND COMMUNITY:
NEGOTIATING ETHNICITY, GENDER AND PLACE IN
COLONIAL TECAMACHALCO, MEXICO

by

Annette D. Richie

A Dissertation
Submitted to the University at Albany, State University of New York
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

College of Arts & Sciences
Department of Anthropology
2011
Confraternity and Community:
Negotiating Ethnicity, Gender and Place in
Colonial Tecamachalco, Mexico

by

Annette D. Richie

COPYRIGHT 2011
Abstract

_Cofradías_, lay religious brotherhoods introduced to New Spain by Mendicant friars in the mid-16th century, were optimal vehicles for corporate consciousness. This case study in colonialism, evangelization and ethnic politics centers on avenues and strategies for assessing, accommodating and rejecting cultural elements from “foreign” groups, as well as the freedom to assemble and incorporate, but also marginalize, others.

Focusing on the parish archive and community of Tecamachalco, Puebla, Mexico, this project elucidates the mechanisms that produced lay interactions _compliant_ enough for vice-regal and ecclesiastic authorities, yet amenable to status _contests_ among Popoloca (indigenous), mulattoes and Spaniards. Priests solicited conformity from native and multi-ethnic communities by offering ritual, social, economic, and political boons largely absent from secular spheres, at least for non-Spaniards, non-elites and non-men.

Crafting charters, in Spanish and/or Nahuatl, fifteen groups (1563-1823) attempted to set their own courses for autonomous lay religiosity. Few succeeded in this endeavour but everyone involved received a practical course in ethnic education. Six _cofradías de naturales_ (locals), all with close ties to Popoloca elites, communal lands and _barrios_ (neighborhoods), were joined by five _cofradías de españoles_ (Spaniards) masquerading as umbrella sodalities, a casta group and three sisterhoods.

Cofradías were once invaluable tools in the hands of individuals, families, neighbors, and ethnic groups. A “good death” and public recognition as a viable citizen, gained through _mayordomías_ (fiesta sponsorship) and penitential processions, motivated urban and rural residents to mobilize their own sodalities and choose with whom to share
fellowship. When insulated among social intimates, elites told themselves, and their competitors, that they were the true patrons and masters of Tecamachalco.

When examined in conjunction, confraternal records, indigenous histories and petitions, and ecclesiastic edicts reveal self-conscious rhetoric and evolving *intercultural dialogue*. This project represents the first systematic attempt to reconstruct confraternal membership and political economy, or to contrast ideals (acts of foundation, ordinances and amendments) with actual practices and interactions. Confraternal charters and rituals were instruments of *good government* and *good citizenry*, and *performances* of, as well as challenges to, power. Spaniards’ hegemony-driven enterprises were confronted by native, casta and female struggles for dignity, legitimacy and autonomy.
Acknowledgements

I dedicate this work to family, friends, teachers, and students who sustained me on the long road back to Tecamachalco. To my husband Mike, my parents Ron and Judy, my sister Karen and her family, my grandma Dorothy, and my mentor Louise M. Burkhart – thank you for investing in me. It is a joy and a privilege to walk this earth with you.

I am grateful for the generosity and wisdom of my stellar doctoral committee: Louise M. Burkhart, Robert M. Carmack, and Walter E. Little, former members Gary H. Gossen and Michael E. Smith, and external reader Caterina Pizzigoni. James Lockhart, Susan Schroeder, John F. Schwaller, Barry D. Sell, and David Tavárez also provided invaluable insights and inspiration in my Nahuatl studies and ethnohistoric analyses.

I am proud to call the Department of Anthropology and the Institute for Mesoamerican Studies at the State University of New York at Albany home. In addition to external research support from the Organization of American States, Yale University’s Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, and the Newberry Library, this project was funded through the University at Albany’s College Scholarship (three years), Research Fellowship (one year), DeCormier Memorial Scholarship, numerous Benevolent Association Awards, and the Office of the Vice-President for Research.

My many adventures in teaching at Albany Medical Center, Bard College, Bennington College, the College of Saint Rose, Middlebury College, Skidmore College, the University at Albany, and the University of Saskatchewan led me far off-course. But they also provided immeasurable rewards. I thank my students for teaching me so much.

And to the parish and people of Tecamachalco – thank you for treating viajeros and extranjeros as compañeros and compadres, and for sharing your stories with me.
# Table of Contents

I - Parish Archives, People and Practices  
II - Confraternal Ethnohistory and Ethnology  
III - Popoloca Lay Leaders’ Struggles for Legitimacy and Autonomy: San Francisco and the Nativity of Our Lady (1563-1803)  
IV - The Holy Name of Jesus (1595-1779): Assertive Nahuatl and Submissive Spanish  
V - Learning to Be Cofrades: Tecamachalco’s Spanish Confraternal Model  
VI - Good Government in the Holy True Cross: Confraternal Political Economy  
VII - Gender and Ethnic Management, Marginalization and Mobilization: Rituals of Rule and Rebellion in the Holy True Cross  
VIII - Ethnic Coexistence and Factionalism in the Communal Quest for Salvation, Legitimacy and Autonomy  
IX - The Cultural Geography of Popoloca Catholicism: Barrios, Capillas and Cofradías  
X - The Eventual Rise of Mulatto and Female Lay Leaders: The Marian Devotions of Our Lady of the Rosary, Solitude, Transit, and Sorrows  
XI - Conclusions: Authority and Agency in Confraternal Charters and Practices  

Bibliography

---

**Figures**

Photographs  
Maps  
Charts
Every time my family was posted to a Canadian embassy, we assessed and adapted to yet another cultural system. Growing up as an occasional foreigner and member of an ethno-religious minority were largely positive and rewarding experiences, leading me to a career as an ethnographer or professional stranger. Naturally I came to focus on models of ethnic coexistence and the plural functions played by religion within interethnic interactions. I pondered: How is a sense of community constructed and maintained? In what ways do newcomers negotiate their place within increasingly diverse societies? What coping mechanisms do individuals, families and larger corporate units employ in their quest to define themselves and others? How do locals assert their autonomy and legitimacy, particularly when dealing with outsiders or “the other”?

I begin this case study in corporate responses to colonialism and evangelization with its motives, setting and methods. I explore cofradías, or lay religious brotherhoods, commandeered by men and women of indigenous, casta (mixed ethnicity) and Spanish descent. Cofradías enable me to trace the evolution of interethnic, gender and barrio (neighborhood) relations within a rural parish community peripheral to central Mexico.

My ethnohistoric project illuminates change and continuity within and among cofradías as well as the intercultural dialogues and exchanges that they both facilitated and circumvented. An abundance of colonial chapels, religious tests and artwork, and cofradías make Tecamachalco, Puebla, an optimal research site. Between 1563 and 1823, the indigenous, Spanish and casta residents of neighborhoods, farms and subject hamlets united but also divided themselves in order to found, lead, promote, enrich, and preserve
their own cofradías. Lay leaders, not ecclesiastic authorities, ultimately decided which parishioners to include or exclude as spiritual brothers and sisters.

Before delving into the Tecamachalco confraternal project, I provide my rationale for centering this study on a single parish archive and my specific interests in confraternal records. My focus on the parish archive and community includes translation and analysis of confraternal, sacramental and census records, indigenous *anales* (annals) and petitions, and bishop’s edicts.

In Chapter II, I assess the case study’s indebtedness and relevance to historical anthropology and Mesoamerican studies. Confraternities are particularly significant within colonialism and ethnic studies. I explore the explanatory frameworks that have been, or could be, used to interpret cofradías in order to situate the approaches employed in this project.

*The Road to Tecamachalco*

Our growing knowledge base on cofradías may prompt the reader to ask, “Why undertake yet another study on cofradías?” One reason is that we still know so little about the actual functioning of cofradías in the centuries immediately following the Spanish conquest, especially outside metropolises, such as Mexico City and Lima, Peru. Much of what we know stems from studies of one ethnic group (whether Spaniards or Indians) in urban centers or rural Chiapas. Recent scholarship sheds light on inter-confraternal interactions within a multiethnic setting (García Ayluardo 1994; Lavrin 1980; O’Hara 2010), Spanish groups (Bazarte Martínez 1989; McLeod Richie 2010), gender roles in Nahua cofradías (Schroeder 2000; Schwaller 1989; Sell 2000, 2002), and Afro-Mexican
sodalities based in the provinces of Chihuahua, Morelia, Querétaro, and Veracruz (Bristol 2007; Von Germeten 2006). My project incorporates mulattoes and other castas as well as Spanish settlers and indigenous locals. I was inspired by studies of parishioners (Pescador 1992, 1995) and political rituals (Beezley, et al. 1994) that link lay religious activism and community development to interethnic and gender relations, cultural geography and symbolism. Confraternal records enable me to trace evolving interethnic interactions in a small town and parish peripheral to its bishopric and central Mexico.

Ethnohistorians demonstrate that “many insights can be gained about almost any topic by investigating it in records at the most local level attainable, with the least mediated information” (Lockhart 2002: personal communication). This is also true in my former field – archaeology, which values the context of an artifact and its relation to the entire assemblage. Texts linked to known locations, years, uses, authors, and audiences are ideal tools in the reconstruction of community histories, Thus it was natural for me to focus on a parish archive rather than rely on centralized reports from bishops or judges of the Inquisition alone. The partial sacramental records of many towns are stored on a microfilm repository in Salt Lake City. But examining originals on site is advantageous. My experiences of investigating Tecamachalco’s parish archive while residing in the community emphasized ecclesiastic records’ purpose and utility. At a minimum, I was reminded that books are produced within a broader human setting not to be forgotten. Few confraternal records are open to the public, so one must go directly to the source.

There are countless parish archives throughout the Christianized world. One could argue that they are all very much the same. Each has its own protective priest - a true padre guardián - who conceals "his" collection's content, classification and conservation
systems from the wandering historian. The typical parish archive is incomplete, disorganized and restricted, terms that might describe the Tecamachalco situation, but only upon initial consultation. The collection and others like it are well worth the hours invested in eyestrain, diplomacy and reciprocity.

I visited over fifty towns in my 1997 pursuit of an accessible and fruitful parish archive. I sought a "frontier" setting and people outside the well-studied central Mexican valley. In colonial religious outposts in the states of Mexico, Hidalgo, Guerrero, Morelos, Tlaxcala, and Puebla, I requested access to many parish archives but was regularly informed that there were “no documents” to be analyzed. It was more likely that I could not see the archives, at least not yet.

My quest for a documentary goldmine was eventually rewarded. Willingness to return “mañana, pasado mañana, quince días” (tomorrow, in two days or two weeks) opened the door that mattered. I first came across Tecamachalco in treatises about Puebla’s *rutas conventuales* (routes of convents) in Puebla’s INAH (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia) library. Researchers from Tepeaca’s UAM (Universidad Autónoma de México) campus published an inventory of the parish archive (Faulkes Woog 1992). Large and long series of confraternal (1575-1823) and sacramental records (1641-present day) were promised. The archive had exactly what I was looking for. Suitably remote from the Spanish cities where most cofradías were studied, Tecamachalco was an excellent location to examine indigenous reactions to colonialism and evangelization. Moreover the parish archive had yet to be mined for historical data.

Sources that attest to Tecamachalco’s indigenous talent and heritage further captured my interest. Tecamachalco is best known as the home of one of New Spain’s
few identified indigenous artists, Juan Gerson (Arredondo et al. 1964). The native
nobleman’s *amatl* (tree bark) mural depictions of Biblical episodes still adorn the Ex-
Convento de San Francisco. The *Anales de Tecamachalco* memorialized major events in
the natural, political and religious history of the town, including earthquakes, epidemics,
dignitaries’ visits and infighting, church erection, and cofradías’ formations and debts.
Written in Nahuatl in the late 16th century, the anales were translated into Spanish and
published in both languages (Celestino Solís and Reyes García 1992).

The Tecamachalco region was once home to indigenous peoples who the more
dominant Nahua referred to as the Popoloca. In Nahuatl, Popoloca translates to “one who
speaks poorly.” The ethnic identifier or slur reveals that the *naturales* (locals) could
speak Nahuatl, the central Mexican lingua franca, but that they were linguistically and
ethnically distinct. The *altepetl’s* (city-state) *caciques principales* (noble lords) and
gobernadores (governors) were active into the 18th century, maintaining close ties with
nearby Acatzingo. But the true seat of Popoloca power was Tepejí de la Seda.

Tecamachalco was indoctrinated by Franciscans within the framework of the
diocease of Tlaxcala. The first friars arrived by 1540, followed by at least one hundred
Spanish families before 1590. By the mid-17th century, religious control of many of New
Spain’s parishes was wrestled away from the Mendicants and handed over to the secular
clergy. Tecamachalco’s transition occurred in 1641. New priests, subject to the bishop of
Puebla, were concerned about the spiritual wellbeing and maturity of all residents, not
just those of native neophytes.

Tecamachalco is an ideal place to study cofradías. By 1595 it hosted 3 indigenous
cofradías (San Francisco, the Nativity of Our Lady and the Holy Name of Jesus), and at
least 2 Spanish-led groups (the Holy Eucharist, the Holy True Cross, and probably the Blessed Souls of Purgatory; Vetancurt 1971: Part III, 65). By 1689, ten active cofradías, and fifteen by 1743 seem to attest to a unique local situation. Cofradías were usually most abundant in peripheral or rural areas, but population, parish size and location are not reliable determinants (Gibson 1964: 127). By 1700, there were at least eight cofradías in major cities but only two or three in small towns (Zafra Oropeza 1996: 24). Perhaps only large Spanish-led sodalities or ones with parish-wide memberships were tabulated. In 1585 there were as many as three hundred cofradías in Mexico City, of which eighty-two (27%) were classified as Indian (Knight 2002). Confraternal records are housed in parish archives rather than in a few centralized locations where they could be enumerated, so there may never be a consensus on the abundance of New Spain’s cofradías.

Something unusual may have been afoot in order to compel Tecamachalco’s residents to define their ethnic, residential and gender groups by proliferating ten cofradías in a century (1644-1743, after the secular clergy arrived). Spanish migrants’ displacements of the Popoloca followed by evolving ratios of “locals” (Popoloca and perhaps Nahua) to “foreigners” (Spanish and casta residents) are likely culprits.

On my first trip to Tecamachalco, I visited the Ex-Convento, a once Franciscan stronghold. The church exterior and nave remained in a remarkable state of preservation, unlike the friars’ former quarters. I inquired about parish records and authorities with the elderly female sacristan who swept the church floor. She directed me to the parish church, a few blocks over, completed under the secular clergy in the 17th century. I would soon spend over a year within its ceremonial precinct, supplementing my ethnohistoric
research with attending processions, fiestas and masses, teaching English to children and the vicar, even becoming a comadre (godmother).

As expected, I gained access to the parish personnel and archive but only after several attempts. Arriving anew in 1999, I was granted an audience with the head priest, who would consider granting my request in exchange for a letter of introduction. I had one, but upon its receipt, Padre solicited another detailing my research plan. I framed my project as a scientific service to the parish and community. I soon learned that my “piety,” expressed as attendance at mass and exemplary behavior befitting a joven (young person), was an unspoken requirement.

Days later, Padre escorted me to the parish archive in the Casa Parroquial, the priestly residence located behind the parish church. After opening the lock to the naturally cool and spacious room, Padre showed me three bookcases and a series of dusty cardboard boxes. Much of the material was recent, but great care had been invested in preserving the oldest books.

When I exited the archive, reveling in relief and anticipation, my premature illusions were shattered. Padre instructed me to pay someone to monitor my work in the archive. Citing past thefts and illicit photocopying, Padre explained “It’s not about not trusting you. We have to protect ourselves. Surely you understand.” I did not. But I later learned that no one outside of the clergy had enjoyed archival access in several years, including or especially any INAH scholar. When I suggested working where the church staff could oversee my comings and goings, Padre was immediately satisfied. We had reached our first compromise of many.
Expecting to be placed in an underutilized room of the ceremonial precinct, I was instead imposed upon two sisters who ran the cramped and overextended parish office. From that point forward, I obliged the women to escort me through a maze of church corridors and across the street in order to borrow and return books. Initially my presence may have been intrusive and distracting. But I soon felt commonplace and hoped to be perceived that way. It was strange for a gringa to come to a small Mexican town to look at old books all day long. Townspeople flocked to the office to deal with their sacred and everyday business. Children were most fascinated by the juxtaposition of the ancient books with my modern laptop. Children and adults often asked if I could read the books. My answer was always the same: “Of course I do, and so will you. Look.”

*Working with Colonial Archives and Modern Institutions: Obstacles and Rewards*

My plans for the parish archive extended to an interest in the parishioners, which in turn greatly informed my ethnohistoric project. Even without concerted ethnographic fieldwork, which relies primarily on participant-observation, I witnessed present-day versions of proceedings documented in the archive, such as festivals, processions, weddings, baptisms, memorial masses, and steering committee meetings associated with Holy Week or patron saint day fiestas. Working inside the office offered a perfect view of the church doors, atrium and the variety of rituals that these spaces hosted. Parishioners came to the office with all manner of requests and payments, including blessings animals, cars, homes, businesses, saints’ images or robes, or people who were ill, dying or pledging to abstain from drinking. A gap of centuries separates observed local practices from texts produced in the same place. Much of what I saw in 1999-2001 may have
persisted little changed from the 16th, 17th or 18th centuries; much of it must be new or greatly transformed. It is not always easy or even possible to say which is which. But contemporary religious and business procedures enabled me to refine my research questions, which I then applied to the confraternal, baptismal and matrimonial series.

Arranging, financing and recording baptismal and matrimonial events were daunting tasks. For baptisms, parents and padrinos (ritual sponsors) produced paperwork, travelled to the parish church on several occasions, and completed weeks’-long courses. Through the bola or gift custom, generosity and humility were extended to priests, sacristans and other church personnel, for whom I was often mistaken. While enlightened by matrimonial examinations, I had sympathy for couples, parents, witnesses, and padrinos interrogated by the priests or secretaries. A series of inquiries was directed at the intending bride and groom as to their identity, origin, romantic and residential histories. Many couples already had children together. For optimal discomfort the ordeal was performed within earshot of anyone who happened to be waiting in the parish office.

Reciprocity secured my long-term access to the archive. When Padre asked me to serve as tour guide for visiting dignitaries, back-up data for the office, or write a report on each church and cofradía, I consented immediately. I attended mass each week. At a few church events I volunteered alongside other local women. It seemed that my work could continue indefinitely as long as I never questioned or transgressed parish protocol, even when forbidden to photograph or photocopy the documents. Several men, who identified themselves as “the unofficial historian of Tecamachalco,” and college students soon learned of my purpose. My presence was likely novel because the archive and most church business were traditionally enveloped with secrecy. A new friend even helped
input data. I spent three months studying cofradías in 1999 and ten months in 2000-2001 on baptisms and marriages. Promoted to a large desk perpendicular to the secretaries, I was strategically placed under ecclesiastic surveillance, facing Padre’s office window.

Residing in Tecamachalco, exploring the surrounding area and participating in parish events enabled me to better situate colonial communities and activities. I was soon invited to family events, such as baptisms, graduations and funerals, held at churches and parishioners’ homes. I also appeared at community celebrations and tried to be as inconspicuous as possible, even with my camera in tow. My participant-observation of religious processions, such as those marking Todos Santos (All Saints Day), Palm Sunday, Good Friday, the Assumption of the Virgin (the patron saint), and the patron of the Church of Calvary, perplexed and amused friends and probably strangers whenever I crossed the paths of their homes and work places.

Tecamachalco is an ideal site in which to model the expansion and co-development of the Catholic Church and colonial communities. The colonial churches, multiethnic barrios and native hamlets mentioned that are in the confraternal, census and sacramental records remain visible and active. Preservation and continuous use of colonial chapels and neighborhood boundaries facilitate a study in historical and cultural geography. Chapels come to life once again when hosting sacramental or life-cycle rituals, such as baptisms, confirmations, graduation masses, weddings, funerals, and misas de difuntos (commemorating the deceased). The chapel of San Sebastián (circa 1540) is frequented daily by barrio residents and cemetery visitors.

Churches and plazas form the spatial heart of local fiestas. Chapels are integral resting and staging areas along colonial and contemporary processional circuits. A
healthy spirit of barrio rivalry persists over whose church interior, exterior and courtyard are largest, oldest, best-cared for, and/or optimally situated (near the center of town); whose religious images are best known, whether inside or outside of town, even attracting pilgrims; and whose residents are best represented, in numbers and positions, in Holy Week festivities or on patron saint days.

Colonial towns and farms have grown in size if not influence, but it is still a worthwhile exercise to situate localities through place names. Tecamachalco modernized and expanded until haciendas, such as San Juan, became suburban barrios, but their patron saint names remain. San Juan’s autonomy, population and distance from the town center now merit a modern chapel, a yearly round of festivals and regular bus service. Tecamachalco’s ecclesiastic administration once fell under Tepeaca. Residents of both cities interact through marriage, markets and schools, but the ties are weaker than in the colonial era. Acatzingo and Tlacotepec, which were closely tied to Popoloca cofradías, remain small and numerically dominated by indigenous peoples. But they are now sister towns to Tecamachalco rather than its dependent native barrios or sujetos, respectively. San Salvador Alseseca and San Mateo Tlaixpan, once native hamlets, administer their own schools but remain subject to Tecamachalco’s municipal and ecclesiastic authorities.

Current residents cannot imagine how the local landscape looked in colonial and Pre-Columbian times, especially without cartographic evidence. I sought maps to contextualize Tecamachalco’s religious, economic and political development, particularly its social networks and ethnic enclaves. I secured a few amorphous renderings from the late 16th-century from the AGN (Archivo General de la Nación). The Christian town was depicted through churches and royal roads, but the colonial landscape’s agricultural
qualities featured heavily. Large planning maps of the city’s current grid plan and agricultural industry were donated by Tecamachalco’s Presidencia Municipal. Both map types indicate little about the parish’s colonial appearance but they are still instrumental in spatial applications of the confraternal, census and baptismal data.

Temporal incompatibility frustrated my efforts in the AGN and Tecamachalco’s municipal archive. I examined all of the AGN manuscripts associated with the parish, most of which falls under Iglesias (Churches) or Indios (Indians) and dates to the late 16th century. While this is the same time frame as the earliest cofradías, little material concerned cofradías. Most texts were Spanish-language requests to erect of a new church, chapel or hermitage, generated by nearby hamlets or farms rather than parishioners. Other documents were capítulos (pleitos or complaints) from native nobles calling for the removal of a corrupt official or bemoaning the burdens of repartimiento (draft labor) assignments. Tecamachalco’s municipal archives begin after the late 18th century. Texts pertaining to the operation of secular cabildos, land transactions and other legal matters should date back to 1560. The records must have been destroyed, moved or hidden, but no one living today could pinpoint their past existence or current whereabouts.

Most ethnohistorians rely on mundane texts, pursuing research agendas through both quantitative and qualitative analyses. Baptismal and matrimonial records from urban and rural parish archives have been employed to elucidate alliances among individuals, families, barrios, ethnic groups, and classes (Cline 1993; McCaa 1984; Pescador 1995, 1992). The wealth of scholarship on New Spain’s notarial documents may arouse little excitement about further study.
Some new trends are shaping Mesoamerican ethnohistory and philology, including the discovery and publication of native-language texts, correlation with other documentary genres, and reliance on qualitative analyses and interdisciplinary interpretive frameworks. In the regions of central Mexico, Oaxaca and Chiapas published native-language texts include secular records, such as town and government histories, censuses, wills, and petitions, as well as a variety of evangelization tools, such as plays and confessional guides (Anderson et al. 1976; Burkhart 1989; Sell and Burkhart 2009; Celestino Solís and Reyes García 1992; Cline and León-Portilla 1994; Haskett 1991; Kellogg 2005; Kellogg and Restall 1998; Pizzigoni 2007; Schroeder 1991; Sell et al. 1999; Tavárez 2006; Terraciano 2001; Wood 1991).

Many texts directed at specific communities and practices are formulaic texts, but often less so than parish records. As such, they may hold more potential to locate less filtered information about native corporate adjustments to colonial life. But my interest in interethnic relations led me to seek a genre where the voices and dialogues of indigenous peoples, Spaniards and castas were represented. The parish archive enables me to decipher and deconstruct the ways in which men and women connected with and/or confronted their fellow parishioners. In order to illuminate the co-evolution of interethnic, gender and barrio relations in a multiethnic parish, I chose to use a parish archive as the core of my project. I supplemented this work with ethnography of contemporary religious festivities and cultural geography of colonial churches.

The present condition of Tecamachalco’s parish archive is generally favorable. Intact books are organized in a rough chronological scheme, in series, and alternatively grouped in protective boxes (disciplina - confraternal records; padrones - lists of people)
or tied together in bundles (sacramental). The collection is relatively large, varied, well preserved and contiguous, but incomplete. Under the authority of Puebla’s bishop Don Juan de Palafox y Mendoza, secular clergy replaced the Franciscans in 1641. This resulted in shifting the ceremonial focus of the community from the Franciscan establishment to the new parish church. The transition likely accounts for the disappearance of certain confraternal and sacramental records that date to the pre-1641 period. Unfortunately the Franciscan period is not well represented.

The earliest available records (1575) were generated through the Spaniards’ Confraternity of the Holy True Cross. But it was not the first cofradía. Records from two earlier sodalities are now missing from the parish archive. The parish-wide Holy Eucharist (1563?), a *cofradía de españoles*, and San Francisco (1580?), a *cofradía de naturales* (locals or natives) were noted in the Anales and the constitution of the Holy True Cross. By 1595, two more Popoloca groups (the Nativity of Our Lady and the Holy Name of Jesus) were in operation. The Spaniards’ Blessed Souls of Purgatory was likely founded in this era. Between 1644 and 1689, four cofradías incorporated multiethnic barrios (San Joseph, San Sebastián and San Nicolás) and castas (Our Lady of the Rosary). The final confraternal wave was poorly documented. In the 18th century, there were three sisterhoods (Our Lady of Solitude, Our Lady of Transit and Our Lady of the Sorrows) and two multiethnic cofradías (Our Lady of Mercy and Our Lord of the Holy Sepulcher of Calvary). Of 15 sodalities, only half were well-suited to in-depth comparative analysis.

My primary interests are indigenous people and their relationships with other groups, so I hoped to find a large corpus of texts written in Nahuatl. Recent ethnohistoric scholarship shows the advantages of native-language sources produced by the people of
interest in their own language and revealing their own conceptual vocabulary.

Tecamachalco fits well within the general area of dominance of the Nahuatl language, but only a small amount of Nahuatl is preserved within the parish archive. The Popoloca originally spoke another tongue that lacked an alphabetic writing tradition. Perhaps the lack of Nahuatl has more to do with the strength or weakness of the local tradition of alphabetic literacy and the size of the corps of writers. But native elites should have been competent in spoken Nahuatl, warranting documents in Nahuatl.

The small portion written in Nahuatl is associated with cofradías. Out of ten confraternal constitutions, four are in Nahuatl, along with the acts of foundation preceding them - the Nativity of Our Lady (1580) and the Holy Name of Jesus (1590), San Sebastián (1686) and San Nicolás (1689). The latter two groups’ scribes employed Nahuatl in membership lists as part of a general increase in ethnic and barrio solidarity. Regardless of the era, receipts for services rendered by the maestro de capilla (choirmaster) were usually written in Nahuatl. I was grateful for whatever Nahuatl materials fate afforded to me and inclined to take full advantage of them. But they were insufficient for encapsulating the corporate evolution of the indigenous community. As the project evolved, I incorporated other genres of documents, such as padrones (parishioner counts), baptismal records, bishop’s edicts, communal petitions, and an indigenous history.

The bulk of the archive’s colonial collection consists of sacramental records written in Spanish. In addition to being prepared by secular clergymen, the lists were primarily intended for the purposes of a Spanish-led parish and diocese, so the use of Spanish was most natural. Other central Mexican archives contain a substantial Nahuatl
documentation, including the sacramental series, especially into the 1600s. Even in neighboring Tlacotepec and smaller parishes, there are sacramental entries in Nahuatl. The existence of separate, chronologically-ordered, series of books for baptism, confirmation, matrimony, and extreme unction holds out the best possibility for tracing the life cycle of a given individual. Identification is difficult because of the large number of cases and the small repertory of names used. Every person who received a sacrament represented an individual entry or case. In almost all cases, priests described events and participants from their points of view, sanctioning reports by signing their names.

Baptismal entries resume after the 1641 arrival of the secular clergy and are maintained up to the present day. Baptismal certificates, safeguarded by families or reproduced in the office, are the basic form of personal identification. They attest to individuals’ legitimacy as Mexican citizens and are required to obtain all other forms, such as marriage licenses, voter identification cards or passports. Thus parish officials are partly justified in protecting church records from parish outsiders or insiders who might be tempted to alter sacramental or family histories.

The baptismal series is mostly complete and contiguous, despite some adjustments. Until the mid-18th century, indios were grouped separately from the gente de razón (people of reason), which included Spaniards, mestizos and castizos - in other words, almost all non-Indians. Casta children receiving baptism were listed in their own book only once in the community’s history (1683-1688). In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the condition of birth came to outweigh race. The categorizations of hijos legítimos and ilegítimos divided records into a dichotomy. For a child to be legitimate, parents had to be married by the church at the time of birth. This binary scheme was also
replaced. All baptismal cases are now listed in a single series. Trends, such as priests’ struggles to assess and memorialize parishioners’ ethnicity, and late colonial authorities’ equation of mixed ethnicity with illegitimacy, are explored in a chapter on castas.

During my second stay in Tecamachalco, I consulted all of the baptismal records that fell between 1641 and 1740. These data produced 23,706 separate cases, which promise to reveal social boundaries and networking among men and women of various ethnic groups. This study centers on cofradías. Analyses of baptismal and matrimonial records, centering on compadrazgo (ritual sponsorship), marital choice and illegitimacy will be presented in future publications.

I would urge those who are actively seeking a new source to give parish archives another look. I believe that much can still be accomplished with these types of collections. Approached with some methodological and interpretive sophistication, they facilitate a wide range of projects that are bounded only by the scholar’s imagination and access to a well-preserved collection. I was both blessed and cursed; Tecamachalco provided me with enough material to analyze, interpret and publish for a decade or more. In the near future, I will apply lessons from confraternal records to baptismal and matrimonial records.

A Rhetoric, Practice and Agency-Centered Approach to Confraternal Records

My inspiration to apply an innovative, comparative and diachronic approach to a large localized corpus of confraternal records came from the existing scholarship on colonial Mexico’s multiethnic parishes (Cope 1994; Pescador 1992, 1995), the intersection of kinship and race (Lavrin 1991; Martínez 2008), Nahua doctrinal texts
(Burkhart 1989; Sell 2002), and cofradías. I was attracted by the corporate nature, declarative wording (decidedly assertive or self-conscious) and recurring detail of confraternal records, which range from constitutions to electoral, membership and financial data. These institutional accounts were traditionally penned by Spanish priests or Nahua scribes, rather than the individual members who they memorialized. But the varied experiences, perspectives, transactions, agendas, and agency of the diverse colonial subjects who interacted through lay religious activism still surface.

James Lockhart (1992: 219) observed that “there was room within [the confraternal] framework for indigenous peoples to assert themselves, using these sodalities for a combination of personal piety, unit patriotism, and factional strife that for the most part we can only imagine.” But there was no attempt (or means yet) to contrast expected and real behaviors by finding discrepancies between the ideals projected in constitutions and the actual practices described elsewhere, such as electoral, financial, inventory, and membership lists.

John F. Schwaller called for scholars to look beyond confraternal constitutions towards related records as part of a comparative and diachronic study of one or more cofradías. Such a strategy could paint “a picture of society and social relations, of the role of the Church in everyday life, and a vision of the Indian community seeking a Christian institution to help provide cohesiveness in the wake of the death and destruction which the conquest and its aftermath brought” (Schwaller 1989: 219).

Perhaps Maureen Flynn (1989: 11) overstated the usefulness of studying confraternities when arguing that it “offers a singularly promising opportunity to reconstruct the experiences of the entire community.” Much that is fascinating and useful
can be found within the records, but they paint only a partial picture of an evolving community consisting of more than cofradías. Like all scholars, confraternal experts focus only on the objectives and narratives that are most relevant to them intellectually (professional interest) and instinctively (personal bias). No one can fairly assess and represent an entire community’s experiences, mostly due to the records’ corporate nature and the centuries separating us from the scribes. There were likely large divides among official confraternal agendas, as expressed by religious authorities, founding members, and scribes, and the views of the people whom cofradías represented (Terpstra 2000: 6).

When compared to the study of institutions or individuals alone, cofradías are optimal social units for historical anthropologists pursuing community and/or colonialism studies: “Collected into groups, the faceless individuals merge to form corporate personalities whose features are clear enough to appear in historical documents” (Flynn 1989: 1). Voices reflected in confraternal records represent the experiences and views of certain social factions or interest groups, but not those of specific individuals or every member of an ethnic group. These books cannot reveal “the manner in which the indigent and powerless may have used Christianity for their own benefits… the voices of the lowest orders of society are transmitted indirectly and are difficult to hear through the perspectives and prejudices of the literate who record their words” (Ibid: 6). Men and women whose deeds and words were recorded by priests and other scribes already enjoyed greater prestige in the cofradía and larger community than most members.

As opposed to the sacramental series, confraternal records account for only a small portion of Tecamachalco’s parish archive, but they constitute a relatively large and contiguous collection. There are 40 books placed into 4 boxes, filed under Disciplinar
(Indoctrination). At first Padre denied the existence of colonial and contemporary cofradías because grupo and asociación are the only terms used today. The collection documents 14 organizations. The period of study spans over two and a half centuries. Between 1575 and 1743, native, Spanish, Afro-Mexican, and casta residents formed mostly contemporaneous cofradías, sometimes in cooperation, sometimes in competition. Using barrios as bases, they recruited members, elected officials, built chapels, adored saints, and sponsored masses, festivals and orphans.

Like all documentary genres, confraternal records have their limitations. A skeletal nature is their chief weakness, which is typical of many mundane texts. Documents were created by a scribe who systematically recorded information that was considered to be relevant to local authorities. The transcription was formulaic: there was a conscious effort to convey the same types of information for all of the people recorded. Common descriptors in baptismal and matrimonial entries were a person’s name, age, sex, marital status, race, occupation, title, place of residence, and perhaps relationships among the people mentioned in the document.

Scribes provided far fewer details about confraternal members and even leaders. In some cases, the men, women, families, and alliances represented in cofradías can be located and verified within baptismal records. The record-keeping was far from consistent, leaving us with detailed knowledge of some individuals but not others. Except in the case of electoral results, membership lists and accounts, confraternal records do not form a series concerned with individuals. For the most part, confraternal records are corporate or institutional in nature. Most entries within tend to be restricted to certain standard operations of the institution, described in formulaic terms.
Expectations of regularity and conformity in the records are not necessarily drawbacks. Standardization throughout New Spain, or at least a bishopric, means that we can compare cofradías to one another, as I do in this case study. Membership lists, election results and yearly accounts attest to the relative size, influence and prosperity of contemporaries that may have interacted with one another. When confraternal protocol was (or was not) followed, whether through record-keeping or people’s actions, lay leaders’ and members’ real behaviors can be contrasted with the ideals promoted by New Spain’s ecclesiastic authorities. Having a certain formula or standard in mind sets the ground work for scholars to identify variable interpretations, appropriations and agencies within the framework of lay religiosity. In this project, constitutions surfaced as the most promising sources for analyzing rhetoric among interacting social segments.

Confraternal records are particularly useful because they were produced locally and are contemporaneous. They describe events as they take place or soon after. In various types of entries, individuals ranging from scribes and priests to confraternal officials and church singers affirmed their assorted roles in executing lay religious business. Treating the records as a whole, we learn about officers and members, what constituencies the organizations served, when groups arose and expired, to what extent they were autonomous and supervised by the clergy, and in general how well these cofradías correspond to the picture that scholarship has built up.

Confraternal records illuminate Spanish, indigenous, Afro-Mexican, male and female versions of local Catholicism. It was thus natural and useful for me to compare all of the social segments within the community rather than look at any one group in isolation. Confraternal policies, practices and records present an ideal arena in which to
juxtapose peripheral, subordinate, marginalized, or “subaltern” interpretations and appropriations of folk Catholicism (bottom-up: native, mulatto and female laypersons) against centralized, standardized, normalized, or dominant models (top-down: ecclesiastic authorities and Spanish settlers).

On the one hand, cofradías could be largely influenced by conformist or hegemonic ideologies, such as Spanish superiority and patriarchy. But comparing multiple documents enables me to discern the rare instances of conflict or counter-hegemony. The initial response by Popoloca to Spanish cofradías and dominance were commemorated through constitutions in Nahuatl. Three late-17th century cofradías were minor, mixed in ethnicity and heavily barrio-oriented. Two more constitutions and membership lists in Nahuatl, and the formation of the only group by and for “mestizos, mulatos y negros,” attest to the (re)emergence of native and casta community leaders. In the 18th century, six final groups reflect the eventual rise of sisterhoods but also ethnic differentiation, criollo leadership monopolies and intense ecclesiastic oversight.

Only about half of the cofradías maintained continuous records. In theory, every cofradía maintained at least three books at any one time. According to a late colonial edict from the Bishop of Puebla, too late to be effective, a constitution and membership lists were to be placed in one book, with election results in another, and inventories and accounts in the third book. But in practice, membership lists are interspersed throughout all of the books and many volumes are now missing. While losses of records are troublesome, it is still clear that townspeople were exceedingly prolific in forming cofradías. If Tecamachalco is compared at various time periods to other settlements of similar size, then this abundance of cofradías is atypical (15 rather than 3) and will
require some explanation. The bounty of this collection places Tecamachalco on par with much larger urban centers, climbing steadily in population and social differentiation.

There have been few systematic studies of New Spain’s confraternal records. Despite the proposal of several important research questions, little has been stated about how ordinances and cofradías themselves were actually employed and (re)interpreted. The recent publication of confraternal constitutions elucidates the ideal practices of cofradías and their appropriation by colonial subjects (Schroeder 2000; Zafra Oropeza 1996). Translations of Nahuatl ordinances, undertaken by Barry D. Sell (2002: Fray Alonso de Molina’s 1552 model; 2000: Our Lady of Solitude from San Miguel Coyotlan from 1619), John F. Schwaller (1989: The Holy Sacrament from Tula from 1570), and James Lockhart (1992: Xochimilco) have been invaluable research tools. But the accompanying analysis was more extensive than intensive. To my knowledge no additional Nahua confraternal constitutions have been published in nearly a decade.

Confraternal data are grouped under a few major documentary types not exclusive to Tecamachalco. Most cofradías generated acts of foundation, although they are never explicitly heralded as such. The acts are brief, written with great care and a large script. Letter size and placement on the page reserved most attention for the cofradía, settlement, parish or barrio. Even if composed of individuals with various agendas, cofradías were primarily corporate entities, named for their dedication to a standard object of their members’ devotion, such as the cult of Jesus, Mary, a saint, or the Eucharist. Acts conclude with the date of foundation and signatures of the scribe, bishop and founding members, who were often illiterate and signed with a cross.
In their brevity, acts of foundations often leave some very basic matters unclear. In one example, the scribe identified one group as a cofradía de españoles. But the constitution revealed that native peoples could join, although with limited dues and benefits. Founding members are sometimes described as naturales of the town or a barrio. While we may be inclined to interpret naturales as indigenous people, in a multiethnic setting, it might mean anyone born there. But it was exceedingly rare to refer to someone as an español as well as a natural, whereas indios naturales were common. Founding statements are most useful when looked at subtly as attempts to express an ideal history and identity and seen in conjunction with the books in their entirety.

Immediately following the act is a list of ordinances penned. Ordinances are seldom arranged in any clear order of importance or related topics. Constitutions in Nahuatl and Spanish can be quite formulaic, with many standard statements found again and again. But constitutions are not carbon copies of one another. Some represent nearly exhaustive attempts at outlining the cofradía’s intended workings. Others are abbreviated, apparent afterthoughts or half-hearted fulfillments of a requirement that scribes or lay leaders considered meaningless. Ordinances are particularly promising when contrasted with practices described in less official portions of the records. Comparing multiple Spanish and Nahuatl versions of the same or a similar text, particularly in cases of literature and confraternal constitutions, may hold out the best potential in studies of native corporate adjustments to and appropriations of Christianity.

Comparisons of documents, not only within a single parish, but also across time and space, should help us understand the extent to which regulations were forged with local conditions in mind, as opposed to imposed or drawn from a common source. For
example, participation in churchyard, barrio, parish, or other saints’ day processions, as well as the ritual garb and insignia to be used, were emphasized in nearly all constitutions. But gender and ethnic management within processions, elections and membership was highlighted in only a few.

Constitutions articulate an ideal, not a reality. They are rhetoric or discourse, not practice. They may appear to be transparent populist manifestos, but caution should be exercised. Ordinances were produced by professional scribes who knew and mostly followed the rules. Policies were worded to placate bishops as much as reflect members’ true agendas (Flynn 1989: 9). Proper procedures for electing officials, maintaining inventories and balancing accounts were stated and restated. New officials were admonished to humbly resolve any conflict within the cofradía, especially its council. In order to analyze interpersonal dynamics, I sought documentation of actual practices, but that sort of resource is quite rare. Amended constitutions attest to the evolving concerns of confraternal leaders within multiethnic communities. For example, 2 constitutions (penned in 1575 and 1718) proposed by Spanish lay leaders, were replaced (in 1605 and 1718-1719) when they failed to resolve ethnic tensions. The chief innovation of the amendments was native cofrades’ differential position in processions. The revisions were the impetus for further incidents or change, including priestly intervention.

**Members, Leaders and Properties**

Membership types, qualifications and dues (in *reales, tomines or pesos*) were detailed early on in constitutions. Fees were often distinct for each ethnic and social category, in which Spanish and Indian, rich and poor, and single and married were
contrasted. The benefits that a cofrade could expect were support in times of poor health or finances, prayer for their soul, masses for themselves and loved ones, a Christian funeral and burial, and settling of their accounts through a will, all thought to guarantee an individual’s passage into paradise. More concretely, the associated fees ensured the future operation of the cofradía and the local priests. Failure to attend the bimonthly masses could mean expulsions unless some wax candles were donated to the chief steward. Members were also encouraged to visit the sick, whether at home or in their hospital, and care for widows and orphans, particularly by collecting and giving alms.

Membership lists were rarely grouped by any ethnic, gender, geographical, or even temporal principle. Wherever placed, they reveal the name, sex, residential location, and date of a member’s entrance into the cofradía. Newcomers’ ages, socio-ethnic categories and ties to others were rarely recorded with enough regularity to allow for diachronic and comparative analysis in terms of percentages in certain categories. Due to the lists’ lack of completeness, the researcher must do much extrapolation. On average widows and married women joined cofradías more frequently than their male counterparts, but entire families were also common. The wealthy and influential were known to belong to various organizations, even if the patron church was distant and one could not attend the yearly round of activities. I wondered if generalized observations and assumptions about membership trends were supported locally and over time.

Electoral results, signed by the scribe and the supervising priest, are found here and there, separated by contemporaneous accounts and receipts, as well as occasional inventories and autos de visita (reports of parish visits) from the bishop or his emissary. Annual elections were usually scheduled to follow a cofradía’s patron-day procession.
Electoral results reveal victors but candidates’ names, desired position and number of votes were withheld. A cross-correlation of electoral entries with constitutions suggests that few members could run for office or even vote. In some cases, women, single men, and outsiders were summarily excluded. Subtle distinctions may have also come into play, such as ethnic and social status, wealth, generosity, and ability to network. Ethnicity was not mentioned consistently until the mid-18th century, after which we can contrast electoral data with ethnic ideals projected in founding statements and constitutions.

A set of confraternal officers was a cabildo, not to be confused with the municipal government of an entire altepetl. Councils usually consisted of one mayordomo (chief steward), assisted and accompanied by a pair of diputados (deputies). One group elected Spanish and native leaders who officiated simultaneously and somewhat independently. But this sparsely-recorded system remains enigmatic. Council members’ formal duties included overseeing the treasury, ritual paraphernalia and solares (estates or land holdings), resolving disputes, collecting and supplying alms to widows and orphans, and visiting the sick. Leaders, who faltered in their duties, whether due to other commitments, incompetence, infighting, or corruption, could be removed from office. Following individuals in the records over time reveals that leadership monopolies were common, particularly in later periods, with some individuals serving over two decades. Due to a growing population and small repertoire of names, I cannot prove that officials represent family dynasties, or that they were associated with a specific social or ethnic category.

Scribes described the activities of some lay leaders who were principales naturales (local native nobleman), even caciques. But electoral and financial records were not commissioned merely to honor people’s exploits or bemoan their failures. They
were also tools in the hands of individuals and groups who sought approval or action from a burgeoning bureaucracy that was dominated by Spanish and mestizo men. Mundane texts of all kinds, including censuses, testaments, sacramental and confraternal records, were subject to inspection by the local colonial administration, whether secular officials, such as the governor, mayor, alderman, or sheriff, or members of the religious hierarchy, such as the bishop, ecclesiastic judge or head priest.

Due to their smaller size and/or consequence, a couple of brotherhoods and sisterhoods were identified as *hermandades* (minor devotional groups) rather than cofradías. Some women became mayordomas and diputadas of sisterhoods. I wondered if women took on the same duties as men and if female officers’ husbands led other cofradías or the town cabildo. Late colonial scribes, often priests, were among the most sporadic or neglectful record keepers. But if women’s records were even worse, then female exploits may have been taken less seriously.

Financial data were considered vital to the success of cofradías. Itemized balances were presented under the column headings of *cargo* and *descargo* (earnings and expenditures). A few scribes may have been overwhelmed by the system; headings and contents were often reversed. Mayordomos oversaw and signed the annual results, especially balancing the budget. Collecting alms, members’ dues and renting out lots and chapels generated the most income. Traditional payments were for masses, wax candles and new acquisitions aimed at the maintenance of the cofradía’s cult of saints. Throughout the records, receipts written and signed by priests and native singers detail the level of these relative outsiders’ involvement with cofradías. Priests were paid
generously in funds and meals for bimonthly masses celebrated on behalf of the cofrades. A high mass (*misa cantada*) was indicated by a few lines in Nahuatl from the maestro.

*Inventarios* of confraternal property, inspected by the bishop’s emissary, were executed with some regularity in Tecamachalco. Contrasting examples illuminate cofradías’ economic power in relation to one another and over time. Financially viable cofradías secured saints’ images, clothing, crowns, precious vessels for alms, oil and transporting the Eucharist, and processional costumes, insignias and banners. Other cofradías held few items in common, borrowed from other groups or churches, and even sold items, especially in the late colonial era. The planning and construction of chapels, the (mis)management of confraternal land and the production of candle wax and insignias were also documented. These activities attest to the ambiguous position of formal and informal lay leaders, particularly native peoples and mulattoes. Frequently entrusted with substantial projects, they could also be blamed in times of bad fortune.

By 1823, all local cofradías were dissolved by bishop’s order, even if they had just been initiated in the preceding generation. Some sodalities had already been forcibly disbanded by 1780. Some groups appear to have ignored closure edicts altogether or followed them in a less than timely fashion. Refusing to adhere to an edict might even signal the exercise of group autonomy. But sporadic recordkeeping in the late colonial era obscures certain patterns.

Pronouncements and correspondence from high-level ecclesiastical officials, filed under *Edicts and Mountain Ranges*, all date to the 18th and 19th centuries. Bishops’ edicts and reports, generated after *visitas generales* (parish inspections), can be correlated with the final wave of cofradías and the demise of all local cofradías in the 18th and 19th
centuries. Some edicts reference long-term or even timeless trends related to business administration, naming conventions and scribal practices. But most of this material cannot be directly applied to Tecamachalco’s earliest cofradías. Four *padrones* (registers of parishioners) were compiled and memorialized between 1660, 1668, 1745 and 1768. These ecclesiastic censuses document how many townspeople attended mass and received communion. I cautiously employ them as population estimates.

This case study demonstrates that cofradías and their records are not just the endless lists of properties, events and activities that they contained. Composed of rules, names of members and leaders, dates of masses and processions, payments, expenses, and possessions, confraternal records are so much more when approached as a whole. They provide us with a view into the lives of many of Tecamachalco’s inhabitants, over the course of two and a half centuries. The key is to stay focused on people, their experiences and perspectives. This is easier said than done without an ethnographer’s access to behaviors and motivations. But the proponents of certain cultural ideals can be identified and their assumptions and degrees of success can be evaluated.

I focus on cofradías in order to emphasize a parish’s evolving interethnic, class, gender, and spatial dynamics. By comparing constitutions to each other (including Spanish and Nahuatl versions), their amendments, and the criteria used for elections, membership, finances, and rituals, I present the first systematic contrast of ideal and real confraternal practices. Place, class, gender, and ethnicity were contested and negotiated on an ongoing basis, not just communicated once, nor in a single direction - from the colonizers to the colonized. My emphasis on people, rhetoric and actions will contribute a
novel and practical component to confraternal scholarship, but also to ethnic and gender studies, folk Catholicism and colonialism in the Americas.

Appendix

The following pages feature photographs of Tecamachalco’s two main churches, the former Franciscan convento/moansterio and the parish church, completed in the late 16th and 17th centuries, respectively.
Top: Street view of the Ex-Convento/Monasterio de San Francisco, the town’s Franciscan stronghold, completed by 1581. Note the proximity of local industries, rather than the central plaza or town hall.

Below: A front-view of the Franciscan church (which faces West), taken from the edge of the atrio.
Above: The arches, now cemented closed, represent the *capilla abierta* (open chapel), where Franciscan friars baptized and recited sermons to thousands of Popolocas who could not fit inside the church nave.

Below: The friary’s ruins include a study (administered by an INAH official), dining hall (hosted Carmelite nuns), subterranean refrigeration system, cells for self-flagellation and jailing wayward townspeople, and a courtyard for prayer. The top level, which once hosted the friars’ rooms, is no longer preserved.
Previous Page Top: Close-up of open chapel arch, with the late-16th century door closed due to more recent industry.

Previous Page Bottom: The Ex-Convento’s bell-tower, speaker attached.

This Page: This side door of the Ex-Convento (north side) was and is used in religious processions throughout the atrio and parish.
Tecamachalco’s parish church is dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. The atrio was full on feast days and hosted masses after a 1999 earthquake that destabilized the church nave and bell tower. The parish office, where the priests met with parishioners and I analyzed records, is behind the tent.
Above: The parish church was decorated for a 1958 feast day with draped cloths (color was added to the photograph by a parishioner).
Below: Repair of the altar and altarpiece after the 1999 earthquake.
The Model of Old World Confraternities:

Inclusionary Principles and Exclusionary Practices

It could be argued that cofradías were and are all things to all people, whether their sponsors, leaders, members, opponents, or modern-day analysts. In medieval Europe, New Spain and contemporary Latin America, the corporate identity of cofradías was and is anchored in the harmonious but hierarchal model of the Catholic family and the collective adoration of religious images. Members busied themselves sponsoring hospitals, orphans and widows; commissioning masses; amassing ritual paraphernalia to be exhibited in community-wide processions; and electing officials who safeguarded the group’s possessions and mission statements. As individuals, cofrades (members) secured a Christian burial or “good death” and fulfilled pledges of piety and charity. As families, they pursued social prestige and networked with peers. As neighborhoods, parishes and municipalities, they cultivated civic pride and performed it in lavish spectacles.

By capitalizing on the seemingly incompatible cultural values of charity and xenophobia, confraternities enjoyed immense popularity throughout the territories that correspond to modern-day England, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Russia, Spain, and Switzerland, from the 11th century onwards (Casagrande 2000: 48; Flynn 1989: 15). They most likely evolved from ancient gremios or craft guilds, which limited membership to male artisans, tradesmen, laborers, or peasant farmers (Bazarte Martínez 1989: 26; Gibson 1964: 131; Lavrin 1980: 37). As opposed to gults’ homo-sociality, thousands of women and even children joined confraternities, until almost everyone belonged to at
least one. All sectors of medieval European society were encompassed. Confraternities were integrated into virtually every aspect of their constituents’ lives (Vincent 1987: 125). In early modern Italy, they were prominent in every settlement, at each holiday and at virtually all citizens’ rites of passage (Terspstra 2000: 1).

Accounts of Iberian and Italian confraternities tell us what to expect of New Spain’s cofradías as well as the points of divergence among the traditions. The ubiquity, hierarchy, diversity, flexibility, and creativity exhibited by European sodalities were later mirrored in the New World. Confraternities are among the few institutions created by the populace to attend to their own spiritual and material needs. They were essentially reconsolidated villages, supplying artificial families and social security in the face of changing or stressful living conditions (Flynn 1989: 11). Confraternities were Church auxiliaries almost entirely composed of lay members.

Members created a parallel or alternative Church and concretized the Church as the “mystical body of Christ” for the faithful (Vincent 1987: 128). Spain’s confraternities fell into three categories: sacramental groups venerating the Eucharist; devotional groups dedicated to a particular saint, an aspect of the Virgin, or the souls trapped in purgatory; and penitential groups acting out a specific moment in Christ’s Passion, usually symbolized through self-flagellation in annual processions (Grijalva 1985: 161; Webster 1998: 15; Zafra Oropeza 1996: 30).

In the Old World, the bases for inclusion or exclusion were most often influenced by place, class, ethnicity, and gender. Iberian cofradías were usually defined by barrios whose residents collectively exhibited penance through rather public acts of piety and charity. Place of residence and membership in the same trade guild, with the obvious
connotations of a class-based social system, were key criteria. Ethnic pluralism was largely absent. In Spain, prospective members provided evidence of solid reputations, ancient and strong ties to the area, and being “Old Christians,” not penitents whose ancestors converted from Judaism or Islam, even three generations ago. Christian immigrants, newly converted Jews, Moors, and African slaves were frequently excluded from these sodalities, but some united to form their own (Webster 1998: 33).

While almost always led by men, confraternities were family affairs. Female cofrades often fulfilled secondary, inconspicuous or less public roles. In 16th-century Spain, women were prohibited from wearing tunics and flagellating themselves in processions, having lost their former status within penitential confraternities (Webster 1998: 46). Women were integrated through prayer circles and at masses and feast days. Their marginalization from certain rituals and decision-making reflected a broader “circle of exclusion” that operated throughout Spanish and Italian society. But in Italy, a trend toward greater female involvement occurred between the 14th and 16th centuries. There was still considerable variation by settlement, with some groups banning women altogether and others functioning as female-only auxiliaries to male sodalities.

European confraternities’ reinforcement but also experimentation with the existing social order, structure and stratification is most telling for New Spain’s cofradías. Writing about early modern Italy, Nicholas Terpstra (2000: 1) argues that “distinct groups expressed the finely graded calibrations by which a boundary- and role-conscious society kept genders, ages, classes, and races distinct, though always with boundary-crossing exceptions to prove the rule.”
As Europe’s lay religious sodalities grew in number, size and influence, they set the stage for the confraternal invasion of the Americas. Intra-group cooperation, conformity and civic pride were the norm, but so too were inter-group contradictions, competitions and conflicts over ritual spaces and privileges. What is most intriguing to me is that the European precedents offered diverse groups opportunities to spiritually legitimize and defend their own earthly or practical prerogatives in the face of other groups (Terpstra 2000: 5).

The Roots of Indigenous Lay Religiosity: A Utopian Experiment

When New Spain’s pioneering Franciscan, Dominican and Augustinian friars concluded that an indigenous priesthood was not a viable option, native lay religiosity emerged as the next best alternative (Nesvig 2006: 83). Franciscans founded the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Santiago Tlatelolco to clear a path for a native priesthood to lead their brethren in worship. But the plan was doomed from the start due to Spaniards’ reservations about Indians’ spiritual, moral and intellectual capacities and compasses. An entire generation of Nahua (central Mexican) elites was educated at the school, becoming Spanish-Nahuatl-Latin translators (Motolinía 1985: 353). When multilingual Christianized native nobles “began to take on leadership positions in their respective communities, they gave a strong impetus to church construction, European-style literacy, the erection of Christian religious institutions,” and cofradías (Sell 2002: 46).

As early as the 1530s, indigenous women were incorporated as Catholic novices, wives, mothers, and daughters. Spanish nuns established selective schools throughout central Mexico for the daughters of native elites. Spanish manners, wifely duties or
domestic service, such as sewing and embroidery, were promoted at the expense of reading, writing and preparing future nuns. When the fear of religious backsliding was dismissed as early as the 1540s, the convent schools were dissolved (Mendieta 1973: 312; Ricard 1966: 210). The Church’s gender lessons were somewhat contradictory and confusing: “the Indians received a dual message: virginity and celibacy were the preferred mode of life, yet they were encouraged to marry young and were barred from the priesthood and the veil” (Burkhart 1989: 157). Forsaking the girls’ schools was part of a widespread decline in female status, and perhaps an erosion of native elite status.

After abandoning the utopian idea of native priests and nuns, Mendicant friars continued to train elites and commoners in professions that sustained the evangelization of New Spain. In big cities, casas de estudios (houses of study) attached to or associated with the local church provided a basis for lay religious knowledge, service, performance, and leadership (Mendieta 1973: 301). Graduates often went on to serve the Church, marry and evangelize throughout New Spain (Motolinía 1985: 266). Technical schools ensured that priests were clothed, schools were adorned, and native men and women were occupied in trades that supported their families and distracted them from less productive activities (Ricard 1966: 207).

While being indoctrinated, tailors, painters, sculptors, carpenters, architect’s assistants, feather and precious metal workers, bell, saddle and candle-makers were trained as expert artisans (Mendieta 1973: 299; Vetancurt 1971: 31). Fray Toribio de Benavente (Motolinía 1985: 195) likened the skills of native artisans to monkeys, seeing mimicry rather than creativity. But many teopantlaca (church people) were extremely adept at the tasks assigned to them by the friars (Grijalva 1985: 157). The native artisans’
attention to detail and imaginative interpretation drew on their pre-conquest talents and work experience but also their tremendous adaptability.

The friars and the secular clergy presented new and often paid opportunities to mostly male but also female converts. Some were appointed as parish scribes, sacristans, fiscales or teopantopile (church administrators or stewards), singers, and confraternal council members (Haskett 1991: 115). The highest positions, those of fiscal (after 1570) or mayordomo, whether for a single cofradía or an entire parish, were generously compensated (Vetancurt 1971: 49). In these roles, native noblemen were entrusted with large sums of money, precious ritual items and the task of organizing their fellow Indians. Some men found ways to dominate the local political scene and further their own interests by serving the church and the town council. In each town, a nucleus of native elites rotated positions and duties among families and neighbors, maintaining a firm hold on local wealth and festivities (Cline 1986; 58; Valadés 1989: 431). But other church employees and volunteers were paid just enough to survive or they were fed and housed by the friars. All ritual assistants’ chief rewards were intra-community prestige and priestly protection from the Spanish, mestizo, mulatto, or native overlords frequently portrayed as abusive.

Even the various avenues afforded by the Church could not balance out native women’s new places within the political and ritual realms, which were marginal or liminal at best. Early colonial Nahua women experienced a marked decline in social status. On the secular front, some native women remained as ward heads (tlaxilacaleque), but they were noticeably absent from the highest regional offices and there were few female literates to serve as scribes or manage their own affairs (Gibson 1964: 115).
Women formed the majority of church attendees and cofrades, at least within native cofradías (Ibid: 114). Women recruited female parishioners, and likely their own husbands, children and other relatives, for masses and cofradías. Nahua women documented mass attendees especially after church attendance began to decline after 1550 (Cline 1986: 15).

Elite Nahua women became informal moral leaders, who were emboldened with the freedom and responsibility to express their devotion beyond the confines of their domestic and family spheres. Charitable community activism was primarily the pursuit of Indian and Spanish noblewomen rather than men. Nahua women and men collected and transported alms (Osowski 2006: 157) and served in hospitals funded by native cofradías (Motolinía 1985: 187). Native women volunteered their time and knowledge of indigenous medicinal plants and visited neighbors who were confined to their homes (Ibid: 258). Sponsoring widows and orphans conveyed the women’s personal piety as well as the generosity and eminence of their husbands, fathers or brothers (Gibson 1964: 131; Grijalva 1985: 156; Torquemada 1986: 228). Women assigned to sweep filth from church grounds continued a pre-conquest Nahua form of penitential offering (Burkhart 1989: 123). In the eyes of sweepers and priestly supervisors, it was honorable and useful to remove real and symbolic impurities from domestic and sacred spaces (Cline 1986: 15; Lockhart 1992: 218). Cihuateopixque (female religious assistants), stewardesses or hermanas (sisters), dispatched on church and/or confraternal business, are only now coming to light.

Exaggerated conversion claims made by the official religious chroniclers (Mendieta, Motolinía, Valadés, and Vetancurt) to the Spanish Church and Crown attested
to initial successes among native neophytes. Fray Motolinía (1985: 358) argued that serving friars was preferable to working for and living among abusive Spanish landowners and miners. Contention regarding the Indians’ true purpose remained, but secular leaders depended on friars for stable communities. The spiritual experiments waned as circumstances changed, particularly after the faith was tentatively implanted and native communities were decimated by waves of epidemics. Anyone who relied on native labor, land and tribute would resent the time lost to church activities and could interfere through petitions and force. Weekly or monthly service in fiestas, processions and masses, all closely connected to cofradías, would still have been expected of most if not all townspeople.

Reconsolidating Communities and Hierarchies through Cofradías

As colonists, Spanish priests and settlers immediately and automatically introduced their own models of society and “Christian living” throughout the New World. Cofradías were transported as part of the evangelical arsenal of the first contingent of Mendicant friars. They formed only one part of a sophisticated religious complex, which was tailored to the needs of the conquered territories prior to, immediately upon, and for generations following the arrival of the first friars. Due to the plasticity of cofradías and Church support, they soon spread as far as the American Southwest, the Caribbean and the Southern Cone of South America. In this migration and expansion, new social actors and circumstances were added, but gender, ethnicity, class, and place remained key factors in shaping confraternal membership, participation and leadership. There were distinct opportunities for colonial officials and subjects, shaped by
sex, race and class. In confraternal pursuits, interest groups both supported and conflicted with one another.

Friars encouraged native converts, likely at the cost of neglecting Spaniards, to establish and become invested in cofradías. Nearly every neighborhood or other self-conscious entity had mobilized to form a cofradía (Haskett 2005: 107; Lockhart 1992: 539). Cofradías were indeed numerous throughout New Spain, but they were better developed on the periphery or in rural areas (Lockhart 1992: 219). In these areas, cofradías were numerically dominated by indigenous men and women (Bazarte Martínez 1989: 33; Lavrin 1980: 60). The Tecamachalco data support this claim, but lists of members and leaders rarely reveal race. In the New World, cofradías came to flourish to such an extent that they have been described as a distinctively “indigenous response to Christianity” (Gibson 1964: 127; Kan 1985: 210; Rojas Limas 1987: 90; Zafra Oropeza 1996: 23). The claim does not negate European confraternal history. Rather it acknowledges cofradías’ unique role in the evangelization of native peoples.

Pioneers in the study of evangelization in New Spain proposed estimates of when (and how many) indigenous cofradías emerged. Robert Ricard’s “spiritual conquest” paradigm framed the sodalities as early, numerous and widespread corporate adjustments to Christianity and colonialism. But Charles Gibson, John K. Chance and William B. Taylor viewed the cofradía as a delayed Indian response to Christianity. Native cofradías began to thrive generations after they were introduced by the Mendicant orders and Spanish settlers who longed for the comforts of home. Barry D. Sell (2002: 44) noted that, “there is still much that is obscure about the various stages through which [Nahua cofradías] passed until they became an expected part of the Mexican scene in the 17th and
18th centuries.” In response to the knowledge vacuum, I set out to examine native cofradías on the periphery, at least compared to where most had been studied.

By 1640, secular clergymen replaced the Mendicant orders throughout much of New Spain. The new priests incorporated their increasingly multiethnic parishes by avidly sponsoring cofradías. After the initial wave of foundations (1550-1590), the institution was replicated everywhere in the 17th and 18th centuries (Gibson 1964: 127). Although real numbers are not yet available, cofrades appear to represent a large, if not the entire, proportion of a settlement’s population (Licate 1981: 83). Individuals and families belonged to several cofradías, even if they resided in distant settlements (Lavrin 1980: 122). Ubiquity and productivity made cofradías highly visible to townspeople, particularly on patron saint or feast days. Leaders of groups whose celebrations depended on the same priests, churches, processional routes, and images likely vacillated between treating other confraternal councils as potential cohorts or as rivals.

Hundreds of cofradías acquired properties and enjoyed resurgence until bishops became disillusioned with their redundancy, excesses and autonomy in the late 1700s (Larkin 2006: 193; O’Hara 2010: 117). By 1800, most cofradías had come to an end, as per bishop’s order. But some community leaders sidestepped decrees or initiated other cofradías, some of which remain active today.

Colonial authorities likely viewed informal leaders, who assisted priests in mass, taught catechism or spearheaded cofradías, as promising alternatives for pacifying native communities. Townspeople’s voluntary participation served the interests of the Church and the State. Early on, cofradías were quite lucrative for the Church, especially clergymen who became members and officiated at confraternal masses and processions.
(Gibson 1964: 127). The business of keeping the “restless natives” and rowdy conquerors occupied and thus distracted would also contribute to effective consolidation of the resettled and somewhat artificial communities (Zafra Oropeza 1996: 14). This strategy was nothing new; Europe’s confraternities directed the social welfare and control of marginal and subordinate groups (Terpstra 2000: 5; Vincent 1987: 122). Local civic-religious hierarchies (cargo system) assured remote colonial administrators that caciques, casicas and principales were incorporated as Christian allies who set the right example and kept their native wards in check (Chance and Taylor 1985; Gosner 1992). Local leaders (governors, mayors and fiscales) were easily recognizable at fiestas and masses. These elite men and their families were obliged to be conspicuously present and active at ceremonies (Grijalva 1985: 161).

Spanish political, economic and religious ideals, structures and personnel only partially transformed, subsumed or replaced resilient and adaptable indigenous administrative forms (Haskett 1991: 134; Lockhart 1992; Wood 2003). Native elites remained focused on their pre-Hispanic pursuits: “the structure and function of native hierarchies creatively adapted to colonial rule” (Cline 1986: 36). Imposing Spanish civil and religious heads did not place local hierarchies beyond the reach of native elites.

Avenues remained for helping and even dominating others.

In the early colonial era, various local institutions and practices were appropriated and transformed by the presence of Spanish priests and settlers, indigenous peoples, Afro-Mexicans, and other castas. Operating alongside the tianguiz (weekly local market), hacienda (landed estate), cabildo (town council), and the court system, cofradías were among the prime sites for the Nahua to advance their own agendas and engage in
intercultural exchange (Haskett 1991; Horn 1997; Kellogg 1995). For indigenous men and women living within multiethnic towns, leadership of native-dominated, or participation within multiethnic, cofradías held the promise of a rich ritual and public life, and all with the blessing of the Church. “Indians” were presented with spiritual, social, and even political and economic rewards. These trajectories, largely absent from the secular spheres of colonial life, were similar to ones enjoyed before the conquest (Restall, Sousa and Terraciano 2005; Schroeder, Wood and Haskett 1999; Wood 2003).

Robert Haskett (1991: 22) observed that “ethnographers tend to view the Indian cofradía as the dominant corporate political institution.” He called for comparison with other forms of self-governance in indigenous communities, especially cabildos and altepetl. By 1540, municipal councils were super-imposed onto the altepetl, the largest pre-Hispanic sociopolitical unit to survive conquest and colonization, which provided the framework for cofradías but also was crucial in shaping Nahua parishes and the Spanish labor and/or tribute systems of encomienda and repartimiento. (Sell 2002: 51)

Conquest and colonization initiated and sustained losses of life, land and liberty that would have required “an entire reassessment of the traditional power relationship in the community” (Megged 1996: 76). In this long-term and uncertain transition, cofradías served as mediating forces. Cofradías symbolically linked and legitimized the recently implanted and the traditional forms of community organization and power hierarchies.

Cofradías and other forms of indigenous self-governance may be approached as effective coping mechanisms in the lives of a variety of individuals and interest groups. Many early colonial native elites still enjoyed considerable clout or what Pierre Bourdieu (1977) would have called symbolic or cultural capital. But the caciques’ (heads) and principales’ (nobles) landholdings and authority to rule their one-time subjects were now
severely restricted. The Nahua, Zapotec, Maya, and other indigenous lords still fared better than their vassals. The *macehualtin* (commoners) continued to shoulder heavy tribute and labor obligations, facing domination by Indian as well as Spanish and even casta authorities. The old Indian elite (followed by the commoners) and the newcomer up-starts (Spaniards, joined later by the castas) were offered new opportunities to self-govern within the sphere of lay religiosity. Lay leaders exercised the right to pool and safeguard resources that would have otherwise been lost to tribute collectors, launch political candidates and finance community-wide feasts (Taylor 1996: 307).

Within and especially between cofradías, whether Spanish, Indian or Afro-Mexican, corporate and even individual connections to Christian rhetoric, symbols, sacraments, and buildings were valued and pursued competitively (Lavrin 1980: 122; Zafra Oropeza 1996: 19). Local native identity, expressed as both cooperation and competition within and between communities, persisted into the early colonial period and beyond. The ritual pageantry of processions, dramas, music, dances, pilgrimages, cofradías, chapels, and the cult of saints encouraged indigenous peoples to continue to assemble as kin and communal groups for a common purpose, which was usually an elaborate display in a public setting (Burkhart 1998: 376; Curcio-Nagy 1994: 5; Rubial García 2006: 40). Through participation, ties and claims to public activities, roles and spaces, already of great value to indigenous groups, were cemented.

Sacred images and entire ritual inventories of localized cofradías and chapels augmented the spiritual and cultural legitimacy of the social units that jointly possessed and cared for them (Grijalva 1985: 160; Torquemada 1986: 229). Carrying religious statues, paintings and banners in processions bestowed special distinctions, as did
funding fiestas, and paying and feeding the priests, musicians and artisans. To some native leaders, the local cult of the patron saint may have represented an attempt to reestablish their lost altepetl or city-state (Gibson 1964: 133; Klor de Alva 1993: 178; Richardson 1989: 74). There was a patron saint for the larger settlement, which might change over time, but also for individual barrios, chapels and cofradías.

James Lockhart (1992: 219) surmised that cofradías were not usually associated with the patron saint of a particular settlement or barrio, but I found much evidence to the contrary in Tecamachalco. In a single cofradía, there could be cults devoted to various saints, despite a patron or predominant religious symbol (Zafra Oropeza 1996: 34). Proliferations of chapels, shrines, paintings, saints’ images, hospitals, and schools conveys that New Spain’s cofradías were more church-centric and active than those in Spain (Bazarte Martínez 1989: 33). But due to centuries of Catholic dominance, these elements already existed in the Old World. Thus, there was little space, funds or need, other than ostentation, to expand the local repertoire of religious art and architecture.

Along with religious images and structures, fiestas were the most tangible means of competition at the disposal of town and confraternal leaders. Fiestas titulares (of the patron saint of the town, barrio, chapel, or cofradía) and regulares (Christmas, Holy Week and Corpus Christi), as well as their processions, were among the most outward, appealing and inclusive expressions of popular Christianity in New Spain (Torquemada 1986: 227; Vetancurt 1971: 44). Confraternal constitutions reveal fiestas as the most expensive, if not the principal, activities sponsored by cofradías (Lavrin 1980: 123; Schwaller 1989: 243; Zafra Oropeza 1996: 27). These expenses were generally the responsibility of confraternal councils. But as confraternal wealth declined, a network of
affluent individuals bankrolled communal celebrations, in the tradition of *mayordomías* and/or the revolving Mesoamerican cargo system (Chance and Taylor 1985: 8).

Fiestas were at least as manifold and dynamic as cofradías. They represented a communal release, an act of penance and self-protection, an appropriation of supernatural forces, an exhibition of the community’s well-being, and a sanction of the local hierarchies in attendance (Gibson 1964: 133; Motolinía 1985: 181). Events were numerically dominated and co-funded by confraternal leaders and members. Valadés (1989: 509, folio 225) boasted that celebrations in Europe could not come close to those sponsored by Indians. Motolinía (1985: 215) noted that the Indians participated more frequently and enthusiastically than the Spaniards, who soon returned to work or home. Torquemada (1986: 224) expressed concern about Indians singing, dancing and drinking alcohol during sermons. But as rituals, fiestas were generally the only settings where it was acceptable to temporarily suspend certain moral and civil codes (Gibson 1964: 133).

Spaniards and castas adopted and adapted institutions and practices into divergent forms mostly endorsed by the Catholic Church. Despite their initial statuses as invaders and outsiders, Spanish colonists managed to convert indigenous settlements into manufactured *pueblos de españoles* (towns of Spaniards) and multiethnic parish communities. *Peninsulares* and *criollos* (Spaniards born in Spain and New Spain) found much that was familiar, valuable and exploitable in New World cofradías (Bazarte Martínez 1989; Lavrin 2002). Spaniards’ arrogation of native land, their agricultural and mining industries and the fashioning of Spanish-led cofradías, all supported the transformation of local hierarchies and cultural geography.
Ethnic exclusivity, set by the founders’ ethnicity, was typical early on but it was still visible in the 1700s (Lavrin 1980: 60). Cofradías limited to Spanish membership were most common in cities big enough to attract enough Spaniards, such as Mexico City, Guadalajara or Puebla de los Angeles (Zafra Oropeza 1996: 26). As more social segments began to emerge and merge, even the most selective eventually opened their doors wider, if only to generate revenue.

Christianized Afro-Mexicans have mostly been studied through records produced by the Holy Office of the Inquisition (Bennett 2003; Bristol 2007; O’Hara 2010; Villa-Flores 2006). Slaves and free citizens also left their mark on cofradías. Borrowing from Spain’s 16th-century tradition of Afro-Sevillian brotherhoods, mulatto and black men and women living in Mexico City, mining and coastal cities (Veracruz) began to launch their own cofradías in the late 16th century (Bristol 2007: 95; Lavrin 2002: 33; Von Germeten 2006: 14). Most growth occurred in the 17th century (Lavrin 1980: 43), which may represent the height of Afro-Mexican population growth. Afro-Mexican cofradías began to thrive despite a 1612 law that forbid blacks and mulattoes from meeting in groups composed of more than three individuals, whether publicly or privately, day or night (Zafra Oropeza 1996: 43). Mestizos joined groups consisting of Spaniards and Indians, or of negros and mulattoes. But mestizos never appear to have been numerous, defined or united enough to launch their own organizations (Lavrin 1980: 46).

Cofradías were clearly dynamic and malleable social arenas in which diverse peoples interacted. Their fiestas reinforced but also obscured racial and class hierarchies:

Indians who could only gather enough money for an annual celebration of a patron saint shared with the haughty aristocrats of Lima and Mexico City a set of beliefs and a vested social interest in their confraternities that made of such
disparate members of society *brothers* in the only institutions flexible enough to cater to them both. (Lavrin 2002: 23)

Ethnic segregation is unsustainable within the political, economic, social, or religious systems of a multiethnic rural parish like Tecamachalco. Neighbors and parishioners had few options but to govern, work, socialize, and worship together.

Nowhere were cofradías a mere reflection of the Catholic ideals and customs of a particular time and place. Many local Catholicisms existed simultaneously (Christian 2006: 259), some engaging one another, others operating without the full knowledge of religious authorities or even one’s neighbors (Tavárez 2006: 124). In terms of how closely they conformed to official Catholicism, lay religious beliefs and practices varied among and within regions and even parishes (Flynn 1989: 4). Confraternities in Europe and the Americas played crucial roles in the practical expression of a multiplicity of beliefs and practices. They institutionalized existing customs, bringing diverse local strains of piety into contact with official Catholicism. The processes of creating a network of common devotional exercises and entrusting concrete and symbolic wealth to lay people standardized and sanctioned varied, rich and ancient forms of popular religion. The Catholic Church customarily dispatched standardized guidelines for specific social segments. Streamlining and co-opting existing local practices were the norms.

Early colonial cofradías, while always under the ecclesiastic “gaze”, represented an unchartered frontier of sorts. The 1552 Nahuatl ordinances of fray Alonso de Molina established a model for Nahua confraternal constitutions (Sell 2002). But variation among the few examples available suggests that confraternal scribes honored local protocol and prerogatives at least as much as European-inspired master texts. Even in Europe, there were no official guidelines for confraternal foundations or operations until

A century after cofradías spread throughout the provinces of New Spain, cofradías remained largely undefined and unfettered. Until the Bourbon Reforms, most cofradías had been governed more by local custom and informal agreements than by formal law… Royal law governing cofradías in Indian and non-Indian communities collected in the Recopilación of 1681 was sketchy and reflected the ambiguities of an earlier colonial state conceived as a marriage of church and crown. (Taylor 1996: 301)

There was always local ecclesiastic sanction and oversight, whether from friars stationed at a nearby convento or itinerant priests. All founding confraternal councils sought licenses from the bishop of the local diocese or they risked operating illegally and eventual closure (Bazarte Martínez 1989: 32; Lockhart 1992: 219; Zafra Oropeza 1996: 49). Bishops held the authority to dissolve cofradías, especially if stewards exhausted their resources or broke their own statutes (Lavrin 1980: 116; Zafra Oropeza 1996: 27). But an overwhelming number of communities, cofradías and cofrades meant that confraternal councils were sufficiently removed from the eyes of bishops to experiment with formal rules and traditional customs. Bishops or their emissaries inspected some parishes and their records less than once per decade. The infrequent and sporadic timing of these ecclesiastic checks and balances may have facilitated chaos and bankruptcy. Alternatively, periods of no surveillance may have conveyed to mayordomos that they alone were in charge of the properties, celebrations, and people entrusted to their care.

Once cofradías were situated within multiethnic communities and placed in the hands of indigenous elites, outnumbered Spaniards, underrepresented Afro-Mexicans, and unobtrusive women, local concerns and individual ambitions could influence confraternal business at least as much as the Mendicants’ utopian missions. Local leaders
were largely at liberty to run their own groups and pursue their own agendas, both corporate and personal. Through the confraternal systems of fictive kinship, accumulated wealth, ritual actions, symbols, and rhetoric (founding mission statements and ordinances), groups could cross and reconstruct the boundaries that shaped class, racial and gender hierarchies, at least up to a certain point. This is why cofradías mattered to all segments of colonial Mexican society, and why they should matter to historical anthropologists in general and to Mesoamerican ethnologists in particular.

The Anthropological Significance and Dilemma of Cofradías

Interest in confraternities was renewed at a 1960 conference in Italy that commemorated the 1260 A.D. *disciplina* or penitential flagellation movement. This peculiar gathering spawned publications and more meetings, which is how an interdisciplinary and international field was (re)born. Many scholars produced ecclesiastic histories with little “attempt at synthesis” (Black 2000: 12). Narrowly focused attention to specific localities, years and themes led to accusations of parochialism. But cofradías are indeed meaningful, not just then and there, but here and now.

Confraternal scholarship, which is geographically, topically and theoretically varied, is a valuable resource for this case study. Early studies were undertaken by antiquarians and local historians who limited their scope to material culture or altruism rather than comparative analysis or cultural critique. Generations later, the same foci, including paintings and theater (Webster 1996, 1998) and charitable activities (Flynn 1989; Zafra Oropeza 1996) still drive much of the multi-disciplinary research on
European and Mesoamerican confradías. Some recent publications on colonial cofradías neglected ethnic (Larkin 2006) or gender relations entirely (Lavrin 2002).

After 1970, a fuller picture of cofradías’ ecclesiastic, administrative, economic and social histories emerged. Until 1980, most approaches remained largely historical, descriptive, regional, and functionalist, rather than interpretive. While remaining focused on Europe, Italy especially, a few seminal works offered advanced approaches (Henderson 1994; Trexler 1980; Weissman 1982). The chief methodological innovation was looking beyond confraternal statutes “to understand activities and members [through] membership lists, minute books, and accounts” (Black 2000: 11). Scholars, including historical demographers, began to consult mundane texts, not just religious art or official founding documents. A shift toward what real people did in their life and death rituals, and what impacts this had on participants and the larger society, is a huge step in the right direction. But I still ventured into unmapped territory when launching my comparative analysis of confraternal ideals (ordinances) and practices (memberships, elections, finances, and rituals) among so many interfacing cofradías of varied ethnic compositions.

The universal socializing aspect of cofradías, including their relevance to social relations, structure, stratification, status, order, control, welfare, change and continuity, opened the field to anthropological inquiry. The incorporation of social historians, sociologists, and social and cultural anthropologists, some inspired by Emile Durkheim, revolutionized confraternal studies. Durkheim’s pioneering sociology of religion incorporated the community and the role of the common people in developing and altering religious systems. He captured the primacy of the social in religion by emphasizing ritual practices over texts or moral imperatives, seeing religion as a lived
experience centered on social relations rather than a set of doctrines or institutions. Religion was not created by or for individuals, who are only “made conscious of the sacred world through the moral force of the community and they sustain personal spiritual sentiment through social interaction” (Durkheim 1965: 16). Effervescence (spiritual bliss) occurs only in collective worship, in the performance of ritual dramas. The classic example, richly elaborated upon by anthropologists Arnold Van Gennep (2004) and Victor Turner (1969) in the concepts of heightened emotionality, communitas and liminality, is a rite of passage. As spiritual and social gatherings where families and neighbors banded together as fictive kin for a common purpose, confraternal and community-wide masses, processions and fiestas would function similarly.

In the 1950s, social anthropology, particularly the ethnologies of kinship, gender, race, class, and Mesoamerica began making room for the dual study of cofradías and compadrazgo (ritual co- or god-parenthood). Cultural histories on rural communities incorporated the classic ethnological theories of functionalism, structuralism and structure-functionalism. Scholars assessed the various pursuits or provinces of fictive kinship moving throughout the society in question, whether a bounded community (Deshon 1963; Foster 1969) or a comparison of Spain and Spanish America (Foster 1953). We also saw political-economic approaches that emphasized the role of ritual kinship in (re)producing asymmetry (Ingham 1970; Sayres 1956; Van der Berghe 1966), and symbolic or interpretive approaches, aimed at how people frame their own spiritual and socio-economic roles in relation to their families, friends and neighbors.

As extensions of ritual kinship, cofradías operate to bind neighborhood networks together (Chance and Taylor 1985; Terpstra 2000). In this way, cofradías resemble the
compadrazgo relationship that was and is practiced throughout Latin America (Mintz and Wolf 1950). Hugo Nutini’s (1980, 1984) in-depth study of the compadrazgo system’s historical development and integration in rural Tlaxcala combined symbolic and structural approaches. Nutini identified compadrazgo types, functions and networks, and interpreted what they meant to villagers. While I consulted baptismal records looking for patterns (ethnic, class, gender, spatial, and temporal) in compadrazgo ties, the complex dataset’s sheer volume led me to narrow my focus to cofradías.

Ritual kinship forms practiced through folk Catholicism provide clues to communities’ spiritual, social, economic, and political organization, hierarchies, cohesion, and conflicts. New approaches were geographically and culturally varied as well as methodologically innovative. Case studies were ethnographies of rural Mexican and Guatemalan villages or ethnohistories of contact and colonial-era cofradías in the Americas or Western Europe. Chance and Taylor (1985) assessed themes and provided direction for scholarship on the Mesoamerican civic-religious hierarchy. Paul Charney (1998) argued that native cofrades’ sense of belonging buttressed Andean communities and families. Nicholas Terpstra (2000) and his colleagues explored early modern Italian confraternities as instruments of social order, welfare and experimentation. The scholars illuminated cultural continuity and change, gender and age hierarchies, ritual kinship, the treatment of marginalized groups, political contests, and community boundaries.

Cofradías are also framed as community clubs dedicated to the social welfare of their members’ less fortunate neighbors (Bazarte Martínez 1989; Flynn 1980; Lavrin 1980; Zafra Oropeza 1996). Cofradías are presented as relatively conservative and paternalistic institutions that co-opted lay people in order to execute the State’s
benevolent functions. Cofradías supported existing social orders, but also ameliorated the living conditions of the most marginalized, incorporating them as brethren in life and death. Scholars who pursue the family model focus on rites of passage and how members collectively pursued piety, charity and civic pride.

The cofradía has surfaced as a prime setting for appraising native corporate adjustments to the evangelization and the administrative overhaul of New Spain. Some studies were entirely dedicated to native cofradías (Chance and Taylor 1985; Lavrin 1980; Schwaller 1987; Schroeder 2000; Sell 2000, 2002; Zafra Oropeza 1996). Only the latter two were book length and both featured ordinances rather than in-depth analysis of social relations or cultural exchange. Cofradías were also explored as part of a survey of colonial institutions that were tailored to capitalize on the indigenous structures and peoples of New Spain (Foster 1960; Gibson 1964; Gosner 1992; Lockhart 1992; Megged 1996; Osowski 2010; Ricard 1966; Taylor 1996). Almost every project relied on records from the core Nahua and Maya regions, rather than the periphery. For the most part, social theories were absent. Exceptions include an emphasis on Maya class warfare (Gosner 1992; Megged 1996) and conflation of the altepetl with saints (Lockhart 1992).

Ritual and social obligations entailed by confraternal membership, service and leadership may have created or solidified certain alliances within a community, while exacerbating other tensions. Cofradías could be highly contested political arenas. Within and among cofradías, disenfranchised native elites struggled for legitimacy while largely ignoring their commoner constituents (Gosner 1992, 1997). In Chiapas, the Indian cofradía surfaced as

…a translocal alternative to the already weakening framework of the calpultin [big house with land], especially regarding common land and property holdings,
labor drafts, and ritual, but also charity and welfare. It was particularly relevant to the shaping of group consciousness among the different social strata in the community. (Megged 1996: 76)

Megged (1996: 92-93) saw confraternal hierarchies as exacerbating class differences, intensifying the mistrust that already existed in pre-conquest Maya society. Stressing differential status within the sphere of local religion was carried out at the insistence of Indian nobles, rather than Spanish ecclesiastic authorities. Rejecting cofradí as social leveling mechanisms and emphasizing Maya elite accommodation and alienation are prevalent perspectives for Mayanists.

The alienation approach to Maya cofradí as is not fully supported by the central Mexican data. Megged played up tensions among Maya elites and commoners, and with their new Spanish overlords. Pre-contact Mayan civilizations and their post-conquest accommodations of Spanish institutions differed considerably from those of the Nahua and the Popoloca whom I study. Thus the inter-personal dynamics of Mayan cofradí are likely to have been negotiated in distinct or novel ways. While Megged accounts for class variation among indigenous peoples, he somewhat neglects the ethnic plurality of colonial towns. Spaniards and Afro-Mexicans were no less adept than indigenous peoples at manipulating cofradí as’ social, political and economic potential (Richie 2010; Von Germeten 2006). They actively preserved their own cultural traditions and legitimacy through self-conscious language and practices, which we should take just as seriously.

Explanatory frameworks tailored to cofradí fit well into the cultural and historical contexts to which they were applied. European feudal states subjected to spiritual re-conquest are geographically and temporally distant settings, with no native or Afro-Mexicans to incorporate. Instead, medieval and early modern Europeans sought to
exclude any perceived outsiders, socio-economic inferiors and New Christians (converted Moors and Jews). Studies conducted in New Spain are more comparable to one another, but the centrality and size of settlements still shape local circumstances. Urban cofradías could present more restrictions and opportunities for men and women seeking spiritual companionship or more earthly goals. In cities, a central location likely meant greater ecclesiastic oversight and parish integration than in rural or peripheral settings. But there were also more cofradías to join, or even viable alternatives to cofradías.

Each region, cultural context, historical circumstance, and case study is unique. In turn, points of divergence require explanatory models that best account for local conditions. We may be framing cofradías as instruments of social harmony or strife due to our biases and research area, rather than the data. Existing models may be inappropriate for current and future case studies on cofradías. Borrowing from other fields or new theories may be in order.

_Cofradías, Meaning and Power: Modeling Compliant and Contentious Interaction_

Before the 1980s, there was little consideration of what cofradías meant to different groups. Ethnologist Clifford Geertz (1973) emphasized the plural, layered, mutually reinforcing and competing meanings of cultural symbols and practices. He challenged us to look beyond or behind official or dominant cultural interpretations. A ritual or statute may mean one thing to a performer but something else to the audience. That is before ethnologists add to, elaborate and complicate these interpretations. This approach has not been directly applied to cofradías. But all confraternal scholars would
acknowledge that members’ experiences and relative positions in, and outside of, cofradías influenced what they brought to, and took away from, cofradías.

Sociologist Max Weber (1968: 196) unraveled the process by which diverse meanings emerge and circulate throughout society, particularly in the religious sphere: “beliefs and ritual actions are often invested with new meanings or change directions, as they are introduced in novel situations and social frameworks, different from those in which they were initially developed.” When cofradías were transplanted from Spain to New Spain, from urban to rural communities, from Spaniards to Indians and castas, and from men to women, they were altered considerably through the lives of their members, leaders, supervisors, advocates, and critics.

Colonial historian James Lockhart’s paradigm of double mistaken identity dovetails nicely with symbolic approaches. DMI is most persuasive due to Lockhart’s expertise on Nahua-Spanish interactions and familiarity with confraternal records. DMI occurs when the colonizers and the colonized assume that a form, concept or practice functions identically the same way as it did within their own cultural frameworks. When making this miscalculation, they are “unaware of or unimpressed by the other side’s interpretation” in the cultural exchange (Lockhart 1999: 2). Interfacing groups synthesize new beliefs, symbols, experiences, or interactions by framing them through their deeply embedded cultural knowledge. This largely automated and unconscious response would have led to many miscommunications along the trajectory of the colonial project.

Colonizers and colonized often seek the familiar in the exotic instead of fully exploring and capitalizing on a competing cultural context. Spanish bishops, priests and settlers drew on an ancient confraternal heritage. Colonial authorities embraced cofradías
in order to promote ethnic purity, Christian family values and settlement pacification. But in practice, cofradías may have actually facilitated interethnic interaction, empowered native women to transcend their homes and families, and enabled social factions to more effectively pursue interests in conflict with those of the Church and Crown (Lavrin 1980: 190). Solidarity, regional and ethnic identity, as expressed in ritual performance, structures and paraphernalia, were hardly the invention of medieval European cofrades. Nahuas also drew on pre-contact traditions of kin and communal ties, rituals and political organizations in order to inform their present. James Lockhart’s (1992) juxtaposition of the Nahua altepetl and Catholic saints provides a promising direction for studies of confraternal engagement, especially cofradías founded and led by native groups.

Colonial administrators, settlers and subjects were all faced with the introduction of people, institutions, organizations, rules, and customs that were largely alien to them. Even members of the same ethnic background and community would approach cofradías with distinct positions or agendas. I argue that *multiple mistaken identity* is a flexible framework well-suited to cofradías, not just among Spaniards and Indians, but also among castas and women. Afro-Mexicans applied their own enigmatic rationales in early encounters with cofradías (Von Germeten 2006: 44). Females’ interpretations of cofradías assuredly differed from those of husbands, fathers and brothers. Women joined, supported, served, and even led cofradías for their own reasons. Spanish residents’ confraternal ideals likely contradicted those of priests, particularly on the issue of incorporating their Indian or casta brothers or sisters. Competing visions about the nature and ultimate purpose of cofradías facilitated accommodation as well as conflict.
DMI provides satisfactory rationale for the enthusiastic reception enjoyed by cofradías throughout New Spain. But like any useful paradigm, it does not explain everything. I argue that more attention to human agency, whether individual or corporate strategies, will illuminate the place of confraternal leadership and participation within colonial Mexican society. Treating a practice, institution or hierarchy as an expression of something familiar involved an element of self-preservation. It was an active choice. Colonists and colonized peoples were best motivated by defending their own continued presence, resources and leadership in plural communities.

Before 1990, there was minimal exploration of how men and women collectively navigated and negotiated the avenues afforded to them through cofradías, whether through a focus on political economy, structure, praxis/practice theory, or agency. The exercise of power through rhetoric or symbolic action, whether used to circumscribe or empower cofrados, was explored only superficially. Sergei Kan’s study of Tlingit confraternities in Western Canada was a clear departure. Kan framed lay religious sodalities as native responses to Christianity. Here was evidence, from outside of Latin America, linking cofradías and colonialism. Brotherhods were first presented by official representatives of a monolithic religious institution (the Russian Orthodox Church) as ingenious mechanisms to bring individuals together for socially-positive, community-focused activities and efforts (Kan 1985: 215). Then they were reinterpreted and accommodated by opportunistic leaders (usually male) and cultural go-betweens (usually women and children) before they were absorbed into entire Tlingit communities.

Colonialism’s culture (Thomas 1994) is a complex, dynamic system that is best deconstructed when we contrast its accompanying institutions, processes, policies, and
practices with the myriad of possible responses from colonized peoples (Osterhammel 1997: 97). I was initially drawn to cofradí as native corporate adjustments to colonialism and evangelization. Interplay between the colonial institution of the Church and the voluntary religious activities of native men and women involved strong social, economic and political components.

I found the dueling paradigms of passive conformity and active resistance to be of little help. Many more options existed, whether or not they could be articulated, then or now. Ethnologist Marshall Sahlins (1995: 251) argued that “the logic of any given response to a historical situation is never the only one possible and rarely the only one available.” Some avenues failed to impress or to take a firm hold, such as a native priesthood or entrusting Spanish land- and mine owners with moral leadership. But creative appropriation, negotiation and selective accommodation of certain aspects of the Church’s vision for native and multiethnic communities, such as cofradías and baptismal compadrazgo, are supported in my study.

Attempts to identify the at times subtle or veiled motivations behind the actions of individuals and group may be futile, much more so than the stated pursuits of colonial institutions. But it is equally naïve to assume that any instance of human interaction entails passive role playing. Within the dynamic and manifold domain of cofradías, I sought evidence of men and women performing, reenacting and challenging their assigned roles as colonial officials and subjects. Urban and rural cofradías were multifaceted mediums of religious expression, civic pride and responsibility. In multiethnic parishes, cofradí as were primary corporate institutions, used to (re)legitimate
and (re)channel the religious, social, economic, and political realities, aspirations and struggles of Indians, but also those of Spaniards, Afro-Mexicans and other castas.

Colonial, post-colonial and post-structural theorists focus on people, practices and institutions, primarily in terms of power relations. Cofradías are historically and theoretically significant as instruments of colonialism, social control and pacification, in the service of the Spanish Church and Crown as well as local religious and secular authorities. Official agents of the colonial project have various tools at their disposal (Cohn 1996). George Foster (1960) and Robert Ricard (1966) recognized cofradías as vital components in Mexico’s *spiritual conquest*.

If I apply Gramsci’s (1980) *hegemonic-state reproductive model*, Foucault’s (1991) *power/knowledge theory of social relations*, and Bourdieu’s (1998) notions of *position-taking* and *symbolic capital* regarding power to the cofradía, it will be unfairly reduced to an instrument of hegemony. Cofradías would be essentialized and dismissed after being credited with, or blamed for, coercing subordinate peoples into regulating their own behavior, reinforcing their own domination by colonial authorities, whether religious or secular, Spanish or indigenous.

Antonio Gramsci saw hegemonic forces as operating just below the cultural radar of the powerless and/or even the powerful. Winning hegemony means “diffusing one’s ‘worldview’ throughout the fabric of society as a whole, thus equating one’s own interests with the interests of society at large” (Eagleton 1991: 116). Gramsci would see native, Afro-Mexican and female cofrades as unconsciously fulfilling the limited roles assigned to them by colonial authorities in exchange for few real or lasting benefits. He would approach cofradías as agents of social control and order that primarily preserved
colonial hierarchies. The cofradía may seem like little more than a hegemonic institution that reproduced the Church and Crown’s control over native subjects through discursive (rhetoric) and non-discursive practices (actions). But Gramsci believed that, once united and enlightened, subordinates would enact counter-hegemonic strategies. Gramsci’s disciples have been slower to assess subaltern experiences and perceptions of hegemony, or to compare them to the aspirations of the dominant power (Torres 1992). But hegemony could still be a useful concept in interpreting the language, activities and overall mission of native and Afro-Mexican cofradías should they mirror those of the Church and/or cofradías with Spanish leadership. Counter-hegemonic processes must be considered whenever native, Afro-Mexican, Spanish, and ethnically plural cofradías crafted innovative policies or responded to similar requirements for membership, participation and leadership in novel ways.

Michel Foucault (1969: 90) saw power beyond the State, pervading everywhere and everything. Power permeates our most treasured and seemingly neutral institutions, operating and masquerading in ways unseen to the majority of society. Foucault framed discourse or rhetoric, propagated by representatives of the dominant culture, as a regime of truth. Expert manipulation of one’s subject material, language and audience communicate the culturally-appropriate rules for behavior. Subtle messages include and exclude different social segments, extolling the virtues of one group in order to bring another into compliance. Foucault called for researchers to unmask the techniques that put power into play, conceal and protect it.

Confraternal hierarchies were always enacted, despite and perhaps because of the family model. Foucault would encourage scholars to consult ordinances and bishops’
edicts for evidence of social control and order being wielded over, through, within, and among cofradías. Standardized rules, close contact with the clergy, task supervision, and the use of positive and negative sanctions to solicit attendance and status-appropriate participation in masses, processions and meetings may be evidence of the mechanization of individuals. Foucault urged us to look beyond seemingly inclusive statements and public policies for evidence of who really holds the power and to what end. This might be best accomplished by comparing founding documents with the actual practices reflected in membership, electoral and financial records.

As a praxis theorist, Pierre Bourdieu acknowledged the roles of individuals’ experiences and choices in bringing about change within their societies. But his reproduction theory outlined the process by which individual actions, aimed at personal ends, are recuperated into reproducing the existing or desirable social structure (Bourdieu 1972: 209). If institutions are framed as agents of the state that manipulate people’s desires and actions, then cofradías would be seen to do much more for maintaining the status quo than on behalf of their lay leaders and members.

Bourdieu (1987: 156) proposed a dynamic relationship among relative social positions (structure or hierarchy), people’s dispositions (habitus or experience) and position-taking (preferences or choices). These components collectively generate but also constrain the strategies that can be made by social agents throughout the diverse domains of everyday human interactions (such as confraternal foundations, rituals and elections). Position-taking may best explain native, Spanish and Afro-Mexican efforts to integrate but also segregate themselves from each other and other ethnic groups through cofradías, baptismal compadrazgo and marital choice.
Praxis theorists would approach lay religious institutions and practices as \textit{reproduction} and \textit{reconversion strategies} of both \textit{structures} (the Spanish Church and Crown) and \textit{actors} (elites and commoners). Reproduction strategies reinforce the status quo and reconversion strategies create bonds of religious, social and economic obligations among participants. The latter involve the intentional misrecognition of actions by transforming \textit{capital} (Harker et al. 1990: 19).

Confraternal founders and leaders, processional penitents, priests’ assistants, and native artisans of religious artwork all qualify as joint possessors of what Bourdieu (1998: 104) called \textit{symbolic capital}. Appointees would hold an advantage in social relations, despite their many socioeconomic sacrifices. As positions frequently restricted to local native elites, seats on the confraternal council, alms collecting, church stewardship, singing, and sweeping would have been interpreted by men and women of all ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds as symbolic capital to be pursued competitively. Serving the Church and one’s brethren was not always financially enriching; it could bankrupt a family. But men and women recognized as the stewards, patrons and spiritual leaders of their communities capitalized on the avenues opened to them, creating legacies for themselves, their families, neighbors, and descendants.

Social control requires the collaboration of the dominant and the dominated. Cofradías may have served as the Church’s primary means to appropriate, supervise and neutralize colonial subjects’ leisure time and activities. Harnessing and sustaining lay religiosity were not easy tasks. Priests built upon existing community hierarchies, assigned distinct roles to men and women of all classes and ethnicities, and co-opted virtually everyone in communal tasks.
Participants did not go home empty-handed. Outlets for sanctioned self-expression and group formation for indigenous and Afro-Mexican men and women outside of the Church setting were few and perhaps becoming fewer. When native elites were incorporated as recruiters for cofradías and masses, their economic and cultural resources were channeled into the benign and seemingly politically neutral practices of sponsoring the sacraments, fiestas and images. The commission of religious organizations, architecture and paraphernalia glorified God and required further investments of native time and labor, while identifying and elevating community leaders.

The extent to which lay religious duties were performed through informed consent or masked coercion is a problematic and unexplored issue. Was there as little room for evading or appropriating and rechanneling power as suggested by applying theories about power? Strong spiritual, social, economic, and political returns were involved, so it is naïve to assume that native cooperation entailed totalitarian social control. Did lay religious participation represent voluntary obligations or obligatory volunteerism? Did cofradías enact largely productive processes for men and women of various ethnic and social statuses, or did they mostly serve to reproduce and extend colonial authority into one more realm? Could the Church’s religious and social programs be covertly co-opted or redirected through the management of interethnic relations by Spaniards, Indians and castas within and among cofradías (and vice-versa)?

Cofradías’ hegemonic and hierarchal properties are undeniable. But we cannot overlook native, Afro-Mexican and women’s attempts to manipulate or preserve the ethnic, social and spiritual boundaries shaping confraternal membership, service and leadership. Cofradías were exposed to concerted attempts at collective and individual
agency, from elected and would-be leaders and members. Cofradías may have served as vehicles for subaltern resistance, not fully appreciated by colonial authorities nor today’s scholars. James Scott’s (1985) *weapons of the weak* concept includes acts of passive resistance to State authorities, including foot-dragging while feigning cooperation and pursuing agendas while appearing to adopt the party line.

Anthony Giddens (1984) would frame cofradías as mediums of collective *agency*. Power is productive, positive and generated by a variety of social actors, regardless of their dominant or subjugated positions. I should seek evidence of the seemingly powerless acting together, or against one another, through cofradías, in order to effect meaningful change in their own lives. Were cofradías’ structures, functions, ideologies, and practices vulnerable to covert resistance movements? Could they be used to avoid native work obligations enforced by secular authorities, or to reclaim the sacred and social legitimacy usurped by Spanish priests and settlers?

Charles Gibson (1964: 132) dramatized the ethnic strife generated or at least facilitated by the creation of native and multiethnic cofradías: “to Indians, the cofradía appeared as an institution acceptable to whites, but non-white and in some measure anti-white.” Gibson’s view or Robert Ricard’s *spiritual conquest* paradigm are not validated by three decades of confraternal studies. Counter-hegemonic and hegemonic processes may have generated certain confraternal policies and practices. But if cofrades denied participating in their own domination, then their subaltern strategies, everyday efforts and struggles were futile and meaningless. Perhaps there was no resistance at play. Some observers might even argue that native and Afro-Mexicans’ creative adaptations to their subjugated positions imply acceptance of that domination.
Colonizers and colonized often (mis)read and essentialized each other's actions and intentions after only brief observation and minimal contemplation. Innate qualities were quickly ascribed and came to operate overtly and covertly throughout the wide expanse of colonial society, in its associated institutions, discourses and practices. Sometimes views were expressed corporately, through concerted acts of solidarity or ethnic slurs in the service of self-defense and preservation (Van Young 1984). Colonial authorities recorded and enacted social differentiation through policies addressing ethnic or gender boundaries, such as the *sistema de castas* (Martínez 2008: 79). Policies were recognized by at least some, if not all, members of the colonial society.

I wanted to know how New Spain’s cofradías measured up as institutions of ethnic integration or segregation. There may have been certain eras or circumstances when ethnic labels were regularly applied, invoked selectively or abandoned altogether. The Church’s official policy was to incorporate everyone, albeit into distinct roles. Verena Martínez-Alier (1989: 48) observed that “owing to her egalitarian ideology, the Church [in Cuba] could not conceive of different kinds of institutions for different kinds of people, [but] Catholic doctrine is one thing, and ecclesiastic practice another.” I sought to examine the extent to which confraternal founders employed constitutions to further ethnic, class and gender-specific concerns. Did ritual, membership, electoral, and economic practices conform to these expectations or other factors?

In any colonial or post-colonial situation, there are limits to self-expression and realization. But there are also limits to ethnic, class and gender stratification. Cofradías are so complex that it is difficult (and dangerous) to generalize about their internal composition and associated social relations. The dual interpretations of domination
(hegemony) and resistance (counter-hegemony, agency) both may have some merit. But where is the textual evidence? Neither paradigm can be perfectly suited to confraternal data. There is not enough relevant material available within the records to insist that a single view on power relations accounts for native, casta or women’s involvement in cofradías. My project is the first systematic attempt to reconstruct the accurate membership of a cofradía at any given time, or to contrast confraternal ideals with everyday practices. But I doubt that I will be able to prove domination or resistance.

A new approach that considers the balance of compliant and contentious interactions as a stabilizing process that promoted the sustainability of a social system, structure, institution, or practice, may be in order. My project examines social mechanisms that produced lay interactions that were inert or harmless enough for vice-regal and ecclesiastic authorities, yet amenable to the diverse and evolving interests of Indians, Spaniards and Afro-Mexicans in the early and late colonial periods. Colonial authorities sought to secure their own permanence and to pacify native and multiethnic communities through dependency. They clearly solicited conformity through an attractively-packaged lifestyle, offering ritual, social, economic, and political boons that were largely absent from secular life, at least for non-Spaniards, non-elites and non-men. Regardless of the issues of intent and consciousness, the symbolism and hierachal human interaction associated with certain Christian policies and practices must have served as a practical course in ethnic education for anyone and everyone involved. When comparing individual cofradías, I believe that our attention should turn to the many opportunities that were granted for observing, assessing, approximating, accommodating,
and rejecting cultural elements from other ethnic groups, as well as the freedom to assemble and to incorporate but also marginalize others.

Conclusions: The Case Study

Confraternal leaders and members were socially integrated into a system that operated on both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic processes. Cofradías may have been optimal vehicles of self-expression, whether individual or collective, for people of varied economic means. They may be opportune arenas in which to assess domination, discourse, practice, and agency, particularly in regard to their rise and fall, church politics, population trends, and community development, and interethnic, gender and class relations. When examining confraternal records, ecclesiastic edicts, indigenous histories and petitions, I primarily focus on self-conscious rhetoric as evidence of intercultural dialogue. I contrast Spanish priests’ and residents’ hegemony-driven enterprises with native, casta and female struggles for autonomy and legitimacy.

In this case study, I identify some of the motivations behind people’s involvement in cofradías, including being recognized as a viable citizen of a particular community. My approach is to explore the extent to which confraternal membership, participation and leadership were vulnerable to alliances and opposing factions, created and maintained by diverse social groups. Men and women of native, Spanish, African and mixed ancestry, residents of towns, barrios and farms, all mobilized to form their own groups, choosing with whom to share fellowship.

Let us begin with the assumption that men and women of various cultural backgrounds and generations found their own “room to move” within cofradías.
occasional entry in the records may yet prove invaluable in our understanding of the resiliency and relative posturing of colonized peoples, alien settlers and colonial institutions. This study demonstrates that cofradías were once valuable tools in the hands of individuals, families, neighborhoods, and ethnic groups. Cofradías were clearly susceptible to corporate and individual strategies. Factions may have simultaneously pursued self-definition, selective solidarity, social mobility, or something else altogether. Subaltern men and women, who acted alone, as families, classes, or communities, exercised their own coping mechanisms, such as self-representation and personal advancement.

In the following chapters, I present a diachronic and comparative analysis of fifteen cofradías founded in the parish of Tecamachalco, Puebla (1563-1743). Idealized and real interactions among ethnic and class factions surfaced in my examination of confraternal records, bishops’ edicts, censuses, indigenous annals, and petitions. I begin by presenting three cofradías de naturales with close ties to Popoloca elites and communal lands. Then I emphasize ethnic and gender relations as well as business practices within and among various cofradías de españoles and umbrella sodalities. Minor devotional groups were centered on barrio chapels and led by men or women, and there was one casta sodality. In the conclusions, I relate confraternal charters and rituals to good government and citizenship, as well as the dominants’ performances of (and subordinates’ challenges to) power. I link cofradías, colonialism and folk Catholicism through theories and case studies from anthropology, history and political science.
The purpose of this early colonial map, housed in Mexico City’s Archivo General de la Nación, is not showcasing the Ex-Convento de San Francisco (upper right) or the pueblo of Tecamachalco that it represents. To the Spaniards who commissioned the map, local representatives of the Spanish Crown and/or potential landowners, the region’s fertile lands were what mattered. To the left (E) is a cañada (glen) of 6 cavallerías (each of 64 manzanas or 1000 varas or sticks; a unit of land measurement for haciendas), featured prominently in all of the AGN’s Tecamachalco maps. In the middle are the lands of Juan de Aquino, likely an early encomendero. Between his lands and Tecamachalco is an unknown church and settlement, bordered by barrancas (valleys, E and W). At the top (S) is the sierra (mountains). At the bottom (N) is the camino real (royal road). In order to use these maps here, I paid the student fee to the AGN copy office in 2001.
In this early colonial map, the pueblos of Tecamachalco (S) and Quechula (Quecholac, W) are portrayed as equal in size, importance and lay-out. The churches, surrounded by the trazas, likely denote the residences of Spaniards. A mountain range separates the pueblos and a road unites them. Tecamachalco is shown with trees to indicate the local vegetation. The map is bordered by the sierras, with all towns and lands falling within a large fertile valley. The central feature is the diagonal “road to the sites of the estates four leagues from Tecamachalco.” To the upper right corner (N) are more mountains, and a cañada or glen of sitios or solares (plots of land), arranged into at least 2 groups. Just below is the note, “within this glen are the sites and units of estate land.” Tecamachalco was mapped due to its spatial relationship to the Spaniards’ agricultural properties.
In the center of this map, the cartographer wrote “here are the six units of estate land.” The lands were bordered by valleys (E and W). At the bottom, the “royal road from San Augustín [Iztapa] to Tecamachalco” and the “Town of Tecamachalco two leagues from the lands” are shown with 2 more churches (likely symbolizing the sujetos and pueblos de indios of Santiago Alseseca and San Mateo Tlaixpan). The “big hill/mountain” (N) is covered with vegetation, which is likely corn and wheat.
This map features the hermita of Santa María (top) and the church of San Lucas (middle), with their corresponding towns, lands, sizes, and distances. There are mountain ranges (N, with vegetation, and S, without). Petitions dating to 1592, housed at the AGN, reveal that indios from the hacienda of San Lucas sought to rebuild their church, receive fair payment and work only 6 days a week. Santa María and San Lucas were subject to the jurisdiction of Tecamachalco. Santa María was in the doctrina of Santiago Tecali. San Lucas el Viejo and San Lucas Palmillas are located to the south of Tecamachalco.
III - Popoloca Lay Leaders’ Struggles for Legitimacy and Autonomy:

San Francisco and the Nativity of Our Lady (1563-1803)

Situating Popoloca Cofradías in Time and Space:

Tecamachalco’s Evolving Ethnic Composition

Three cycles of confraternal foundations (under the friars; after the arrival of the secular clergy; and the decline of ubiquitous cofradías) reflect larger processes at play in an increasingly multiethnic community. After 1541, Tecamachalco was rapidly but only partially transformed from an altepetl dominated by Popoloca and perhaps Nahua caciques to a congregación (forced resettlement), encomienda (grant of Indian labor and tribute), pueblo de españoles (Spanish town), and a century-long Franciscan stronghold. Friars imported ambitious plans for the Popoloca and a church, which they inaugurated in 1551 but completed decades later.

After 1540, Tecamachalco’s Popoloca and Nahuatl-speaking peoples were forcibly resettled into a native tributary: “The cabecera was moved from a hilltop to its final site a league away” (Gerhard 1993: 280). By 1580, about 100 vecinos españoles (probably men were the only ones counted), mostly cattle and wheat farmers, had settled in the San Pablo valley located between Acatzingo and Quechula, just north-west of Tecamachalco. As a whole, the Tepeaca region remained 99% indigenous in 1580 (20,000 native families; 1520: 100,000). Another congregation and census campaign revealed further decimation of the native population (1600: 11,500 native families; 1626: 4,138), followed by a small rebound (1651: 5,045 tributaries; 1696: 7,189; 1800: 11,432).
By 1660, a tremendous influx of parishioners, especially non-indios, is evident. J. I. Israel (1975: 207) claimed that the process began as early as 1550. Too many Spanish settlers displaced “the majority of [Tecamachalco’s] Indians into Spanish residences and on to haciendas,” which put the indigenous labor force at the Spaniards’ ready disposal. The resulting spatial, economic, political, cultural, and familial disruptions had a profound effect on the locals, which we can see played out in annals, petitions and confraternal ordinances. Sometime after 1540, African slaves were introduced into the local agricultural industry and community. Even with a missing century of baptisms coinciding with the Franciscan period, Spaniards’ and Popolocas’ confraternal records reveal that there were mestizos by 1591 and mulattoes by 1595. The resulting cultural mixing and ambiguity of mestizaje influenced local kin, economic and lay religious networks. Local baptismal records indicate that Tecamachalco was only 73% indigenous by the end of the 17th century.

Within a single generation, the first cofradía was established (1563). But it took another two decades for indios cofrades to leave a lasting mark on the parish archive (1581), even though they preceded the first Spanish cofradía, the Holy True Cross (1575). In the late 16th century, ethnicity appears to have mattered more than in other generations of confraternal foundations. Popoloca cofradías emerged in the same contentious generation as local disputes over altarpieces and sacramental canopies. These events inspired Spaniards to mobilize against Indians, whether through petitions, matching donations or exclusionary ordinances. Native lay leaders were equally self-conscious as Spaniards when emphasizing their social status and home communities, but also their ethnicity, to an extent.
In the beginning, the friars oversaw three *cofradías de naturales* and three *cofradías de españoles*. Native elites founded San Francisco (1580?), the Nativity of Our Lady (1581) and the Holy Name of Jesus (1595). Nahuatl texts attest to their native leadership and membership. Nahuatl and Spanish sets of ordinances facilitate additional avenues of inquiry that are not possible with Spanish or casta-led groups. Scribes appear to reserve more space and detail for the activities of male Spaniards, making the records of native, casta and sisterhoods seem sparse and erratic by comparison. Resources, income and spending differed between Spanish and Popoloca groups, as did ritual and electoral conventions, particularly with regard to lay leaders’ autonomy.

Tecamachalco was further reinvented after the 1641 arrival of the secular clergy, who reorganized an increasingly multiethnic town into a parish, *doctrina* and new cofradías. This transition appears to have influenced extant and emerging cofradías. Ethnically-plural cofradías united around barrio chapels in an era when creating a parish made place as meaningful as race. The residents of the barrios of San Joseph, San Sebastián and San Nicolás formed neighborhood cofradías. Sodalities founded under the supervision of the secular clergy integrated the greatest variety of townspeople and saints yet seen, including castas and women. Founding cofrades and secular clergy were likely aware of ethnic tensions interfering with religious celebrations, which occurred at the turn of the 17th century. Thus they likely chose to encourage tolerance of diversity like never before or after. This transition period led up to the eventual reemergence of racialized categories and rituals, as well as confraternal ubiquity, dysfunction and irrelevance, which was well underway by 1780 throughout much of New Spain.
What is behind native cofradías’ post-1600 growth and what stages did they pass through before their late colonial ubiquity (Sell 2002: 44)? Did members recognize native cofradías as devolutions of ancient Nahua polities or auxiliaries to Spanish cofradías (Schroeder 2000: 45)? In other words, what is Mesoamerican or European about native cofradías? I set out to explore cofradías in a community located on the periphery of the bishopric of Tlaxcala-Puebla. I present the trajectories of six cofradías primarily founded by and for Christianized Popolocas. My case study is driven by the issue of native struggles for legitimacy and autonomy, and informed by the nature and outcomes of interactions among native lay leaders and Spanish colonial authorities.

In this chapter and the next, I trace the cofradías de naturales’ rise, development and fall. None were “purely Indian” in their direction or membership, but ethnic exclusivity was only associated with early urban sodalities (Lavrin 2002: 25). No lay religious organization could, nor its leaders wish to, act independently of its “non-Indian” neighbors, especially its religious supervisors. But the use of Nahuatl in constitutions and the recognition of native nobles and commoners as confraternal founders and leaders firmly establish these cofradías as native. Yet there is little evidence to support local examples of subaltern religion - whether native cofradías, a lone casta organization, multiethnic brotherhoods, or its three sisterhoods - directly challenging priests, bishops, governors, or neighbors any more than Spanish-dominated sodalities.

*Elite Accommodation and Conflict in Indigenous Annals and Petitions*

In order to set the stage for Popoloca elites’ self-government within the lay religious sphere, I examine a series of interactions between native and Spanish
authorities, between commoners and elites, and among caciques. My sources are an indigenous history - the *Anales de Tecamachalco* (Celestino Solís and Reyes García 1992) - and petitions housed in the AGN.

When Popoloca nobles and Franciscan friars challenged each other’s authority, it was often over Indian land and laborers or rituals. In one example of resistance and retaliation, a Popoloca man was imprisoned for performing a marriage ceremony (acting as a priest) for a native couple (Ibid: 64, item 303, 1571). The enforcers were rarely identified, whether as religious or secular authorities. In 1584, Friar Francisco de Goyti imprisoned the town scribe for public drunkenness. Then Goyti lectured the *tlatoque* (native rulers) and “all those who tend to the temple” (the fiscales) about the behavior of “good leaders” (Ibid: 89, item 485, 1584). Besides officials, other indigenous and Spanish men were detained for drinking, fighting, theft, and not attending a fiesta. In the rear the monastery, the friars maintained a jail, next to their self-flagellation cell. There is colonial graffiti of a Spanish man and indigenous woman on a jail wall.

Censuses for native tribute and labor assignments were the chief sources of contention between Popoloca and Spanish authorities. An increase in tribute to 10 *tomines*, enacted after a census, led a few leaders to permanently resettle in Xicohtlan in 1572 (Ibid: 64-65, items 305, 308, 1572). The mass exodus, perhaps a symbolic act of resistance, required the naming of new officials. The municipal cabildo consisted of the gobernador, three alcades, a regidor mayor, an alguacil mayor, a mayordomo, and the escribano de comunidad (Ibid: 68, item 332, 1574). In 1573, the men oversaw a large, primarily native population, including “540 people who were given to the Spaniards” (Ibid: 66, item 322, 1573). The figure represents 11% of those receiving confirmation.
from Bishop Antonio Morales de Molina in 1574 (Ibid: 58, item 335, 338, 1574). After the 1579 tribute census, the juez de repartimiento (judge of labor allotment) assigned 450 more Indians to the couatequipano (communal labor draft) or trabajo en común (Ibid: 81, item 429, 1579). Increases suggest demographic growth or recovery after decimating epidemics, but also point to mounting pressure being placed on indigenous resources, households and leaders.

Popoloca nobles and Spanish priests employed their public offices and pulpits to denounce one another for control of the labor and loyalty of native commoners. Most tensions arose between Tomás Gerson, representing indigenous nobles or at least his own interests, and Francisco de Goyti, who supervised the convento and native converts. Gerson, who served as an alcalde and gobernador in the 1570s and 1580s, was joined by his brother (perhaps convento artist Juan Gerson) in 1575 when speaking against Goyti’s appointment as padre guardián (Ibid: 66, item 330, 1573). Was it in retaliation for the friar’s public admonishment of the “keepers of justice” (justiciapixque), of which Gerson was a member (Ibid: 66, item 328, 1573)? Relations improved after Goyti appeased a governor and showed gratitude to another (Ibid: 69, item 340, 1574). But in 1575, Friar José de Estrada de Parada fought with a governor and insulted him. Ongoing tensions led to the removal of “the ecclesiastic authorities” (teopixcatlahtoque), but replacement friars were soon welcomed (Ibid: 71, item 356, 1575). Goyti remained until he died.

Gerson remained an active force in secular and religious spheres. In 1577 “Tomás Gerson became the governor. But the Spaniards harmed him and would not permit him. There were no longer Indian governors, only some in charge of orphans and their properties” (Ibid: 77, 1577). This entry implies that the legitimacy and autonomy of
Popoloca authorities was eroding at the same time that these men and their neighbors launched the first native cofradía in town. After another census and tribute campaign, Gerson and other authorities were imprisoned for a week for interfering with the process (Ibid: 78, item 408, 1577). Had Gerson spared his constituents from additional tribute obligations or usurped the proceeds for himself, which he was accused of 15 years later? Upon his release from jail, he left for Tehuacán, but he was serving as governor still or again in 1586 (Ibid: 95, item 522, 1586). Some native officials managed to retain or regain their positions of authority, despite setbacks or instances of public shaming.

In 1588, Don Tomás Gerson was elected deputy steward of Our Lady of the Nativity, founded by Popoloca elites in 1581. Despite his Christian leadership, Gerson’s baptism occurred in 1589, which may or may not have brought him into a more cooperative relationship with the friars (Ibid: 101, item 571, 1589). He should not have been eligible for secular and lay religious positions before being baptized. The entry may represent scribal error in the sequence of dates and/or a tendency to frame events as final or isolated even if part of a series of interactions.

The controversial figure of Gerson is illuminated in several 1592 documents housed in the AGN. He was granted a salary raise (AGN, Indios, Vol. 6: Exp. 503, Foja 110) and a *carta ejecutiva* (executive charter), which meant even more power (Exp. 504, Foja 110v). When governor of Tepeji de la Seda (the seat of Popoloca power), Gerson was criticized for allegedly removing native men for his personal use (Exp. 608, Exp. 136v). A retort followed, pleading that Gerson be left to do his job without boycotts (Exp. 641, Foja 145). In the same year, alcalde mayor Don Alonso de Arellano urged Gerson to repay goods and farms in San Lucas to Baltazar de Molina, their guardian and curator
Confraternal and town cabildo officers were not without ambition, fault, critics or vendettas. Their various positions, proponents and opponents were identified in both the Anales and the petitions from Tecamachalco.

In addition to conflicts with friars, Popoloca elites and commoners sometimes denounced their own community leaders in land, labor and tribute disputes. Commoners sought protection from a wide range of Spanish and indigenous elites, including mayordomos (estate overseers), governors and notaries. In 1591, the escribano público was accused of abusing the power of his position against “the nobles and Indians of Tecamachalco” (Exp. 358, Foja 80). The scribes identified indigenous elites by social status rather than ethnicity, a distinction also made in the confraternal records of Popoloca elites. Under the secular clergy, tensions persisted; in 1641, Tecamachalco’s native officials had “interfered” in the governance of Tlacotepec, a nearby pueblo de indios (Vol. 13, Exp. 211, Foja 187v). In 1657 and 1664, there were accusations of gubernatorial electoral fraud against the town scribe and a mestizo, perhaps due to his ethnic ineligibility (Vol. 21, Exp. 219, Foja 286v; Vol. 19, Exp. 665, Foja 365-367v).

Public acts of generosity identified native elite politicians as economic and religious leaders. Before the convento’s altarpiece (1584-1586) was donated by Popolocas, not Spaniards, a huge sum was invested in the iglesia mayor (Celestino Solís and Reyes García 1992: 91, item 495, 1585; 73, item 365, 1575). In 1575, an unnamed alcalde mayor gave 210 pesos and 1 tomin, enough to bankroll four years of confraternal rituals and business, to the friars, presumably for the church’s completion and beautification. The fund may represent a nobleman’s personal wealth, but its size and the extra tomin suggest a corporate gift from nobles and commoners.
The nobles’ grand gestures, financial sacrifices and an ethnic dispute over a sacramental canopy (1572, 1587) may have left Spanish elites wanting more from local friars. A “maestro de españoles,” Friar Antonio Castro, was welcomed in 1590 (Ibid: 105, item 593, 1590). Castro was likely a catechist for children who served Spanish families only. It was the only known instance of priests being assigned to a specific social segment within the plural community. Spaniards likely petitioned for the friar due to a perceived need. Spanish confraternal ordinances and much later bishop’s edicts reveal that Spanish men believed that they had a monopoly on spiritual maturity. For neglected and outnumbered Spaniards, Fray Antonio may have symbolized their legitimate presence within a predominantly Indian town. In the era of the first native cofradías, the stage was set for Popoloca naturales and Spanish settlers to coexist and compete.

Instruments of Elite Dominance and Community Service: the First Cofradía de Naturales

When Franciscan Agustín de Vetancurt’s Teatro Mexicano was first published in 1697, it revealed the existence of Tecamachalco’s three cofradías de españoles (the Holy Sacrament, the Blessed Souls of Purgatory, and the Holy True Cross) and three cofradías de naturales (the Holy Name of Jesus, the Nativity of the Virgin, and Our Holy Patron San Francisco). When Vetancurt employed the descriptor naturales, it was in contrast to españoles. In all but one case that I observed, naturales meant indigenous people. Vecino was reserved for local resident or someone born here. But naturales could incorporate either or both meanings – native ethnicity and local residence. Vetancurt’s (1971: Part III, 65) enumeration suggests a lack of awareness or interest about which groups arose first. Prioritizing Spanish cofradías was likely intentional and/or required. The foundation
dates of the Holy Sacrament and the Blessed Souls of Purgatory are unknown; only 18th century records are available. By 1575, the Holy Sacrament and the Holy True Cross were already collaborating in processions (funeral and town-wide) as well as fiestas.

Vetancurt’s inventory reveals ecclesiastic and spatial organization. Native cofradí as were undated but listed in the reverse order of their foundations (1590, 1581, and 1580). A hospital and capilla de naturales (Indian chapel), perhaps San Sebastián because it is the oldest, were acknowledged. The visitas (hamlets) of San Agustín, San Miguel, San Matheo, Santa Clara, two San Franciscos (because it was a Franciscan stronghold), Santiago, and San Bartolome were catalogued but their Nahua names were overlooked. Vetancurt praised the religiosos (friars) as the visitas’ founders and credited the señores clérigos (secular clergy) with their administration. He claimed that the convento continued to thrive more than “other conventos” thanks to the “alms of the devoted labradores” (farmers or landowners). The donors’ ethnic, gender and noble statuses went unstated. In local cofradí as, labradores were always equated with españoles.

Vetancurt was impressed by the new parish church and the image of its patron saint - the Assumption of Our Lady: “The statue was amongst the most beautiful in the Kingdom.” Pilgrims, who came from all over the Orizaba Valley, “venerated her as miraculous.” In a time and place in which cultural spaces and symbols legitimized communities, there could be no recognition that the patron saint was once San Francisco, then San Sebastián, nor anticipation that the Archangel Michael would one day occupy the best position on the convento’s altar.

The Popolocas’ own history attests to a cofradía de naturales in operation by 1563. But its patron saint was never identified and no confraternal records were
preserved. It could be San Francisco (1580) or Our Lady of the Nativity (1581), despite the time difference; the later dates could relate to re-foundations. Alternatively, the mysterious first cofradía could be the Holy Sacrament, which was usually a pueblo’s first cofradía that “served as an umbrella sodality for the whole parish” (Taylor 1996: 302). The Holy Sacrament began as a cofradía de españoles and left no pre-1742 records. But its ethnic inclusivity and ritual activism may have led Popolocas to describe it as a cofradía de naturales in the Anales, just as Spaniards claimed it as their own.

Cofrades’ mission of charity included a “good death” for all of its brethren and care of the sick and dying. In 1563, Members went to the house of Pedro Chililihtzin for his death and burial rites (Celestino Solís and Reyes García 1992: 48, item 188, 1563). On April 25th, 1569, “the confraternal members began anew their service, taking charge of the hospital,” their chief contribution to their neighbors (Ibid: 58, item 256, 1569). Councils of later cofradías bestowed memberships on the poor and urged brethren to donate alms. But indios cofrades’ hospital upkeep and patient care were the biggest commitments ever pursued by local lay leaders.

Popoloca cofradías revolved around the elite. In 1563, there was “a scandal regarding whether the officials were truly nobles, including the chief stewards” (Ibid: 47). It was never resolved on paper. The mayordomos were most assuredly confraternal leaders. Early colonial Maya commoners desired “more active participation in the social, political and economic affairs of the community” (Megged 1996: 140). Socio-economic stratification and competition were also at play within Popoloca cofradías and town councils, albeit to a lesser extent. In nearby Tecalco, “commoners began to serve as alcaldes” as early as 1565 (Celestino Solís and Reyes García 1992: 50), perhaps due to a
lack of eligible caciques in relation to the number of municipal positions. Commoners’ assemblies and petitions were unlikely to win the support of colonial officials. Spanish authorities realized that most native candidates for the town cabildo, church staff and cofradías were wealthy nobles. But they could not always separate true citizens or veteran residents from community outsiders (Sell 2002: 52). Some families might lack títulos (deeds) to prove noble ancestry and lands, but oral histories should have weeded out any imposters. In addition to migrants or non-residents, ethnic outsiders vied for coveted Indian positions; in 1592, Tepeaca’s alcalde petitioned to ban mestizos and Spaniards from procurador (attorney) status (AGN, Indios: Vol. 6, Exp. 87, Foja 22, 1592).

Mayordomos Juan Medel and Miguel Atecpacatl (in a rare local instance of a Nahua name), diputados Matheo Sanchez and Juan Osorio, and escribano José Maldonado were elected in the inaugural year (Celestino Solís and Reyes García 1992: 48, item 188, 1563). In a political arrangement that seems unique to native cofradías, two mayordomos presided together. The “10th obligation” of Fray Alonso de Molina’s 1552 model ordinances for Nahua cofradías required a scribe, two diputados, two mayordomos, and a prioste, “the ruler of the members of the cofradía” who inspected his predecessors’ accounts (Sell 2002: 101). Priostes were never documented locally, only one or two mayordomos/as, diputados/as and an escribano or notario (later on).

Cabildos were fluid in composition, varying by region, cofradía size and the candidate pool. An 18th-century sisterhood engaged two mayordomadas from two barrios who used separate chapels. The Holy Sepulcher of Calvary’s dual cabildos formed along ethnic lines – one Spanish, one local, as did Tula’s Holy Sacrament: “the election of two deputies and two majordomos, one Spaniard and one local man each, and one scribe”
(Schwaller 1989: 240, Ord. 2, 1570). But all evidence points to the first sodality being a true cofradía de naturales created and managed by the altepetl’s Popoloca elites. The native tradition of co-leaders, also practiced in San Francisco and Our Lady, may have emulated pre-conquest leadership patterns. Power, title and duty-sharing between two men lessened the financial risks associated with leadership.

There is evidence that lay leaders’ authority extended beyond confraternal confines, despite a lack of municipal cabildo records. By 1567, some officials were serving as secular authorities (Celestino Solís and Reyes García 1992: 52, item 219, 1567). In the unnamed cofradía (1563) and San Francisco (1589), Juan Osorio was deputy. Officials could lead for two decades or more, so this could be one man and the unnamed cofradía could be San Francisco.

*The Confraternity of San Francisco: Native Leaders in Transition*

There is no record of the cofradía in the parish archive, only the Anales: on May 22nd, 1580, “the confraternity of San Francisco was established for the first time. This was done at the hands of guardián Francisco de Goyti, later the ordinances were established” (Celestino Solís and Reyes García 1992: 83, item 446). San Francisco was the best choice of patron saint to bolster the group’s legitimacy; the local convento and pueblo were dedicated to San Francisco at this time. Well-known native noble families were among the first cofrades: “Don Rodrigo de Vivero, Doña Melchora and all of their children, nine people” (Ibid: 97, item 535, Sept. 8th, 1586).

Each year, a minimum of five officials were elected. Two deputies were mentioned first, followed by two chief stewards and a scribe. Native lay leaders enjoyed
reelection and office rotation within and among cofradías, and between religious and secular positions, which conformed to native custom (Haskett 1991: 47). Between 1581 and 1589, Domingo Silva served as deputy steward at least five times in San Francisco and Our Lady and scribe Francisco de Santiago serviced both cofradías (Celestino Solís and Reyes García 1992: 96, item 524, 1586). On one occasion (Gregorio Aquino in 1589), maestro de capilla (choirmaster) was a council position rather than an external contractor (Ibid: 101, item 568, 1589).

Names and annotations can provide clues to lay officials’ identities. Domingo García (1588 mayordomo) was a carpenter. Some names reference home communities; scribe Vicente de San José from the barrio of San José (Ibid: 99, item 553, 1588); chief steward José Alejo de Tlaixpa from the native village of San Mateo Tlaixpan (Ibid: 101, item 568, 1589); and scribe Francisco de Santiago from Santiago Alseseca, also subject to Tecamachalco (Ibid: 103, item 582, 1590). Naming conventions confirm that native families were assigned surnames where none existed before. Unfortunately few local Nahuatl names survived, at least not on paper.

In the Anales, nothing controversial or rebellious was ever recorded in connection with native cofradías. But home-grown social clubs would not be framed in a negative light within an official indigenous history. Like confraternal records, the Anales was a selective cultural history employed to legitimize the Popoloca as elite Christian leaders. The Anales end in 1590, which partly accounts for overlooking San Francisco’s precarious financial status. Within a decade, the cofradía was already operating in the red. Popoloca lay leaders appealed to the padre guardian and Tepeaca’s alcalde mayor for permission to sell ritual items in order to remove the cofradía’s debts (AGN Indios: Vol.
The outcome is unknown, but San Francisco was still in operation when Vetancurt’s chronicle was published a century later.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Chief Steward</th>
<th>Deputy</th>
<th>Scribe</th>
<th>Choirmaster</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1586</td>
<td>Simón de Luna</td>
<td>Domingo de Silva</td>
<td>Francisco de Santiago</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Felipe Juárez</td>
<td>Bartolomé Rodríguez</td>
<td>de Nofuentes</td>
<td>de Valencia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1588</td>
<td>Cristóbal de Rivera</td>
<td>Don Juan de Mendoza</td>
<td>Vicente de San José</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domingo García</td>
<td>Gaspar de Rojas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1589</td>
<td>Martín Jaramillo</td>
<td>Don Juan Osorio</td>
<td>Vicente de San José</td>
<td>Gregorio de</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>de Valencia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aquino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1590</td>
<td>Cristóbal de Rivera</td>
<td>Gaspar de Rojas</td>
<td>Francisco de Santiago</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Francisco Flores</td>
<td>Lorenzo Torneo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Origin Myth of the Confraternity of the Nativity of Our Lady**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Chef Steward</th>
<th>Deputy</th>
<th>Scribe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1581</td>
<td>Diego Maximino</td>
<td>Domingo de Silva</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1586</td>
<td>Diego Maximino</td>
<td>Don Agustín Velásquez de Peralta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Baltazar Hernández</td>
<td>Don Luis de Luna</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1588</td>
<td>Diego Maximino</td>
<td>Don Tomás Gerson</td>
<td>Francisco de Santiago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Juan de la Cruz</td>
<td>Domingo de Silva</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1589</td>
<td>Diego Maximino</td>
<td>Baltazar Rodríguez de Valencia</td>
<td>Francisco de Santiago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Miguel Navarro</td>
<td>Don Agustín Velásquez de Peralta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1590</td>
<td>Felipe Juárez de</td>
<td>Domingo de Silva</td>
<td>Francisco de Santiago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nofuentes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Andrés de Luna</td>
<td>Bartolomé Hernández</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The 1581 foundation of Our Lady left its mark on the Anales and the parish archive. I can infer but not substantiate the cofradía’s roots and connections. A 1576 Indian procession dedicated to the “Lady of Tears, Light of the Nativity” was patronized by the Spanish cabildo of the Holy True Cross. This public act of devotion may be the original impetus for Popoloca elites uniting to form their own cofradía. Indirect evidence from the Anales (Celestino Solís and Reyes García 1992: 82, 1579) suggests that “the house of Our Lady” was formed and revolved around a Popoloca-funded hospital: “The Holy Jubilee was celebrated in a procession in the house of the Virgin, the hospital. It began there in the big church [convento] where mass is celebrated. Again, in the street, a mass was held on September 9th.” The procession predated Our Lady by two years, but Our Lady’s fiesta did fall on September 8th and the penitents were indigenous. The hospital and cofradía also shared an epithet: “the house of Our Lady.” On May 29th, 1585, Friar Alonso, “the one with the spectacles,” led another hospital procession and mass (Ibid: 93, 1585).

Community hospitals were most often associated with native cofradías, particularly ones dedicated to the Virgin: “almost all confraternities had a hospital annexed to them; other times it was the hospital that had a confraternity” (Zafra Oropeza 1996: 45). Most hospitals were attached to conventos, the friars’ residences, which was the case in Tecamachalco. In Molina’s 1552 model ordinances (Sell 2002: 77), the sample Nahua cofradía was dedicated to Virgin, as was the hospital that was sponsored and serviced by its members, “the home of Saint Mary.” Many of the hypothetical cofradía’s “obligations” (9/24 or 37.5%) dealt with service to the hospital.
In 1588, the Popolocas relinquished control of their hospital to the friars. The temple is likely the chapel or shrine within the convento where the Virgin was venerated:

On February 18th, the images were removed from the hospital. They removed all of their property. The temple was closed because it was there that the priests wanted to establish themselves. This was done under the authority of head friar Cristóbal. (Celestino Solís and Reyes García 1992: 100, 1588)

The friars’ appropriation of the Popolocas’ place of worship, meeting, service, and storage appears to have been uncontested. Additional friars would require extra housing space, so the Popoloca may have seen the inevitable move as a sign of more masses and processions to come. By 1667, the parish church hosted Our Lady’s council meetings and masses.

Our Lady was established in the convento by noble Popoloca who stressed their ancient ties to the area. Even though nobles officiated with competency, efficiency and autonomy, poor record-keeping or preservation obscures the early period. The first of four books contains an act of foundation, constitution and amendments, but then ends abruptly in 1701, with little structure or continuity. Some dates are omitted or presented out of order; a later year (Cofradía de la Nuestra Señora de la Natividad: 3v, 1667) preceded an early year (CNSN: 5r, 1584). Perhaps Nahua or Popoloca scribes were unfamiliar confraternal record-keeping requirements, not formalized until an 18th-century edict. Membership, electoral and financial data are lacking until the 18th century, so I can only offer a partial analysis of confraternal ideals and practices.

Local confraternal founding documents’ similar formats confirm the shared priorities of lay leaders and members. After the act of foundation, a few key ordinances that promised a “good death” for all brethren were previewed (CNSN: 1r, 1581); the actual constitution was featured later (CNSN: 8r–17r, 1581). The four initial policies
were presented as *constitutions*. Three more rules from 1615 function as additions or reiterations rather than amendments:

1: There shall be a sung mass for each deceased member, with their body present, paid for from the alms or possessions of the confraternity (CNSN: 1r., 1581).

2: The cross shall be brought out whenever someone is buried.

3: There shall be alms requested at the funeral in order to pay for it.

4: The members shall be entered into the book. Obey the constitutions.

5: The cost of a sung mass is two pesos.

6: The padre guardián of the convento will bring out the cross for burials.

7: Those who bury people shall be paid from alms (CNSN: 1v-2r, 1615).

Great care and detail were reserved for the ten-page Nahuatl version of the 1581 constitution that followed (CNSN: 8r–12v; footnote #1). The strategic use of Nahuatl was both practical and symbolic; scribes were most (or only) comfortable or competent writing in the lingua franca of indigenous central Mexicans. Nahuatl reiterated the cofradía’s native character and constituency. Following the 22 capitulos in Nahuatl, 22 ordinances were written in Spanish. The differences between the two versions will be explored in future research. Both texts were sanctioned by the signatures of ten influential men, including the scribe and other members of the cabildo, Friar Francisco de Goyti, and Bishop Don Diego Romano de Mendoza of Tlaxcala.

A second set of records began in 1698. Three books were labeled with the correct name, “the Confraternity of the Nativity of Our Lady,” which emphasized the birth of the Virgin rather than the Virginal birth. Vetancurt’s report and coincidences of timing, patron saint name, corporate land ownership, ethnic composition, and class distinctions
reveal that this is the same cofradía. Many of the Nativity’s 18th-century practices reflect Our Lady’s 16th-century ordinances. Employing a local device to establish religious legitimacy, later scribes claimed that the cofradía was founded in the parish church rather than the convento, its original home (Cofradía de la Natividad de Nuestra Señora I: 1r, 1698). Paternalistic Spaniards began to infiltrate the Popolocas’ records but the books that would illuminate this transition have been misplaced.

**Popoloca Elitism and Catholic Paternalism Coalesce: Political and Moral Economies**

In all local confraternal acts of foundation, it was taboo to emphasize any one individual. Scribes wrote about groups of naturales who wished to form a cofradía dedicated to a saint and meeting in a church. But Our Lady’s primary founder was heralded before the constitution: “Don Jhoan Roman principal and natural of the Town of Tecamachalco… Confraternity of Our Lady of the Nativity, founded in the convento” (CNSN I: 1r, 1581).

There are various other signs that Popoloca elites, as individuals and as a distinct social segment, asserted their differential positions and dominance through cofradías. Between the Nahuatl and Spanish versions of the constitutions, the distinguished founders were noted: “the Señores Gobernador, Alcaldes, Alguaciles and principales… who gathered in the chapel of Our Lady” (CNSN: 13r, 1581). The *macehuales* (commoners) were not yet enjoined. The license was ratified by padre guardián Francisco de Goyti, who had argued with future diputado Tomás Gerson (CNSN: 13r, 1581). Most if not all founders and early leaders, including “Don Andrés de Oreda, principal and
cacique of the Town of Tecamachalco” (CNSN: 5r, 1584), would have been local noble Popolocas who were recognized by many if not all townspeople.

The annals paint a detailed picture of the first men who led their fellow principals. The offices of mayordomo and diputado were monopolized by Diego Maximino and Domingo Silva for at least four years but probably for more than a decade. When a rural man died, co-founder Maximino escorted his body to town at night, ensuring his Christian burial inside the “abode of our mother” (Celestino Solís and Reyes García 1992: 87, item 474, 1581). This space was likely the cofradía’s chapel, attached to the convento and/or inside its hospital. All past, present and future officials were expected to attend members’ burials. For this reason, one election (tlapepenaloc) even led to the postponement of a funeral vespers (Ibid: 103, item 580, 1589).

“In the house of our mother,” at least three deputies held the title of don, but no chief stewards were linked to titles, which was also the case in San Francisco (Ibid: 95, item 523, 1586). Don denoted “very high status in the early colonial period” (Haskett 1992: 135), “referring to only the highest nobility” (Sell 2002: 55). But it was eventually bestowed on more office-holders. Don Tomás Gerson, long-term mayor and governor, served as deputy steward in 1588, the first year that the books of Our Lady and San Francisco were inspected (Celestino Solís and Reyes García 1992: 100, item 564, 1588). A 1592 petition was sent to vice-regal authorities to request that Domingo Silva, founding and veteran deputy of Our Lady and San Francisco, quit as San Lucas’ regidor in order to allow Tomás Gerson to uphold the electoral results (AGN Indios: Vol. 6, Exp. 542, Foja 114v). Here is evidence of political rivalry between council members and even contemporaries (Silva and Gerson were 1588’s co-deputies).
Choirmasters encountered leadership opportunities in Our Lady and San Francisco. Like council positions, singing was a prestigious profession usually reserved for a restricted group of Indian nobleman and long-term residents (Haskett 1991: 118). Maestro and presumed nobleman Baltazar Rodríguez de Valencia became a deputy in 1589. He had just been recognized for dividing his fellow singers into two groups, assigning them to two chapels, likely one for Spaniards and another for Indians (Celestino Solís and Reyes García 1992: 100, item 560, 1588). Andrés Rodríguez, a veteran choirmaster employed by Spanish cofrades, served as Our Lady’s chief steward (ca. 1630). Later chief steward and choirmaster Francisco Rodríguez was assisted by deputies and singers Andrés Rodríguez and Pedro Rodríguez (CNSN: 7r.). Francisco and Andrés rotated their positions as cantores and maestros during the 1630s-1640s. Rodríguez is a common name, but the cabildo was clearly once a family affair, composed of the “native singers of the chapel of the Church of this Town” or their close relatives.

Throughout New Spain, office rotation, reelection, nepotism, and an extremely limited pool of eligible candidates characterized native ritual performers and confraternal leaders as much as their secular and Spanish counterparts. The local ruling elite dominated and moved back and forth between municipal and confraternal councils (Haskett 1991: 122-123). Monopolies typified distant and later indigenous groups, such as the Confraternity of the Pure Conception in Cocula, Jalisco (Zafra Oropeza 1996: 84-85; 1645-1713 elections). In Our Lady, no one was specifically precluded from voting, running for or accepting an office, but women were surely ineligible. In theory, any pious Popoloca resident, noble or commoner, who was on good terms with his neighbors, could present himself as a candidate. But in practice, peasants would have lacked the resources.
and connections to access a council position. Few commoners may have attempted to challenge the nobles’ monopoly, at least during the first generations of the cofradía.

Class, but not ethnic, distinctions took center stage in the constitution. With most members being Popoloca, ethnicity was not a dividing line and never merited much attention. Just as Spaniards overlooked all non-Spaniards in a 1575 constitution; Indians disregarded all non-Indians in 1581. In and after 1605, the Spanish lay leaders of the Holy True Cross referred to “Indians,” “some Indians,” or “the said Indians,” and in a few cases, “Indian members” or “Indian officials” (artisans). Native scribes may have considered it inappropriate to address españoles by ethnicity, at least in Spanish-language records; non-Indians may be demarcated in the Nahuatl constitution. In male-dominated Popoloca cofradías, nobility and residency mattered but gender and ethnicity were rather moot points. Native noblemen were this cofradía’s standard. In 1627, Padre Francisco Miguel de la Cruz came to inspect the convento and cofradías. Friars and native lay leaders presented Our Lady to him as a cofradía de indios (CNSN: 2r, 1627).

A binary classification segmented members who were nobles or commoners, rich or poor, and property owners or peasants. The poor were sometimes referred to as indios and/or naturales. Their social betters were “señores, caciques, principales o ricos” (wealthy) as well as vecinos and naturales. But rather than lord their nobility and authority over poor members, native officials were admonished to “obey and serve the brethren” (CNSN: 16r, Ord. 18, 1581). Those who failed to lead by serving would be removed from office and expelled. A sense of noblesse oblige emanated from Our Lady’s constitution. Christian charity was to be extended to non-members even more than members. The ethos of extending mercy to foreigners and locals alike had been expressed
in the Molina ordinances (Sell 2002: 78-79, Ord. #21-23). Nobles were admonished to visit the “poor sick people” being treated at the Indian-funded hospital. Once a week, nobles, especially the officials, cared for “all of the needs” of the patients, which included the physical, but also the emotional, social, financial, and the spiritual (CNSN: 15r, Ord. 14, 1581). The principales’ failures to attend to the ill, dying and deceased would invite fines or even expulsion.

Paying dues, claiming abject poverty or social isolation (lack of family support) activated a social security system through which a “good death” was conferred (Schroeder 2000: 43; Sell 2002: 56; Zafra Oropeza 1996: 33). The cabildo and four members who carried four candles visited dying members in their homes at night, so that they could “die in a Christian manner” (CNSN: 14v, Ord. 9 and 10, 1581). The corpses of members who died in the morning were carried in funerary processions by brethren with “all solemnity,” with the cofradía’s cross, candles and paid singers (CNSN: 14v, Ord. 11, 1581). All members, male and female, sung responses and recited 33 Our Fathers (the years that Jesus spent on earth) and Hail Marys. Enjoining men and women and pairing the Our Fathers and Hail Marys attests to gender parity and complementarity, not promoted in Spaniards’ confraternal rituals.

Members were tasked with enacting a daily corona to Our Lady (CNSN: 13v, Ord. 2). This obligatory expression of popular religion was instituted among all cofrades, but the scribe did not identify it as a solitary or collective act. A crown was a prayer cycle that involved the recitation of 73 Hail Marys (Burkhart 2001: 119). This number was symbolic: “each of them [the members] will have rosary beads, a big rosary, 73 is the
year-count of the life of the noblewoman Saint Mary while she lived here on earth” (Molina’s 1552 model ordinances; Sell 2002: 113).

Was classism and paternalism typical of New Spain’s native cofradías? In Molina’s model, church, municipal, and confraternal officials were enjoined, as were “more general human and social types… rich and poor, healthy and sick, nobles and commoners, rulers and subjects, micro-patriotic locals who regarded all others as foreigners, and so on” (Sell 2002: 51). Popoloca officials secured the burial of the destitute and criminals with members’ alms. “The Love of God” required a free and well-attended burial for any delinquent who was sentenced to death (CNSN: 15r, Ord. 13, 1581). Regardless of poverty, prospective members facing death were charged, but a “lord, nobleman or rich person” paid twice as much (CNSN: 15r, Ord. 12). The 5 peso fee factored in a wealthy resident’s inability or refusal to pay during his lifetime.

Geographic barriers may have constructed an additional form or level of elitism. Native peoples who resided in a cabecera (head town: Tecamachalco or Tepeaca) formed an urban elite core in contrast to those living in the dependent sujetos (subject hamlets: Acatzingo, San Mateo Tlaixpan, Santiago Alseseca). In the Maya area, urbanites lorded cultural capital over farmers (Megged 1996: 51). After 1570, rampant classism surfaced in Chiapas’ native cofradías, which widened an existing divide in Maya society. In 1656, Bishop Mauro de Tovar criticized Maya nobles for their elitism: it “was like saying that there is one God for the rich and another for the poor” (Ibid: 93). In eastern and central Mexico, indigenous elites and Spaniards, not their priests, were the ones to emphasize class or ethnic distinctions, at least in the early colonial period.
Indigenous central Mexicans may have continued to unite as altepetl and *tlaxilacalli* (sub-unit of cellular or modular organization based on household and land) rather than fully adopt colonial impositions. While *altepetl* was used in all of the available Nahuatl constitutions (from Tecamachalco, Tula, San Miguel Coyotlan, and the Molina model), *tlaxilacalli* was not (Sell 2002: 52). But the Tula cofradía’s membership lists reveal that local residents’ *tlaxilacalli* were mentioned frequently. Incoming members who were not from the cofradía’s home altepetl were usually identified by altepetl only, likely because they were seen as outsiders or visitors.

Various binary oppositions would be easily understood, welcomed and reinforced by Popolocas and Spaniards. Everyone was asked to contribute regularly through volunteerism and alms, but nobles were frequently mentioned in Our Lady’s constitution. Still here is no evidence of class tensions, whether internally (cofradía) or externally (community). In the Spanish-language records, there were no dismissive comments about non-elites, the poor or women.

**Late Colonial Elections and Memberships:**

**Continuity and Change in Policies and Practices**

Late colonial records facilitate a comparison of leadership, membership and financial trends. Some historical developments and administrative practices were likely common to all local cofradías, such as diverse constituencies, reelection and overspending on fiestas or ritual items. But other modes may be particular to native cofradías, such as employing a female scribe, shrinking and paid cabildos, and Spanish interference in the management of confraternal lands.
Electoral results reflect adjustments of confraternal policies, based on needs or wants. Sometime between 1581 and 1698, the structure or the hierarchy of the confraternal council underwent a drastic change. Instead of five officials, one man became figurehead, assuming responsibility for all gains and losses. Perhaps lone mayordomos functioned more as priostes responsible for all business and their fellow leaders. Secular clergymen may have encouraged one man to execute all business in order to safeguard confraternal wealth and/or avoid power struggles.

Were other positions dissolved, downgraded or merely overlooked? Many duties were likely distributed among a network of unnamed informal leaders. All principales were enjoined to serve Our Lady and the poor. One man who joined with his wife and daughter in 1705 was identified as a deputy (CNNS I: 71v). Diputados did exist, at least in certain years, but when compared to mayordomos, they were clearly junior officers. Scribes were still employed, but they may be contracted to perform a service and paid, rather than formally elected and paid. Appointments and accomplishments (or failures) of deputies and scribes went unheralded. Secondary officials continued to play roles, but scribes no longer considered them to be worth mentioning.

Elections were recorded in most years (91/105: 87%) and sanctioned by reading the results aloud to the gathering of “Indians and Brethren” (CNNS III: 11v, 1776). Most elections were actually reelections (65/91: 71%). The last leader, Domingo Soriano, served 21 years in a row (1782-1802). In the last two decades, he likely encountered few competitors and little business to conduct. Most mayordomos were reelected (17/27: 63%), but Soriano is an anomaly. Other long-term leaders were Pasqual de los Santos.
(1703-1704, 1710-1711), Antonio Francisco (1718-1724), Juan de los Santos (1734-1739), Gaspar Juarez (1745-1750), and Antonio de los Santos (1754-1758, 1760).

Nepotism is likely, but the “de los Santos” were not necessarily related. Mayordomos’ names were observed in the baptismal records of indigenous parishioners: de la Cruz, Francisco, Garcia, Juarez, Lopez, Luna, and de los Santos. Antonio Francisco, Nicolas García and Andrés de Ojeda were padrinos close to the time of their elections, but their names may represent several men. By the 1540s, generic Hispanicized and Christianized names were assigned to, or selected by, indigenous residents, at baptisms. Names were passed on from generation to generation, until Popoloca names were no longer circulated and lost meaning. Many of the early colonial names reveal local cultural geography, whether barrios, native hamlets or agricultural estates.

Only Pasqual de los Santos (1713) and cacique Antonio de los Santos (1754) were identified as vecinos naturales, but almost all officials probably fit this description. In nearly every area cofradía, local residence and ethnicity determined eligibility for a seat on the council and other restricted privileges. The detail provided for the two men is likely due to their elections coinciding with the books’ ecclesiastic inspections. Many Popoloca lay leaders would be nobles, but perhaps not by the 18th century; Joseph Ramos, elected in 1751, was an indio natural, but not necessarily an elite. The ethnic and socio-economic statuses of the remaining 24 mayordomos went unnoted. Officials were most likely local native elites and commoners, as they had been in the late 16th century. There is no evidence of Spanish, mestizo, Afro-Mexican, or priests’ engagement or interference in elections. Other than when the Popoloca cabildo was scolded by Church authorities for poor fiscal management, native autonomy continued to prevail until 1803.
Comparing membership lists (1698-1757) to ordinances (1581) reveals continuities and adjustments. The 652 recorded members span 1698 to 1757. Only some years (63%) yield data, whether due to missing books, poor organization, failure to track members, or membership lulls. People were grouped together by year, often as families, in the order that they joined. Women slightly outnumbered men (55%). Inscribing marital units was the norm (60%), but many unattached men and women were welcomed as fictive kin. Other familial arrangements (4%) included six women married to existing members, eleven children of existing members, and nine people who joined with siblings. The remaining 36% were the unattached, including two widows and a widower, and only two men and two women were identified as single.

Many more kin ties, barrio and occupational networks existed than the few that were memorialized by the scribes. Most recorded ties were among new members and officials; the three sisters and seven-year-old son of mayordomo Andrés de Ojeda joined in 1707 (CNNS I: 72r, 1707). Age was only noted for children enlisting with parents and siblings. In 1708, “a man who helped in the house” of Ojeda joined (CNNS I: 72r). The servant received special attention due to his connection to the 1701-1702 and 1707-1708 mayordomo. In all cofradías, there should be many more cases of employer-employee or patron-client bonds, but they were not recorded.

Marriage might induce Popoloca men to enlist, but regardless of marital status, women were drawn to cofradías. Among the men, 68% joined with wives, but only 54% of women enlisted with husbands. Men joining without (or perhaps before or after) wives amounted to only 14% of all members, while this rate was 25% among women. This gender imbalance is likely due to the greater proportion of women, but the perceived
benefits of fictive kinship structures may have attracted more unattached women, especially widows and doncellas (unmarried young women). After pledging her devotion and fee, an unattached woman could socialize with, and be insulated among, her Christian neighbors. In New Spain, orphaned and poor cofradías received charitable endowments from their brethren for subsistence or a dowry, such as blankets and other basic household items. In a rare instance of a bishop praising indios, lay leaders from this and other local native cofradías were recognized for using their meager resources to “pensionar pobres mujeres” (sponsoring poor women; Cofradía del Santo Nombre de Jesus IV: 51r, 1776).

I sought evidence of the cihuateopixque, female religious assistants who were elected or served informally. But only two policies conceded any female presence or participation. Women were entitled to a “good death” and they helped ensure that this happened for members and non-members (Ord. 11). Noblewomen, perhaps even more than men, visited bed-ridden residents and hospital patients (Ord. 14): “principales, hombres y mujeres.” Native women gave alms but there is no evidence that they collected them, except in Spanish cofradías (the Holy True Cross). Early colonial Popoloca seem to be just as prone as Spaniards to overlook or obscure female experiences and contributions. The Nahuaatl ordinances may feature more female roles.

Women were finally recognized as integral to the Nativity’s success when, in 1728, a female enlistee was identified as the “confraternity’s notary” (CNNS I: 106r). Her literacy and appointment to a formal position are rare and noteworthy. But her enlistment was listed with 17 others and there was no record of her ethnicity, title, marital status, or ties to any official or member. In a native cofradía, she would at least be
perceived as indigenous; it was unsuitable for españolas and mestizas to serve that closely with Popoloca men. The scribe may have been paid, elected or appointed by a relative on the cabildo or even a priest. Her instruction likely occurred at a school or convent, but she could have apprenticed with another scribe. The writing from this period is in Spanish, so I do not know if she could write in Nahuatl. The relative neglect of women in these records prevents me from framing her confraternal service as an isolated event, truly pioneering or representative of other women’s experiences. But it may not be coincidental that the scribe served in the same generation as the rise of local sisterhoods and a mass female dedication to the path of the Virgin in the Spaniards’ Holy True Cross.

The class, residence, ethnicity, and sex of lay leaders and members were emphasized in the ordinances. The true insiders were caciques principales and vecinos naturales. Commoners and the poor were still welcome to join, attend fiestas, donate alms, and serve others. In the early colonial period, native noblemen do not seem to have engaged in Spaniards’ contests of piety and prestige, such as exclusive processional orders or insignia paths. They did not reinforce social hierarchies by instituting set fees based on running for office, ethnicity, sex, or marital status, except for family discounts. The principales and naturales, so frequently invoked in the constitution, were never identified or contrasted in membership lists. The mundane nature of member tallies justifies their lack of detail; scribes merely performed their duty. Late colonial native lay leaders, or their scribes and ecclesiastic supervisors, may have cared less about titles and landholding than was intimated in the act of foundation. Despite emphasizing vecino status early on, scribes rarely traced place of residence (2%). The locations mentioned
were two haciendas and the barrios of Santa Cruz, San Joseph and San Sebastián (cofradías emerged from the latter two barrios in the late 17th century).

Popoloca lay leaders were based in a decidedly indigenous pueblo (according to the locals) or barrio (according to ecclesiastic authorities): “the said Confraternity to the locals of the Town of Acatzingo” (CNSN: 5v, 1701). In 1592, Tecamachalco’s alcalde evicted all Spaniards from Acatzingo (AGN, Indios: Vol. 6, Exp. 313, Foja 85). In 1701, Bishop Don Juan de Javoni Barrera granted Acatzingo’s locals the “right to meet and present themselves” (CNSN: 6r, 6v). A copy of the bishop’s order was penned by Raphael de Santiago Ponze, the parish and town notary. The motion was approved by Governor Nicolás de Luna and three alcaldes. If most elite cofradas were from Acatzingo, then it made sense for the 1701 cabildo to relocate meetings to the barrio de indios or to sponsor a subsidiary group there. Popolocas’ experiences of abuse and marginalization were finally acknowledged by colonial authorities in 1717: “Reparations are being made to the Indians of … Acatzingo, Tecamachalco and Tehuacan, for having been treated so violently” (Ibid: Vol. 40, Exp. 159, Foja 227-230). Why was Acatzingo so important? Lax record-keeping and ambiguous statements conspired to create yet another confraternal mystery. It seems that Acatzingo was closely tied to Popoloca rule.

Ethnicity and occupation were rarely mentioned. A puzzling exception was a Spaniard whose racial label was half ripped off the edge of the paper (CNNS I: 28r, 1735). If he was rejected as ethnically ineligible or expelled for scandalous behavior, then the scribe would cross out his name. Non-Indians were not banned or even mentioned in the constitution. But a scribe or inspector may have seen the ethnic identifier and knew that it did not belong. The issue may not be that he was a Spaniard among Indians, but
that ethnicity was mentioned at all. Spanish parish priest Antonio Marin Siliceo joined, but his ethnicity was not annotated (CNNS I: 76v, 1712). My future study of the Nativity of Our Lady’s Nahuatl policies will reveal whether or not these Popolocas attempted to exclude ethnic outsiders, like their Holy Name of Jesus counterparts.

Communal Events and Property: Contrasting Popoloca and Spanish Treasurers

Despite an elite leadership circle and membership base, the Popolocas’ economic power was weak in comparison to that of the Spaniards. Native lay leaders opted (or were forced) to take a little from a lot of people on a frequent basis. The cofradía’s ethos of poor relief did not extend to expecting nothing from non-nobles and the poor. There were fee discounts but all members were still expected to contribute. Dues were set at 1 peso or 4 reales for the poor (CNSN: 13v, 1581). This fee schedule withstood the test of time; this was not the case for other groups, whose reductions may attest to membership lags or generalized poverty.

Members donated whatever they could at eight annual masses that marked events in the Virgin’s life: Conception, Nativity, Presentation, Annunciation, Visitation, Expectation, Purification, and Assumption (CNSN: 13v, Ord. 5 and 6). Anyone absent from mass, funerals or the homes of the dying was to be fined (CNSN: 13v, 14v, Ord. 5, 10, 11). At the obligatory Saturday mass, cofrades surrendered 1 tomin, or ½ tomin if poor (CNSN: 13v, Ord. 4 and 6). Council members then met in the chapel for a discussion or they would later pay a penalty of 1 real, ½ if poor (CNSN: 14r, Ord. 8). This statute implies that leaders did not have to be wealthy. But policy is not practice and noble status may have been enforced.
Members’ fees and fines may have been of little significance in comparison to the yearly rent on an *estancia* that was held in common by the indios cofrades. The late colonial activities of most cofradías were “supported from community-owned livestock and lands” (Taylor 1996: 304). Wills reveal that some native landowners bequeathed plots of land to cofradías (Haskett 1991: 121). The proceeds of the small agricultural plot were supposed to be listed in a book of possessions and presented for inspection, but these accounts were not maintained or preserved. In Tecamachalco, only native cofradías appear to have subsisted through corporate landholdings, perhaps because only the Popoloca enjoyed legitimate and ancient ties to communal lands.

Each year, the plot generated 50 pesos, which just happened to be the cofradía’s annual operating budget (CNSN: 3r, 16r, Ord. 19). Cofradías were “catalysts for the development of communal property such as livestock ranches and cotton fields, and of other means by which the native colonial community increased its self-sufficiency” (Megged 1996: 76). In an effort to gain and/or retain autonomy, did Popoloca lay leaders intend and/or act to operate completely within their means? Later records reveal that the founders’ optimism about financial freedom and security was misplaced and misunderstood by ecclesiastic authorities.

Early on, very few ritual items were itemized. A book for the purchases of ornaments no longer exists, if it ever did (CNSN: 15v, Ord. 16). A cross, carried by the head priest in funeral processions, would be stored in the sacristy. It was likely revered more than any other symbol: a scribe reminded members to “be attentive to (or be careful with) the cross” (CNSN: 3v). Unlike Spaniards, Popoloca lay leaders did not lay claim to several crosses. But by the late 17th century, they owned or had access to “litters and
insignias in all of the processions” (CNSN: 5v). Loaning confraternal property or funds to anyone was universally taboo (CNSN: 15v, Ord. 17). But cofradías that shared an ethnic base and compatible ritual schedules may have collaborated. Most churches depended on cofradías for their upkeep and ornaments (Megged 1996: 89). But the confraternal records rarely reveal who, if anyone, claimed ultimate control of objects.

Relatively little revenue was required because friars and musicians charged Popolocas less than Spaniards for their services at masses, processions and fiestas. A total of 12 pesos secured four masses separated by a period of three months (CNSN: 15v, Ord. 15). If the collective wealth of the Popoloca had rivaled that of Spaniards, then additional masses might have been considered. There was no mention of the Saturday mass fee, so the event was likely community-wide. The cabildo supplied bread and wine to the “reverend fathers who gave rest to the deceased members and on Saturdays after mass” (CNSN: 14r, Ord. 7). Compulsory gifts of candle wax and alms (1 peso from principales, 1 real from the poor) at masses kept funds and possessions flowing in and out. Only 1 peso was charged for each funeral mass, but it was impossible to anticipate these expenses for any given year. This uncertainty may have led the cabildo to consistently owe money to the priests, but lavish fiestas were most problematic.

Over time, more activities were pursued, requiring more investment of time and money. If an opportunity arose to participate in additional feast days, the timing of masses could be altered (CNSN: 15v, Ord. 15). Members’ work schedules and the ebb and flow of funds might also factor in. A 1605 amendment commissioned a sung mass in honor of “all brethren living and dead,” on the first Saturday of every month (CNSN: 17v), which may have doubled the ritual calendar expenses. Perhaps the group was now
better funded and more frequent and public acts of collective piety and charity were valued. Another 1605 amendment enacted a reduction in the cost of fiestas. The lay leaders were rich nobles who had just diversified their ritual calendar, but the Franciscans acknowledged the Popolocas’ collective poverty and mounting expenses.

The 12 signatories to the 1605 amendments included the chief and deputy stewards, scribe, supervising Franciscan friar, and other members of the planning or voting council. In the Spanish-dominant Holy True Cross, the standard number of signatures was 27. But ten or twelve may have been customary in smaller or subaltern cofradías; the most crucial decisions of Our Lady of the Rosary’s Afro-Mexican lay leaders were endorsed by “the twelve of the table.”

Spaniards were acknowledged as the Popolocas’ spiritual counterparts, at least by a friar. In 1605, padre guardián Balthasar Maldonado urged native lay leaders to collaborate with “the confraternities of the Spaniards, especially in their festivals and in that of the Holy True Cross” (CNSN: 17v, 1605). This was the same year that processions, insignias and ethnicity were conflated in the latter cofradía’s amendments (CNSN: 17v, 1605). Our Lady’s members were invited to partake in (and likely help pay for) the “triumph of the Cross” on July 6th and May 11th, but the fiesta de la Cruz falls on May 3rd. It is not clear if the invitation was extended by Spaniards or the friars only. The request may have preceded the Holy True Cross’ amendments (April 26th), ratified only one week before its annual titular festival and procession (May 3rd). A notice of at least a few weeks or even months would have enabled the Popoloca council to make a real contribution to the May celebration. In order to participate fully, the cabildo needed time to plan (as leaders), contribute funds (as nobles), and secure permission from their
employers (as commoners). It is even possible that Pedro de Beriztain, who went on to pen the Spaniards’ amendments, was aware of, and disturbed by, fray Balthasar Maldonado’s proposal. Perhaps that is why Spanish lay leaders acted swiftly to diminish Indians’ visible roles in processions.

The fiesta principal, which sanctioned the changing of the guard and commemorated the Nativity of Mary, was held on September 8th. At 5 pesos, it was a good deal; 4 reales were given for the procession (CNSN: 13v, Ord. 3). These modest amounts would have just covered friars’ and musicians’ fees, leaving little for decoration and merriment. In contrast, Spanish lay leaders’ annual fiesta budgets ranged from 18 to 40 pesos (1575-1610). Spaniards would have found Popoloca fiestas to lack some very basic elements. How could 5 pesos guarantee the necessary candle wax, powder, wine, costumes, flowers, music, and a feast to properly honor the saints, compensate priests, and impart townspeople’s piety and resourcefulness to visiting dignitaries? It did not, which suggests that Popolocas were poor or that they employed creative accounting practices in order to spend more on religious festivals than they were willing to concede on paper. But there are other explanations. Ritual specialists charged Spaniards more for services. The Holy Name of Jesus’ Popoloca mayordomos outlaid even less. Members also supplemented fiesta expenses by donating candle wax and perhaps other items for the beautification of the church and processional circuit. If we compare the fiesta budget to annual cargo (money in), descargo (money out) and alcanze (the difference) figures, then it was reasonable.

One of the cofradía’s scribes asserted “our great poverty and misery” (CNSN: 3v, ca. 1698). In confraternal records and edicts from Puebla’s bishops, Indians were
frequently equated with poverty, misery and/or wretchedness (pobres miserables). Hispanic Catholicism framed poverty as the “moralistic expression” of the Indians’ vagrancy, idleness, rusticity, and iniquity (Megged 1996: 79). Poor Indian peasants, at least those who loitered or begged, were threats “to the well-being of the Christian community, likely to increase delinquency, civic and moral chaos, and rebellion” (Ibid: 81). Poverty was “divine retribution for sins and death,” and the solution was “social and moral cleansing,” including poor-relief through confraternal charity (Ibid: 78).

In 1667, Bishop Don Diego Offorio Escobar y Llamas acknowledged the “cofradía’s poverty and limited means” by deducting 1 peso from each ceremony’s fee (CNSN: 3v- 4r). But by the 18th century, the price of the fiesta had doubled to 10 pesos. The increase was certainly atypical because other expenses remained low, including the procession (1 peso and 1 real). Paying more for fiestas but not other rituals suggests that native cabildos became more ambitious when planning and executing their most visible celebrations, all while still claiming poverty.

Diachronic analysis of 18th-century accounts identifies a few cycles. If the first year that is available (1698) provides any indication, then Popoloca mayordomos would only lay out what they took in; the difference was a mere 3 pesos. In 40% of the years that followed, lay leaders managed to balance their budgets, come very close to it, or even save some of the year’s gains. This was especially true in later years, even though that was the period in which mayordomos were chastised the most by bishops. But much of the time, officials operated firmly in the red, even owing money to secular clergymen, including Br. Manuel de Olmedo in 1777 (CNNS III: 14r). The debts were most likely due to priests officiating at fiestas and general and/or funeral masses for free or on credit.
If lay leaders were going to cheat anyone, it should not have been their religious supervisors; they probably owed money to singers, artisans and laborers too.

The cofradía alternated between years when money flowed freely and when earning and/or spending were constrained. Erratic shifts may be due to lay leaders’ hypercorrection of past mistakes, the quantity reserved in the confraternal coffer, and the abilities and willingness of members to donate in any given year. Most balanced budgets fell between 1750 and 1802. Over a period of 105 years, there were only six inspections of the books. Usually, nine years elapsed between visits, but more than two decades separated the last few instances. Spending before and after ecclesiastic inspections followed a fairly consistent pattern. In the years immediately after a visit, budgets were balanced (1746, much of the 1750s and 1760s, 1776-1778). It looks like outside intervention was what motivated lay leaders to improve the cofradía’s bottom line.

Published research (Taylor 1996: 311; Von Germeten 2006: 87) and late colonial bishops’ edicts attest to the Catholic Church’s and Spanish Crown’s disillusionment with cofradías, especially their ubiquity, control of communal lands and excessive spending on fiestas. In the 1726, 1755 and 1776 inspections, mayordomos, as well as cofrades and indios in general, were reprimanded for what they had likely been doing with their own fiestas, land and money for nearly two centuries. Popoloca lay leaders may not have been without error or corruption. But a series of priestly critiques seems to be much more about the mayordomos being Indians and joint possessors of valuable lands, rather than anything that any leader did or had failed to do.

In 1726, Puebla’s bishop, Juan Antonio, assessed the Nativity’s financial well-being. He examined the collection and redistribution of funds. After briefly noting the
rental of sheep as the chief source of income, the bishop quickly shifted gears to his main purpose – admonishing Salvador Quintero for his and his predecessors’ loose spending. The source of the over-spending comes as no surprise: “alms are wasted on fireworks or other superfluous things” for fiestas (CNNS I: 96r). The secular or party atmosphere of fiestas came under attack. Indirectly, the bishop posed some fairly uncomfortable questions: What did fireworks have to do with devotion to the Virgin? Why were funds being invested in this manner instead of going towards the hospital, poor, orphans, widows, paying the priests, or even commissioning a chapel?

Confraternal constitutions and annual expense reports establish fiestas and processions as the main priorities of Spanish and native cofradías. Cofradías employed fiestas as “occasions for the display of ties through the exchange of symbolic gifts and the invitation of dignitaries, disseminating the Cult of the Saints” (Megged 1996: 87). Ties existed within and between communities, which linked cabeceras and sujetos, or parroquías and visitas. Rival mayordomos throughout New Spain tried to outspend one another (Zafra Oropeza 1996: 34-35). Throughout New Spain, “propertied cofradías not closely supervised by the cura were likely to stretch the expenses for religious festivities beyond what he regarded as dignified devotion and the proper use of limited resources” (Taylor 1996: 306). In Tecamachalco’s native and Spanish cofradías, ecclesiastic authorities, confraternal record-keepers, council members, and alms donors, all identified ritual events and items as priorities through their (over)spending and archival habits.

Local land disputes, between indigenous and Spanish residents, the Church and the Crown, cofradías and their larger communities, had been transpiring since the late 16th century. The lay leaders of Our Lady, a native cofradía founded in the sujeto of San
Simon (Yehualtepec), travelled to Tepeaca in 1591, seeking viceregal support in their
battle to retain their lands:

The deputy stewards of the Confraternity of Our Lady that meets in the Church of
San Simon, which is subject to Tecamachalco, made a report to me, with regard to
the said Town. The said cofradía owns a livestock farm. They reported on
Spaniards who wish to invade and pled that it be prevented. (AGN, Indios: Vol. 3,
Exp. 993, Foja 239v-240v)

Don Luis de Velasco verified the deputies’ land title and recognized their ancient
claim to the land. The petitioners signed as the naturales of Tecamachalco, but it is not
clear if this Our Lady was the same cofradía or a contemporary. A 1595 petition called
for Spaniards to produce their land titles and tribute vouchers, as well as relinquish the
property of Governor Don Francisco de Mendoza. This document attests to ongoing and
unresolved tensions between Tecamachalco’s Popoloca naturales and Spanish settlers
(Ibid: Vol. 6, Exp. 1100, Foja 301v).

In a 1755 petition, a parish priest identified the Nativity as part of a tripartite team
of native cofradías that was to divide and work their own ranches, animals and plants.
One property was located near Tlacotepec, a nearby indigenous farming community
(CNNS II: 30r). When the títulos for this and other farms were misplaced, the properties
came under risk of usurpation. The priest blamed the indigenous overseers for the loss
and accused them of stubbornness, stupidity, recklessness, and wretchedness. The
Nativity’s mayordomo at the time, and for the next five years, was Antonio de los Santos,
a cacique principal and a vecino natural. Thus, this critique would have been particularly
degrading to the mayordomo and all native elites.

[In regard to] the Confraternity of San Diego de los Cantores, the property
belongs to the confraternities, not the community… This ranch is under the
control of the Indians, who had just almost allowed it to be lost, for their lack of
intelligence and thrift [economía]. I command that ancient acts be sought out, in
spite of the stubborn contradiction of the Indians... [We appeal to] Captain Verdejo, Attorney of the Indians, in Veracruz, Cotastla... [There are] eight spots of land in Tecamachalco that belong to the confraternities, and sheep, in the lands that the said confraternities and natives possess... But they [the Indians] are subject to eviction... [I propose] to split them [the properties] equally among the three confraternities... [in order to] pay the tribute of all of the singers... The loose paper [land titles] that was lost by the Indians... The confraternity owns a ranch in the Nopalero [place of prickly pear] in the Valley of Valsequillo... The Indians spent the profits on the confraternity... [It is near] the Town of San Martin Tlacotepec, in the parish of Santiago Totutla... [There is also] the ranch Acazonica, of the College of San Ildephonso of Puebla... [We make this] demand to Don Alonzo del Priego, who was the Attorney of the Indians, who has in his possession, unjustly, all of the titles of these and other lands... Due to the lack of titles, without which it is very difficult to defend their [the Indians’] rights... The pity that it provokes in me to see the loss of such wealth, for the clear omission and ignorance of these Wretches [Miserables, a legal designation], who with such ease they always allow the Confraternity to be cheated... parish priest Joseph Xavier de Tembra y Jimenes. (CNNS II: 28v-30v)

It seems a bit unreasonable to accuse Popolocas of mismanaging their documents because they had entrusted them to a corrupt or incompetent lawyer. In the late 18th century, population expansion and mounting vice-regal government debt placed unanticipated stress on many agricultural lands and laborers (Burkholder and Hiles 2000: 147). Throughout New Spain, Spanish landowners and colonial authorities frequently employed the device of falsely claiming that indigenous, individual or corporately-owned, properties were vacant or neglected. This designation would allow valuable resources to be put to “better use” for the benefit of the Spanish colonies. But if confraternal laborers had been actively tilling the lands (which is not known), then outsiders might not have contemplated usurping the Popolocas’ land titles.

The 1755 scribe, quoting the Spanish priest, claimed that the petition of the singers, the officials of the Nativity and the other Indian cofradía was successful. The corporate lands could no longer be sold to individuals or reclaimed by the surrounding communities to pay a town-wide tribute. They were safeguarded as belonging to native
cofradías, to perpetuate the cult of the saints and to pay the singers’ tribute. In the 16th century, “singers were allowed to pay as half tributaries” (Haskett 1991: 118), but this may not have been the case two centuries later.

This is the only mention of the Cofradía de San Diego de los Cantores. It was most likely a native group composed of singers, but it also appears to have been linked to a physical place. Baptismal records reveal the presence of families from the barrio of Cantores. Not only did singers own lands and establish a cofradía, but enough of them resided in a barrio until it was named Cantores. By the 18th century, singers saw themselves as a distinct group worthy of their own cofradía. Agustín de Vetancurt (1971: Part III, 65) noted a Cofradía de San Diego in neighboring Quecholac, but he did not identify the cofradías by ethnicity or era. Quecholac is two leagues away from Tecamachalco and is its twin city. A hermita (chapel), visita and church under Quecholac were dedicated to San Diego, so the cofradía may have been based there.

Anyone who had read or heard the 19th ordinance of the 1581 constitution should have known that the 50 pesos obtained from the rent of Our Lady’s property were not channeled into confraternal needs. Instead, it appeared that “the work of the officials” was to be reimbursed from it (CNSN: 16r, Ord. 19). I initially interpreted the statement to mean that native lay leaders were entrusted with the work of overseeing the land. But in 1776, an ecclesiastic inspection finally uncovered the practice of accessing confraternal revenue in order to compensate mayordomos for their services. The mayordomos’ alleged misuse of funds was not restricted to continuing to funnel resources into fiestas, despite the warnings that had been issued:

The waste on extraordinary and superfluous things, nothing that is conducive to the cult of the Most Holy Virgin Mary… and removing from this all superfluous
expenditures on fireworks, musicians, and too much wax, and the rest… they pay the chief stewards… Bishop Victoriano Lopez Gonzalo. (CNNS III: 10r)

The practice was finally recognized for what it was - an ongoing remuneration of elected officials, regardless of lay leaders’ fiscal crisis and claims to poverty.

It must have seemed entirely inappropriate to the Bishop of Puebla, but resorting to self-help was fully justified. It was noted in the constitution, which was examined and ratified by another bishop (CNSN: 16r, Ord. 19). Nor was this an isolated incident. In Tula’s 1570 Nahuatl ordinances of the Holy Sacrament, there was a provision to pay mayordomos for their trouble: “He will explain his employment. He may demand repayment for time lost at the end of one year, and be paid for what he has worked” (Schwaller 1989: 240, Ord. 2). While the Tula statute does not reveal if all officials from every year were compensated, the practice was framed as acceptable and even common. Presenting this policy in the second of 22 ordinances implies the reparation’s importance; at least no one could claim that the arrangement was hidden. Despite the same number of ordinances (22), the founders of the Nativity of Our Lady situated the policy much later on (Ord. 19), at least in the Spanish version, but this does not mean that they hid it.

How did scribes, visitadores and bishops overlook this admission and practice for nearly two centuries? Perhaps they refused to acknowledge the supposed corruption or native officials obscured it. I do not think that inspectors could fully grasp how native cofradías functioned, in terms of how Popoloca leaders, who fulfilled three weekly commitments (attend Saturday mass, meet after and visit hospital patients), were best motivated. Like selling ritual items in lean years, paying lay leaders from the profit of the lands that they administered was merely customary, at least to indigenous eyes. In the Nativity, officials may have taken all of the proceeds of the land or only what remained
after all expenses were paid. But this practice did not place the cofradía in jeopardy. Over the long term, these Popoloca men spent little and saved much. But consistently owing money to priests who officiated at solemn celebrations invited Spanish interference.

After 1784, under the direction of long-term mayordomo Domingo Soriano, the cofradía finally thrived. A few hundred pesos were earned each year, presumably from the secured lands and alms; expenses depleted less than a third of most years’ profits. No wonder Soriano was elected to 21 terms! If the books represent transparency, then he was a financial wizard rarely seen within any voluntary organization, whether ancient or modern. How did he do it? As one man, he could surrender only so much personal wealth. His strategy likely included networking with wealthy neighbors, administering lands expertly and/or selling ritual paraphernalia.

The Nativity of Our Lady’s doors closed in 1803 after a religious image was sold for 185 pesos (CNNS III: 23r). In 1747, Spaniards shed costly but spiritually meaningless jewels, but items had been disappearing for decades. Popolocas followed the same financial strategy as other cofradías undergoing decline. But they did so half a century later and only upon the cofradía’s closure. Perhaps the Nativity fared better because its leaders invested less in religious images and structures, if only because their budget was so much smaller. Its founding members were assuredly among the indigenous donors who sponsored the convento’s altarpiece in 1585. Despite all of the fiesta supplies and merry-making, bishops never criticized the Nativity’s leaders for overflowing inventories of statues, insignias and gold. But for all the questioning of Indians’ abilities, Popoloca lay leaders actually ended up in better shape than the Spaniards.
I cannot pretend to know what Popoloca cofradías meant to their founders and members. However, there are clear ways in which native and Spanish-dominated cofradías mirrored one another as well as key points at which they diverged. Patterns among Tecamachalco’s cofradías will become apparent after the Popolocas’ Holy Name of Jesus is compared to various Spanish, parish-wide and barrio groups (in subsequent chapters), and my future analysis of the Nahuatl ordinances of the Nativity of Our Lady.

Footnote
#1: Due to supposed previous thefts and no photocopying machine, I was forbidden from duplicating archival materials. I do not have a transcription of the Nativity of Our Lady’s Nahuatl constitution. I will return to Tecamachalco to take digital photos of all of the confraternal charters that were penned in Nahuatl, and then translate and analyze them.

Primary Sources
Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City
Documental Group: *Indios* (Indians) and *Iglesias* (Churches)
Petitions relating to Tecamachalco’s native leaders and commoners, 16\(^\text{th}\)-18\(^\text{th}\) centuries

Parish Archive of Tecamachalco, Puebla, Mexico
Documental Group: *Disciplinar* (Discipline/Education/Indoctrination/Penitence)
Confraternity of the Nativity of Our Lady, 1581-1803 (Leg. 4, 3 books, 1581 charter)
The origin story of the Holy Name of Jesus resembles that of many of its successors and contemporaries. The cofradía de naturales was established in 1595 in the Franciscan convent but elections and masses were later moved to the parish church. In 1657, a scribe’s misstatement that the cofradía was founded in the parish church served to appropriate the secular clergy’s and new structure’s legitimacy (Cofradía del Santo Nombre de Jesus II: 28v, 1657).

A half-century would pass before the next wave of foundations. Scribes of older cofradías were most prone to revisionist history-making, perhaps out of ignorance or as a means to preserve the groups’ cogency amidst newcomers. Nearly all founders made claims to antiquity (the Holy True Cross and the Holy Sacrament), nobility (San Francisco, the Nativity of Our Lady and the Holy Name of Jesus), sacred spaces (all groups), barrios (San Joseph, San Sebastián, and San Nicolás), piety, charity, spiritual maturity, and intelligence, usually falling along racial, geographic or geographic boundaries. Whether these claims were true or not, few outsiders would be able to object.

At the 1595 founding ceremony, 22 men were in attendance. Writing in Nahuatl but using Spanish loan words, the scribe referred to 18 founders as naturales (82%). They were joined by two children (*pilzintli*), a youth (*telpochtli*), and an artisan (*amanteca*). A married couple was present but not included in the tally. The number 22 remained meaningful to the brethren. According to a lone election tally, voting councils were
comprised of 22 men. In 1642, Matheo de Santiago secured nine votes, and his two challengers earned six and seven votes, respectively. The uncharacteristic detail provided for this election is likely due to it being the first one supervised by the newly assigned secular clergyman, Pedro de Medina. Voting was a privilege restricted to a small group of men. In Tula’s Holy Sacrament, we are led to believe that anyone could vote: “Each member will stand before the scribe in order for the group to elect” (Schwaller 1989: 240; Ord. 2, 1570). But we know that confraternal ideals are not practices.

Confraternal books are disorganized collections of mundane documents, but they were also sources of corporate wealth, prestige and legitimacy. On two pages preceding the Nahuatl ordinances, two colored drawings face one another (CSNJ III: 20v-21r). The artist could be a founding member or an outsider commissioned for this task. This was one of the rare occasions in which I observed artwork within confraternal records. In Huexotzingo, Puebla, cofrades invested in a grand mural that is still displayed in the main church (Webster 1996). But two drawings may have been all that Popoloca lay leaders and members could afford. The renderings may have served as models for future pieces or they may be evidence of existing images.

The first image portrays Mary and Joseph assisted by a temple authority in the naming ceremony of baby Jesus. The models for this rendering were likely Catholic paintings or wood-cuts but also Spanish settlers. A haloed elderly rabbi (perhaps Simeon) sits on a throne, holds a staff and wears a bishop’s miter (see Burkhart 2001: Figure 10); Joseph and Mary, standing to his left and right, are dressed as Spaniards and their hands are clasped in prayer. A haloed book, presumably the Torah or for writing names, rests on a pillow, atop a table, draped with a white cloth. In the next image, a golden-haired and
haloed Christ child is naked except for a red cloth that is draped over his shoulders and fastened by a golden clasp. In a featureless scene, he sits on a pillow next to a scroll that leads upwards, cradling a wooden cross in his left arm. In his right hand, he holds a sphere with a cross, which likely represents the earth, his dominion. Popolocas’ dedication to the Holy Name of Jesus and celebration of his circumcision as their titular festival inspired these images. But nothing in the portraits conveys any “Indian” or local flavor; the subjects’ dress and features, including Jesus’ blond hair, reflected Hispanic Christian ideals only.

*Hierarchy and Equality in the Nahuatl Act of Foundation and Ordinances*

Acts of foundation previewed ideals about members, rituals, symbols, and spaces. Values were echoed and elaborated upon in ordinances and then applied, reinterpreted or even violated through accounts of actual practices. The following act functioned similarly, conforming to a standard formula of presenting crucial facts in a set order. But a small statement reserved for, or forgotten until, the end of the text altered my perception of subaltern and multiethnic cofradías.

Confraternal policies and practices bear witness to citizens’ reactions to the evolving ethnic compositions of their parishes (Von Germeten 2006: 190). I sought to identify and assess the strategies, obstacles and outcomes in Popolocas’ pursuits of spiritual, social, political, and/or economic legitimacy and autonomy in a pueblo de españoles. I present the Nahuatl-language act and constitution in their entirety, noting the presence and absence of certain statements and persons. Then I contrast the Nahuatl and
Spanish ordinances and juxtapose them to the electoral, financial, ritual, and membership practices of subsequent generations of native brethren.

Nahuatl is found throughout the records: the petition to assemble, ordinances and even some membership lists and inventories. The high incidence of Nahuatl pinpoints the group as the most self-consciously “Indian” in town. I am indebted to Barry D. Sell for perusing my transcriptions, Louise M. Burkhart for translating the act and ordinances with me, and John F. Schwaller for feedback on a nebulous passage. Here is the 1595 act, translated from the Nahuatl:

In the town of Tecamachalco, on the tenth day of the month of September, of 1595, this confraternity, the Name of Jesus, was established. The officials the members [cofrades] established it. And the ruler [tlatohuani] don Diego Romano bishop of Tlaxcala came here and then they [founders] appeared before him. And also they implored him to approve it and make it strong [the petition to assemble or license of foundation]. And truly he received it happily and also approved it. And also he blessed it so that it appears as the bishop’s order. This is called a Decree and really in it, it is said that on the said day, month and year, were set forth all of the signatures of the said officials and cofrades who belong to the said Holy Confraternity, and also all of the caciques [tlatoque] and nobles [pipiltin] and all of the little commoners [macehualtzitzintin] who willingly were counted within the said Holy Confraternity. And they all appeared before him – the esteemed rulers [mahuiztlahtoque] don Juan de Mendoza the lieutenant constable [guardián teniente] and head alderman/prefect [regidor mayor], and also the justices [alcaldes] Balthasar Rodriguez de San Felipe and don Vicente de San Joseph. And those who are put in office first will be deputy steward [diputado] Juan Geronimo and Hypolito Perez becomes chief steward [mayordomo]. And they will record those who will enter into the Holy Confraternity. Like right now here begins the first members [cofrades]. And they entered at one peso each of alms offering, and it is four tomines for each poor person, and for the wealthy it is one peso each, and for a sick person someone ill who will enter the whole amount is one peso. And as our big ruler [tohueytlatocatzin], the bishop, said, he gave his blessing. And moreover those who will enter, and those who are the diputados and mayordomos who will govern will be laid out in front of people [announced] once a year and will be written here in this book. May there be no Spaniards, [yspañoles], no blacks [tiltic], no mulattoes [molato], no mulatas [molata]. From now on, here they [members] will be inscribed in this book. And already here we begin just like that to be admitted in the said year, time and month of 1595. (CSNJ III: 24r, 1595)
This act elucidates Popolocas’ submission to confraternal hierarchies and protocol, but it also contains an assertion of selective solidarity. The latter was atypical for indigenous or Afro-Mexican cofradías, at least in this context (featured in an act rather than an amendment). We first learn about the sequence of events involved in establishing a cofradía. The bishop’s presence, position and sanction of the cofradía were underscored. It was customary to mention the bishop’s decree. But repetition and exaggeration of the bishop’s credentials, as well as those of the co-founders, through the use of Spanish titles and Nahuatl honorifics, legitimized the license.

As in the Nativity of Our Lady, caciques and principales, particularly secular and lay religious office-holders, were listed first, set apart from the commoners, and merited the greatest detail. This binary classification was reinforced through two sets of dues, the same fee structure practiced in the Nativity of Our Lady. “First cofrades” meant noblemen only; the poor were mentioned right after. Perhaps the scribe viewed all nobles as wealthy and the poor as commoners, but these associations remain unclear. The wealthy and the sick, if in peril of death and soon to be buried, were charged the full fee, the same as the founding elites.

When the policy about electoral results was introduced, the scribe’s presentation of membership types and dues should have concluded. But his enumeration only identified viable members, not the ineligible. The listing of ethnic outsiders appears to be an afterthought, but the prohibition was important as well as innocuous enough to make its way into the act. Ma, used four times, denotes a command, usually in the affirmative. The suffix ahmo, used in “proper Nahuatl” to construct a statement of negation, was omitted. But a scribe residing in a peripheral area, who was likely a speaker of Popoloca
first, then Nahuatl and then Spanish, should not be held to the same standards as Mexico City’s Nahua scribes. Nahuatl texts reveal scribal error and creativity, the insertion of Spanish loans into Nahuatl compound words, and local conventions.

The word choices for the foreigners are revealing. Except for *tliltic* (black), Spanish was used. There were no Nahuatl glosses for Spaniards, mulattoes or mulatas, at least none that were suitable for ecclesiastic records. The contrast of mulattoes and mulatas reflects couplets and repetition, common linguistic devices in Nahuatl, rather than the neglect of other women.

If the founders intended to welcome non-Indians, then these groups and their respective fees would be listed with all of the other membership categories. Instead, the excluded were broached as a final order of business before the members were presented. The statement reveals nothing about why these people were banned. As non-Popoloca and non-founders, and people who had, would or should have their own cofradías, Spaniards and Afro-Mexicans did not belong. Elite Popolocas may not have considered aliens to be entitled to reside in Tecamachalco. But that was beyond their reach, whereas the cofradía was home territory, ripe for manipulation.

In fray Alonso de Molina’s model ordinances, Nahua cofrades were instructed to regard foreigners and travelers “as gold, emeralds and precious green stones” (Sell 2002: 109, Ord. 12, 21). Examples of foreigners were the sick (Ord. 21), dying (Ord. 16), “simple-minded Otomi and the savage Chichimec” (Ord. 23). Locals were urged to entertain foreigners on feast days and to “help foreigners more than they will help the locals” when they died, granting them a Christian burial (Ibid: 111, 119, Ord. 7, 16). But
Popolocas may not have viewed Spanish, mulatto and other Afro-Mexican settlers as precious jewels. For some reason, they overlooked mestizos.

The Franciscan friar even ordered the Nahua cofrades to subjugate themselves to foreigners, who may have been Spaniards or even just the friars in this case:

As for the foreigners: you mistreat them, you are not very careful with them. Most especially they will be obeyed because they have no neighbors here. You will carry them in your arms, and you will give them food as it is prepared here. What you will say to them will not be in vain and useless so that you will not bother them, for willfulness is very deadly. (Sell 2002: 129: Ord. 21)

The confraternal lifestyle meant service to others, expecting nothing but salvation in return. By placing Indians at the bottom and “foreigners” at the top of a hierarchy, Molina’s 21st obligation of the 1552 model constitution went beyond this ethos. The founders and members of the Holy Name of Jesus did serve the less fortunate and strangers. But Tecamachalco’s lay leaders and scribes were unlikely to prostrate their own group in relation to another.

Tecamachalco’s scribes, who wrote in Nahuatl and Spanish, were informed and prompted by priests and lay leaders as they peppered confraternal founding documents with local flavor. Elements of selectivity and innovation in these texts render constitutions amenable to comparative analysis, not only among Nahuatl ordinances, but also between a Nahuatl and Spanish version of the same charter, which I now present. As in the Nativity of Our Lady and the Spaniards’ Holy True Cross, an initial list of seven policies, this time in Nahuatl, outlined basic membership and leadership procedures (CSNJ III: 24r-24v, 1595). The ordinances reflect Catholic and indigenous customs, such as highlighting (but also muting) the roles of priests and women.

[Preamble] In regard to the Holy Name of the Holy Ruler God and of his esteemed mother, he is our Redeemer, the Holy Name of Jesus, he who… by the
cross. And we are all his creations. And just now in relation to how it originated, it began, they established it this confraternity, he our Exalted Ruler the Holy Name of Jesus. It [the license] is still in the hands of our priest ruler [toteopixcatlatocatzin] don Diego Romano Bishop of Tlaxcala who came to consider, to give, the license so that… this confraternity in the town of Tecamachalco in the Franciscan doctrina it originated, it began. And here it was established by our priest ruler the bishop. If it is good [approved] our great constitution, we will make it and then we will belong to the Holy Confraternity of the Name of Jesus. [1] This one the very first [ordinance] that was established as to how to make it strong, those who willingly desire, who wish to come to become, to belong to the Holy confraternity, they will be inscribed in the book that is the property of this confraternity. And for this, four tomines will be paid when they will be inscribed, for each one who would desire it. [2] And also it was commanded that in each year on what is called the circumcision, at the New Year [January 1st], right away we merit it at this time, all of the brethren and sisters [ermanos y ermanas], we will gather and we will be present at Vespers. And four brethren will light up four torches, candles, at the beginning of Vespers. Just like that the next day [or at vespers] in the mass all of the members [cofrades] will confess and receive communion. Then in the procession all will lead our Savior by lighting up candles and with flowers. All of this will take place at this time. [3] And also it was commanded in regard to all of the members being present who belong to the confraternity. If it is good [approved] the great constitution they [members] will happily receive, they will do, what is commanded by the chief and deputy stewards [mayordomos y diputados]. Those who will take charge of the work of his name the Holy Confraternity. And moreover whoever does not obey will be penalized with half a pound of wax, which will belong to the confraternity, and it will be made known to the priest [teopixqui]. [4] And if some brother or sister who belongs to this Holy confraternity is sick, if there is illness, then the chief steward and deputees [mayordomo y diputados] will tell him [priest] to visit the sick person, and they will tell him [priest] so that he/she [the sick person] will receive the Holy Eucharist so that our Savior... And four ladies [señoras] will remember what God has done. When it [the Eucharist] comes to the sick person, all of the brethren will go visit, and the sick person will make his/her will. [5] And whichever brother dies, all of the members will do a good thing for the burial and they will be given wax for the interment of the brother who dies. But there is a penalty for he/she who does not obey. And the brethren will very clearly recite one Rosary. They will count it so that the deceased is helped. Already his/her soul belongs to God. [6] And also it is ordered that, in each year, sung and general masses are given for all the living and dead members in the Holy confraternity. And in the masses the said brethren and sisters will listen. And for he/she who does not appear for some reason, there is a list, it will be recorded and he/she will pay half a pound of wax, he/she who does not come, and it will be made known to the priest. [7] And there is the ordinance that if sometimes, due to our great sins, our Lord God sends here some great illness or great famine and drought, which has already occurred amongst us, all of the brethren of this Holy confraternity will gather at the church [teopan] or chapel [ermita]. They will implore our Lord God
and they will gather and come in order to make a procession, doing penance, penitence, [Nahuatl-Spanish couplet] so that God will have mercy on us. [Ending] All that is set in order in relation to what belongs to the Holy confraternity, it is not a toy, a joke. You will not consider it as such. All of the brethren, when there is mass, the brethren who are in the confraternity, they will not look upon the cross as if it is dead. Really, everyday it is him, the child Jesus, whom we summon at our supper and our breakfast [night and day]. (CSNJ III: 24r-25r, 1595; footnote #1)

This Nahuatl constitution clarifies, but also obscures, hierarchies introduced in the act. A universal fee (4 tomines, Ord. 1) was proposed, perhaps because membership types and dues had already been presented. While the act combined inclusive and exclusive elements, the constitution was more of a uniting force. The ordinances reflected and reinforced ecclesiastic hierarchies (the bishop, priest, chief and deputy stewards, the four torchbearers), but not amongst members (other than members in good standing and the non-compliant). The elite founding officials and members had already assumed and asserted their positions in the act, so there was little need to emphasize the lower statuses of cofrades who were poor, commoners or latecomers.

*The Elusive Cihuateopixque: Female Lay Leaders*

Overlooking women, except in sisterhoods, is all too common in the confraternal records of all ethnic groups and generations. Nicole Von Germeten (2006: 41) had to consult various genres of documents from several cofradías and parishes in order to write a chapter on Afro-Mexican cofradías. Barry D. Sell (2002: 60) observed that “Nahua women are conspicuously absent from any formal leadership role in most of the core sources” on Nahua cofradías. One exception is Tula’s Holy Sacrament, but its “four spiritual mothers” were described in other parts of the records, not the 1570 ordinances
Women were invisible in most of the Tecamachalco material, including the Spanish version of the preceding ordinances.

The Holy Name of Jesus echoed the same indigenous ethos of gender parity or complementarity as the Nahuatl ordinances from the Molina model, San Miguel Coyotlan, and Tula. In the Holy Name of Jesus, hermanos and hermanas were enjoined as full participants in the fiesta (Ord. 2) and masses (Ord. 6). In devotions, Fray Alonso de Molina had admonished everyone equally: “The men and noblewomen will be very careful, they will pray to our God and to the noblewoman Saint Mary” (Sell 2002: 125, Ord. 19). In Tula’s Holy Sacrament, men and women were instructed to perform the same devotions: “Correctly we state that all cofradía members, male and female, in the first week, all must remember to say the five Our Fathers and Hail Marys which pertain to the Blessed Sacrament” (Schwaller 1989: 244, Ord. 22, 1570). One would expect men and women to engage in the same private and even public rituals. But what is notable is that Nahua scribes mentioned this fact, whereas Spaniards and Afro-Mexicans did not.

In Our Lady of Solitude of San Miguel Coyotlan, male and female visible participations were framed as equal. But restrictions on ritual paraphernalia and dress were imposed on cofradas who marched in the Holy Friday procession: “And the women are greatly obligated to clothe themselves in black blankets… The women will not carry tunics… They will only carry scapularies that will be black, and the short mantillas with which they cover their heads will all be black” (Sell 2000: 352-353; Ord. 9, 11, 1619). The color black symbolized Our Lady of Solitude’s (the Virgin Mary) mourning of Christ’s death on the cross (Ibid: 353, Ord. 10). But black may have also served to push certain categories of cofrades to the margins of processions, while true insiders were fully
cloaked and hooded in white. In 1605, Spanish lay leaders denied the Holy True Cross’ indios cofrades the privilege to wear white tunics and insignias, assigning them black robes and torches instead. Likewise, the Nahua lay leaders of Our Lady of Solitude instructed women to wear black cloaks and reserved exclusive ritual items for the men.

In the Holy Name of Jesus, the care of dying hermanos and hermanas was identical (Ord. 4): “And if some ermano or ermana who belongs to this Holy Confraternity is sick…” This parity was seen elsewhere. Molina called for everyone to be treated equally in death and burial rites, regardless of their sex, age, class, or membership status: “When they go to bury the people [in the church] the men and women will line up together… for the sake of all the commoners, women or little children,” not just the caciques and the principales (Sell 2002: 121, Ord. 17, 1552). In Tula’s Holy Sacrament, dying men and women merited identical final rites: “We order that whenever a cofradía member gets sick, be he man or woman, the deputies and majordomo will take charge of the situation, see that they confess, and that they receive it [the Blessed Sacrament]” (Schwaller 1989: 243, Ord. 20). If someone, even a non-member, died, all were expected to attend and pray on behalf of the soul of the deceased (Ibid: 244, Ord. 21).

All of the Holy Name of Jesus’ cofrades or hermanos, which included women, were summoned to electoral announcements, funerals and penitential processions (Ord. 3-5, 7). Men and women were enjoined as attendees and absentees: “And in the masses the said brothers and sisters will listen. And for the person [yn aquin: he/she, the/that one] who does not appear…” (CSNJ III: 25r, Ord. 6). In the San Miguel Coyotlan ordinances, cofradas, like their male counterparts, were framed as potential offenders: “If some man or woman, or perhaps a young man or young woman” does not follow the rules, he/she
was to be punished with whipping or expulsion; “A man or woman will not go about giving false testimony” (Sell 2000: 356, Ord. 19-20, 1619). There are fewer examples of pairing men and women in the Holy Name of Jesus documents than in the manuscripts translated by Barry D. Sell. But the difference is largely attributable to the brevity of the Tecamachalco texts and the scribe’s use of gender-neutral terms.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the Nahuatl constitution relates to four members, whose sex remains unclear: “And four hermanos will light up four torches, candles, at the beginning of Vespers [on the feast day of January 1st]… And four señoras will remember what God has done,” when the Eucharist is brought to the homes of the dying (Ord. 2, 4). Brief references to four distinguished members who assisted at mass and accompanied male officers, as well as “all of the brothers and sisters,” to members’ deathbeds leave much to the imagination. Spanish terms were employed to introduce the assistants. In the first case, the scribe employed an irregular spelling of hermanos instead of a Nahuatl gendered term; he may have intended to communicate the gender-neutral or all-inclusive meaning of hermanos or even hermanas. Certain Spanish words, such as señoras, were penned more stylistically than most Nahuatl words; cofrades was especially challenging to transcribe. The señoras appear to be torchbearers who escorted the Holy Sacrament and the priest who administered it. Within an ethnic group and cofradía dominated by caciques, it may have been natural for the scribe to classify the women as señoras, which translates to ladies, even noblewomen (cihuapilli). In 1595, the four female appointees were likely Popoloca casicas or at least considered to be principales.

In the Spanish ordinances, the scribe clarified and elaborated the duties of the four, which were only touched upon in Nahuatl. Four members were to carry four lit
candles in the festival of Christmas and its vespers (Ord. 4). The scribe first wrote that all of the cofrades would attend. Perhaps that is why the torchbearers were identified only as “four of the cofrades,” which side-stepped gender. The four went out with the priest in the procession and mass, carrying candles in mass at the time that the Gospel was read (Evangelio). Four individuals served in the same capacity in the January 1st titular festival, which celebrated “the circumcision of the Lord” (Ord. 5). Once again, the scribe first mentioned that all hermanos and hermanas would attend the vespers. Four (gender unspecified) were dispatched to carry four lit candles. The next day, members carried the cofradía’s insignias and an image of the Christ child to and from mass. Lastly, four of the cofrades, bearing candles, were to accompany the chief and deputy stewards whenever they visited the sick in their homes and administered the Eucharist to them (Ord. 8).

The same four, who likely served on a yearly basis, would have fulfilled their informal leadership roles at various events. In addition to serving at death and fiesta rites, the torchbearers would be highly visible at any events whenever the Eucharist was present, except for male-only cabildo meetings. The positions do not appear elsewhere in the records of this or other local cofradías. Therefore I do not know if the female and/or male members were elected by their fellow brethren or appointed by the priest or stewards, who could have been their influential spouses.

In Tula’s Holy Sacrament, “four spiritual mothers” served their fellow brethren, but they were not introduced in the 1570 constitution. After 1604 the cofradas held informal leadership positions, and between 1631 and 1695, women were appointed or elected as deputy stewards. Tecamachalco’s Spanish lay leaders began to offer more visible roles (insignia paths) to women as the community, cofradías and lay leadership
system co-evolved. Creating additional positions and deputizing women say more about efficiency than recognizing or liberating women; many hands would make light work of the responsibilities traditionally undertaken by the stewards.

The San Miguel Coyotlan ordinances reveal the roles of cihuateopixque or capitanas (Sell 2000: 336, Ord. 12, 1619): “There will be one ‘actor’ and a ‘monitor’ [that is to say, a ‘prioste’], and a woman in charge of people, a female captain.” These women served at funerals, processions and hospitals as custodians of objects, events, and people, and they even spoke on behalf of the cofradía (Sell 2002: 60; Sell unpublished draft). Perhaps women were assigned positions due to the cofrades’ devotion to the Virgin (Our Lady of Solitude). Alternatively, these roles may represent the norm in Nahua cofradías rather than Spanish or Popoloca cofradías.

In a Mexico City barrio cofradía overseen by the Jesuits of the College of San Gregorio, women were numerous and highly visible. Nahua women, especially doñas and doncellas, were vital to the cofradía, school, church, and community. They cooked special dishes during Holy Week and fed the poor at church every Sunday.

Others washed the sick and poor and distributed clothing, chocolate, and alms to the needy... The example of hundreds of women serving as Congregation officers each year nullifies the idea of Nahua women as diminished in social purpose. Moreover, the fact that Buena Muerte women reported directly and regularly to the Jesuit Prefect indicates that theirs was a voice that was listened to. (Schroeder 2000: 73)

As urban elites, active, 18th-century (1710-1767) Nahua lay women appear to have more in common with the leaders of Tecamachalco’s late colonial sisterhoods, regardless of their ethnic make-up, than early colonial Popoloca women. Over time, more opportunities were returned to native women. Denying opportunities, or at least omitting information about them in the Nativity of Our Lady (except for the lone scribe in 1728)
and the Holy Name of Jesus (except for the four señoras, female land donors and scribe), suggests that the Popolocas, or their scribes, practiced less gender parity than the Nahuas. But the brevity of the Tecamachalco manuscripts, and their departure from the Molina model, result in many issues being overlooked or glossed over. Just as local scribes disregarded the Nahua tradition of priostes, they downplayed female lay leaders.

_The Priest, the Bishop and the Sacred_

The priest’s role may be the text’s most enigmatic aspect. Several Franciscan friars serviced the community at this time, but the padre guardián, present at the ratification of the Nahuatl and Spanish versions, was the priest in question. He was a shadowy figure; the stewards were to tell “him” to attend to the dying, but “he” was never identified by name or position (Ord. 4). Nahua scribes, including this one, often named priests and other authorities. But this priest’s title may have been omitted in order to emphasize the Eucharist, sick person, stewards, and/or the four ladies. The scribe may have consulted Molina’s template in this matter: “They [the officials] will go speak to the priest so that he [the dying member] will receive Extreme Unction” (Sell 2002: 119; Ord. 16). The priest but no one else was clearly identified, probably because Molina introduced the others in previous sentences. The locals were told to report the guardián to the governor and prioste if he could not be convinced to confess people, after which the bishop would dispatch a new friar. In San Miguel Coyatlan, members, not just officers, were to “summon the priest” in order to confess the sick person (Sell 2000: 354, Ord. 15).

In the records of a lay religious sodality, the focus should be on officials and members, not the priest or the bishop. But the scribe of the 1595 act and ordinances
highlighted the bishop’s high position, as if to emphasize his elite status and thus his legitimacy in sanctioning the foundation. Scribes employed by other cofradías showed little interest in narratives on religious authorities. Friars were usually framed as respected and helpful outsiders who had to be fed and paid, rather than voluntary servants of God or masters of people.

Popoloca stewards looked outside of their leadership circle in order to bring wayward members into compliance (Ord. 3, 6). In addition to the customary penance of candle wax, offenders were reported to the priest, who may have been seen as the ultimate authority. I cannot imagine a similar situation transpiring in Spanish-led cofradías. Spanish lay leaders were fully prepared to govern Indians, women, debtors, and dissenters. Why did Popolocas invite or allow Franciscans to sanction what should have been their most intimate and internal operations – member discipline and coming to peace? The Molina model reveals that God and the prioste, not the priest, would punish, even whip, unruly or stingy members (Sell 2002: 99, Ord. 9). But in comparison to the long and heavy-handed parables and admonitions in the Molina and San Miguel Coyotlan texts, Tecamachalco’s constitutions are abbreviated, light-hearted experiments.

The Holy Name of Jesus’ members were admonished to approach all ritual activities and items as sacred. Proscriptions, metaphors and repetition merged Christian symbolism and Nahuatl speech styles seen in the Molina model. Molina reminded the locals that the Eucharist, administered at the annual election, “is not a frivolous matter, not a joke. But enough of that” (Sell 2002: 101, Ord. 10). A variation of this couplet, “not a toy, a joke,” is found at the end of the Popolocas’ Nahuatl ordinances, but without Molina’s comical segue. The couplet, employed to emphasize the solemnity of the
sacred, is perhaps the most convincing evidence that the Holy Name of Jesus’ scribe was familiar with the 1552 Molina model or a similar guide.

The metaphor-rich phrase was also used in three similar contexts in the San Miguel Coyotlan cofradía: “It is not frivolous” pertains to members carrying candles in processions behind the image of Christ; “When the ordinances are about to be read no one will speak, no one will laugh, because it is not a joke, not a frivolous thing.” Items and activities associated with the cofradía, its hospital or chapel were construed as sacred and solemn: “the home of our beloved mother is not a frivolous thing” (Sell 2000: 350, Ord. 4; 355, Ord. 16; 356, Ord. 20; 1619).

Nahuatl ordinances pinpoint which ritual practices were embraced by Christianized native peoples. Fiestas required candles, but adding flowers (Ord. 2), which were cost-effective symbols of the sacred, life and beauty, emphasized the cofradía’s native constituency. Natural disasters inspired penitential (likely flagellant) processions (Ord. 7), which was a Popolocan Christian practice noted in the Anales and the Molina model. In the Molina manuscript, all penitential brethren were instructed to fast as well as march in flagellant processions whenever there was great sickness or many deaths in their hospital (Sell 2002: 111, Ord. 13, 1552).

Through the Nahuatl ordinances, founders established their own rules; they invited noble and poor indigenous residents to serve as brothers and sisters of light in masses and penitential processions, demonstrate charity, and receive a “good death.” The document was signed by six founders, who were principales and indios naturales, as well as the scribe, Indian governor, padre guardián, and the bishop, for a total of ten signatures
A license of foundation was promptly ceded by the bishop to the founders, represented by their lawyer (CSNJ III: 27r).

Then the bishop declared, “There is a need for ordinances,” even though they had just been presented in Nahuatl. Perhaps he had not intended to communicate, “These are inadequate. These are not ordinances.” But his remark initiated the creation of Spanish ordinances. In the process of translation, seven policies became fifteen. Key points were added and elaborated upon, but nothing was overruled or subsumed. At the end of the Spanish version, the bishop referred to “the other matter that was written in the Mexican tongue,” meaning Nahuatl (CSNJ III: 29v, 1595). This reference to the Nahuatl constitution may read a bit dismissive, but the bishop had acknowledged the legitimacy, if not the parity, of the original ordinances.

This situation is similar to that of Tula’s Holy Sacrament. After translating the 1570 Nahuatl ordinances, Schwaller (1989: 217-218) compared them to the Spanish version and assessed the texts’ relationship:

It is my belief that the constitution and ordinances were first written in Nahuatl, perhaps under the guidance of the Guardian of the Franciscan monastery in Tula, and then translated into Spanish. Some details that appear in the Nahuatl are lacking in the Spanish, likewise the Nahuatl has a richness of expression that the Spanish does not have.

The Tula Nahuatl constitution is brief in comparison to the Molina model and San Miguel Coyotlan ordinances. But the details in the Tula ordinances (22, the same number as in the Nativity of Our Lady’s Nahuatl version) dwarf the policies (7) penned by the scribe of the Holy Name of Jesus.

The last of the bishop’s concessions was a privilege that placed the principales and naturales on equal footing with other cofradías: “a license to meet in the convento of
San Francisco” (CSNJ III: 29r, 1595). Unlike the lay leaders of late colonial cofradías, these Popolocas lacked the chapel that they had anticipated (Ord. 7). But they were assured that their council meetings, masses, processions, and ritual items would always be held on sacred ground.

_Franciscan Adjustments to the Confraternal Charter_

In order to compare confraternal ideals and practices within and among native cofradías, I highlight only the policies that illustrate the ethnic, class, gender, and geographic dimensions of leadership, finances and membership. Ethnicity was never mentioned in the Nahuatl ordinances, but it was clearly a crucial issue in the act, even if presented rather abruptly. The Nahuatl ordinances welcomed brothers and sisters to partake in processions, vespers and the Eucharist. The Spanish version repetitively enjoined all members, including men and women. The only members highlighted in both versions were the stewards and the four carrying candles in festival processions, masses and whenever officials took the Eucharist to the homes of the sick or dying.

Was the Holy Name of Jesus less elitist than the Nativity of Our Lady? Status differences were revealed before and after the constitutions only, when listing the founders. The scribe initially contrasted principales and naturales, as in the Nativity. But the records suggest that lay leaders were local Indians first. After the elite founders, most members would be commoners. In that case, it was likely fruitless and unnecessary for lay leaders to emphasize class differences.

The 1595 cabildo did not reserve charitable activities to principales nor offer the poor discounts on masses, as seen in the Nativity’s 1581 ordinances. Dues were 4
tomes (Nahuatl version) or 4 reales (Spanish) for everyone, except for the founding members (all presumed to be nobles), wealthy and posthumous enlistees. Membership lists reveal that the fee ranged between 2 tomes and 1 peso (CSNJ I: 2v, 1615). Discounts for the poor mirrored those for indios cofrades in the Spaniards’ Holy True Cross, as if being Indian meant the same thing as being poor. Fee variation also reflects family units; spouses were charged less and children joined for free. In the Spanish version, the poor were only noteworthy as recipients of charity (Ord. 3).

The Spanish ordinances and ecclesiastic inspections reveal that friars and the bishop kept a close eye and tight hold on Popoloca officials, elections and finances. Absent from the Nahuatl original was a policy that allowed (and required) friars to attend council meetings, particularly during elections or the transfer of alms: “The chief and deputy stewards shall sit in the presence of the padre guardián or the person who dispenses the Holy Eucharist… to elect leaders and guard alms” (CSNJ IV: 27r, Ord. 2). The friar’s presence may have been well-received because he was there to administer the treasured sacrament. In a late-18th century bishop’s edict, native lay people were forbidden from dispensing sacraments, except when baptizing dying babies. The Eucharist was not entirely off-limits to lay people, but only in life or death scenarios.

In the Nahuatl (Ord. 4) and Spanish texts (Ord. 8), chief and deputy stewards were instructed to bring the sacrament, escorted by four brethren or ladies with torches, to the homes of the ill or dying. The Nahuatl version enjoined the priest, albeit only as “him” (Ord. 4), but he was omitted from the Spanish ordinance dealing with visiting the dying (Ord. 8). The friar was likely overlooked because everyone present would have known that he administered the rite of Extreme Unction.
Why was the surveillance of cabildo meetings instituted? Did Franciscans monitor cabildo pláticas (discussions), elections and finances in order to discourage corruption and disputes, or even advance Church interests? Friars would have promoted their role as helping, guiding or supervising patrons, but they seem more like paternalistic spies who wanted to ensure that their investment in indigenous Christians was sound. That way, native converts and their own church hierarchy would not come under the scrutiny of the bishop. Could the sacrament induce Popoloca officials to overlook a covert strategy? Was the Eucharist a hegemonic tool in the hands of the Church, wielded to secure a front-row seat to witness and influence local lay hierarchies in action? Did this arrangement lead council members to participate in their own domination? Unfortunately, there is insufficient evidence to support these interpretations.

It is clear that the head priest, rather than the founders, inserted the clause. He made certain to do so in a timely manner, situating the obligation right after the membership dues (Ord. 2). In case anyone might claim ignorance, the final policy reiterated the rule in detail: “When the elections of officials are held in the council meeting, the president or the padre guardián of the convento must be present. The provisor or visitador must be informed” (CSNJ III: 28v, Ord. 15).

Almost all local confraternal elections were sanctioned by the signature of a local ecclesiastic authority, who confirmed the results, and all electoral and financial records were periodically examined by the bishop’s emissary. But other cabildos did not create policies to require stewards to provide immediate notice to, and seek approval from, the bishop. Electoral results were to be announced to all members so that everyone would understand (Ord. 14). In the interest of political transparency, the transfer of power was
witnessed by past, current and future cabildos, many of whom would be among the 22 members of the voting council (all were native men and likely principales and vecinos naturales), as well as the padre guardián, and anyone else present at the annual election and festival of the Circumcision of Our Lord (January 1st).

Did the Church impose meeting supervision on indigenous cofradías only? This was the only time that the rule was communicated in a local constitution. But Our Lady of the Rosary, a casta sodality, was most heavily monitored. Molina’s lengthy description of the election of officials did not reference priests (Sell 2002: 101, Ord. 10), nor did the relevant obligation from San Miguel Coyotlan (Sell 2000: 351: Ord. 7). But omissions do not mean the absence of friars. Franciscans appear to encroach on all groups - Spanish, mulatto and native, mixed and female. But to Spanish lay leaders, cabildos were strictly closed affairs. In 1605, friars were specifically banned from interfering with the elections of the Spanish-led Holy True Cross. Priests were portrayed as outsiders and potential assailants on cabildo sovereignty. Popolocas and castas were more receptive to priests witnessing their deliberations, whether by choice or coercion.

What instigated the vigilance? The bishop of Tlaxcala and the friars may have interpreted officer reelection, nepotism and in-fighting as evidence of electoral fraud or chaos. But there was no evidence of intra-cabildo strife in the 16th century. Only casta leaders were ever removed for “electoral irregularities,” and even then, only temporarily. The Holy Name of Jesus’ Popolocas were urged to “come to peace” after any discord among them (Ord. 12), but officials were not specifically targeted, unlike the Spanish lay leaders of the Holy True Cross. Perhaps the rule was overlooked or friars were more concerned about the rivalries of Spaniards, who sometimes blamed each other for losses.
Beyond elections, resource management was a pressing concern for bishops and priests, especially by the 18\textsuperscript{th} century. The Church had a vested interest in cofradías remaining financially solvent. The revenue that priests earned from officiating masses was channeled into their own subsistence, churches and missions. Right away, in the second and third policies, the Spanish constitution addressed the safekeeping of alms: “Only the chief steward shall have access to alms. He must record in the book whenever goods are taken” (CSNJ III: 27v, Ord. 2-3).

On the next page, the bishop issued a warning against spending beyond what could be generated (in a given year). He also warned that the provisor or visitador would return to examine the books (CSNJ III: 29r, 1595). While inspections were standard protocol, the founding documents of other local cofradías did not emphasize these events. The message was reiterated two pages later: “The chief steward is required to not spend too much” (CSNJ III: 30v). Mayordomo and indio Gaspar Juarez showed the records of new members, possessions, alms, and expenses to the visitador general from Puebla, Don Alonso de Salvador Corona, in 1620 (CSNJ II: 13v). Writing in Spanish, the notario reported that the inspector had approved of the books’ contents.

Did Popoloca founders who distrusted one another institute the one-man fiscal policy? It is much more likely that the bishop and friars discounted Indians’ abilities to safeguard corporate funds and property. In terms of (re)distributing duties, local Spanish lay leaders were free to do whatever they wanted. The \textit{sindico fiscal} (treasurer) of the Holy True Cross could be a diputado, the mayordomo or even the escribano. But in the Holy Name of Jesus, Popoloca founders and/or the padre guardián preferred, or deemed it necessary, to authorize only one man. If anything went amiss and one individual handled
money matters, then there would be one place to look for retribution. Situating the policy right after the padre guardián’s oversight of council meetings and restating the mayordomo’s fiscal role after the constitution suggest that the principle emanated from the prerogatives of the bishop and friars, rather than those of Popoloca lay leaders.

I do not know if external annual reviews occurred in any or all of Tecamachalco’s cofradías, or if self-audits and periodic visitas were the only corrective measures in place. The hyper-vigilance involved in the transfer of wealth in other indigenous cofradías provides some perspective and context. Extraordinary oversight and ritual were instituted in San Miguel Coyotlan’s Our Lady of Solitude. The keys to the confraternal coffer were entrusted to one of two mayordomos and the prioste (Sell 2000: 354, Ord. 13, 1619). In Tula’s Holy Sacrament, a similar situation prevailed and the head friar examined outgoing officials at the end of the year:

Once they [the outgoing officials] have finished they will stand before the Father Guardian, and he will see if things have been done well or not. These things will be held in a chest with two locks. The majordomo will have one key to open and close the lock and the deputy will have another such that it will be impossible for them to open it except in the presence of the Father Guardian. It will be guarded by two constables and stored under the gold and white cross. (Schwaller 1989: 240, Ord. 2-3, 1570)

Despite interjections by priests or bishops, Popoloca stewards still framed their collective authority as immune from challenges by members and non-members alike. Infractions against ordinances, officials or members would be penalized: “All current and past members must obey the orders of the chief and deputy stewards, or the penalty will be payment of candle wax... If a member does not obey or is delinquent to the officials, he will be expelled after his second offense” (CSNJ III: 28r, Ord. 7, 13). When advising non-members to comply, lay leaders intimated that their authority extended beyond the
boundaries of the cofradía. The ordinances were less strongly worded than warnings issued by the Holy True Cross’ Spaniards in 1605. But the central message was the same: “We are sovereign. We are autonomous. Do not interfere.”

Resources, Obstacles and Strategies: Political Economy and Cultural Geography

In electoral and fiscal management, the Holy Name of Jesus diverged somewhat from its contemporaries. In Popoloca cofradías, reelection was common at their inception and again in the 18th century, during widespread confraternal decline. This was especially true in the final generation of the Nativity of Our Lady, perhaps because mayordomo were paid. But unpaid Spanish lay leaders also practiced reelection, nepotism, office rotation and inheritance.

There was relatively little reelection and nepotism (50%). Minimal reelection could be used to argue that the ecclesiastic supervision was successful. But it is just as likely that these Popoloca nobles and commoners preferred distributing their positions widely; officer prestige was tempered with large investments of time and labor. Positions do not appear to have been paid, which would remove some of the attraction for repeat candidates. Most reelection occurred after 1740, but much of the data (60 years) date to the end of the 17th and 18th centuries, so this trend may be just an illusion. The longest mayordomo run was seven years rather than two decades, that of a Manuel de la Cruz Juarez (1765-1771). Other reelected officeholders were indio Gaspar Juarez (1616-1620), Gaspar Alonso (1678-1682), indio natural Joseph de Gracia (1755-1757), and vecino natural Antonio Serrano (1762-1764). Juarez surfaced many times, as did other Spanish names seen in the Nativity, including Francisco, Luna and de los Santos.
Lone mayordomos were identified in the cofradía’s annual electoral results (1597-1779) as well as those of the Nativity of Our Lady (18th century). Between three and five men should have served at one time, but only one man controlled confraternal wealth and only his name was recorded. Andrés Matheo (1684, 1685 and 1689 mayordomo) was identified as a former deputy, so office rotation and/or promotion occurred, even if not memorialized in the books.

In at least 6 years (1616, 1639, 1669, 1682, 1689, and 1758), the election of dual mayordomos conformed to Nahua and Popoloca confraternal protocol. Cacique principal and vecino natural Geronimo Joseph de los Angeles was joined by Felipe Xuares from the doctrina of San Miguel Xaltepeque in 1758. Living outside of the parish may have impeded the second man from addressing urgent matters, leading to job and title-sharing. De los Angeles was elected in the final year tracked by scribes (1779). The native nobleman’s youth in 1758 may have required a co-mayordomía. Dual mayordomos may also be related to an equal share of votes or replacement of an older or ailing official. Support for the latter came from a few examples of two mayordomos who were elected in the same year being listed in separate parts of the records.

In a few instances, names, titles and places of residence indicate that the men who led Popoloca cofradías moved in similar social and geographic circles. Spanish authorities were probably unaware that the men who led Nahua cofradías also represented their tlaxilacalli and rotated “offices among themselves on a predetermined basis” (Sell 2002: 52). Through this ancient closed system, the same individuals moved across the flexible boundaries of cofradías and town cabildos. A few mayordomos alternated between San Francisco and the Nativity of Our Lady in the 1580s. But the evidence for
this occurring between the latter and the Holy Name of Jesus is less convincing, mostly because their electoral data are not fully contemporaneous. Antonio de los Santos was too common a name to suggest that the Nativity’s leader (1750s) also led the Holy Name of Jesus in the 1730s. But mayordomo Geronimo Joseph de los Angeles (1758, 1779) assuredly led San Joseph (1748, 1763), a barrio cofradía. Joseph de Gracia, an indio, found success first in the Holy Name of Jesus (1755-1757), then in San Joseph (1761).

Popoloca lay leaders called the same communities home. Many officers and candidates resided in the altepetl and pueblo of Tecamachalco. Men named de la Cruz or Santiago likely resided in Barrio de la Cruz or the native hamlet of Santiago Alseseca, or at least their ancestors had settled there. On the few occasions when place of residence was annotated, it was always an indigenous community. When the scribes of the Holy Name of Jesus (1616) and the Nativity of Our Lady (1701) introduced Acatzingo, it was always in connection with Popoloca lay leaders. Acatzingo was one of the most self-consciously indigenous barrios or pueblos in the area.

Popoloca lay leaders also shared similar ethnic and socio-economic statuses: vecinos naturales, indios and some caciques principales. In the 1750s, scribes employed by the Holy Name of Jesus, the Nativity, and San Joseph began identifying certain mayordomos as caciques principales, indios naturales and vecinos naturales with unprecedented regularity. This transition is likely associated with a particular scribe and/or this generation, rather than individual stewards seeking recognition of their titles. In the Holy Name of Jesus, many leaders would have been nobles and virtually all would have been indios and vecinos naturales. But ethnic and class identifiers were applied in only 25% of the cases. All but two of the incidents were post-1750: indio Gaspar Juarez.
(1616-1620) and the 1671 mayordomo, Don Jusephe de San Juan de Molina; San Juan and Molina were two of Tecamachalco’s agricultural industry-based barrios.

Perhaps the most significant discovery is the employment of a female scribe. In addition to the Nativity of Our Lady’s *escribana* (1728), a much earlier example was found here: Maria Xuarez was identified as an escribana in a 1612 membership list. Both sexes were eligible to serve, even at the same time: two male scribes joined and served shortly after Maria Xuarez (CSNJII: 6r-8r, 1612-1616). Scribes do not feature prominently in accounts of day-to-day confraternal business, only constitutions and petitions. At this time, *escribanos* recorded most matters in Nahuatl, but by the 1670s, most *notarios* wrote in Spanish (note the name change). By 1700, notaries and priests wrote virtually everything in Spanish. Maria Xuarez was an india who could write in Nahuatl because she served in an era when the cofradía’s scribes wrote in Nahuatl.

Disorganized records, which plagued the Holy Name of Jesus, obscure profit from alms and corporate lands, the acquisition of ritual items and over-spending on fiestas. Subsequent lay leaders, priests, inspectors, and bishops may have found the (im)balance of cargo, descargo and alcanze to be as enigmatic and overwhelming as I did. Various chief stewards and scribes were prone to mismanaging funds, misplacing property and leaving misleading accounts. By 1591, Popoloca lay leaders had already invited negative attention from the Bishop of Tlaxcala when San Francisco’s debts had to be covered by the sale of ritual items (Ibid: Exp. 987, Foja 238, 1591). While the Nativity of Our Lady’s mayordomos rewarded themselves, they often failed to compensate priests for their services in the 18th century. A few of the Holy True Cross’ Spanish stewards accused their predecessors of theft or poor stewardship, but not until the 17th century.
In the cofradía’s final century (1676-1775), officials distributed more funds than they amassed in virtually every year (91%). Only three years (1767, 1772-1773), all falling within the cofradía’s final decade, resulted in a small reserve being passed on to the following year (17-30 pesos). The two men credited did not spend significantly less than their indebted colleagues. But they likely rented out confraternal lands, safeguarded after 1755, secured generous donations from members and/or volunteered their own funds. Both mayordomos were reelected, perhaps in recognition of their extraordinary efforts and fiscal talents. After Manuel de la Cruz Suarez produced a reserve in his third term, he served another four years (1768-1771). Indio principal Miguel Antonio Juarez made a profit in both of his terms (1772-1773). In the final generation, most mayordomos still owed money but they also amassed more than their predecessors.

Overspending was likely unavoidable but dangerous because it placed the cofradía in deeper debt to priests, which invited more Spanish paternalism and ecclesiastic interventions. Officials forged ahead for two centuries, making apologies for their shortcomings but managing to remain indigenous and at the lay level. Each mayordomo was held accountable for the year’s business. Outgoing officials who collected little and/or spent too much (they usually did both) sought God’s forgiveness: “se pida perdón” (CSNJ II: 63r, 1682; IV: 32v, 1760). Lay leaders likely also apologized to other officials, members, the witnessing priest, and ecclesiastic inspectors. During the 1774 inspection, fiscal irresponsibility, identified as spending too much and collecting minimal alms, was framed as “an offense to God” (CSNJ IV: 51r). The Molina model had established the mismanagement of confraternal resources as a sin and evidence that the offender was a “minister of the devil” (Sell 2002: 77; Ord. 5, 1552).
In 1758, cacique principal and vecino natural Geronimo Joseph de los Angeles, who co-led with Felipe Xuares, went beyond asking to be pardoned for the year’s expenses and lack of alms - he “made a donation” (CSNJ IV: 31r). I doubt that the mayordomo could have given as much as he overspent (350%) that year, which set a new confraternal record (109 pesos). But memorializing the gesture suggests that the donation was large in comparison to the cargo of 1761 (4 pesos, 5 reales), which was less than five new memberships. Decline had begun.

The fairest critique is that some men failed to do even more with even less. When Bishop Manuel Fernandez de Santa Cruz inspected the books in 1677, he “pardoned the said chief steward [Cristobal de Guzman] for the said reserve… due to [the confraternity] being poor” (CSNJ II: 47v). Alcanze was meager (81 pesos), but Guzman still won reelection. In 1676, only 38 pesos were amassed from alms, member dues and renting out a señora’s lands, likely a noble cofrada, current or deceased (CSNJ II: 47r). In 1675, Gaspar Juarez had brought in only 30 pesos but “he did not rent out the land,” so the rental may have yielded 8 pesos (CSNJ II: 54r).

Scribes left few records of land administration or revenue. Properties were written about only after new tenants took over or significant profit was made. Solares (small land plots) were first acknowledged in 1675. In that year’s inventario de bienes, forty goats were itemized (CSNJ III). There were no more data until 1756 when Joseph Gracia oversaw “the lands of Santiago Orea, on the road to Tlacotepec” and a maguey field in the barrio of San Sebastián (CSNJ IV: 29r). Even with the agricultural or rental income, the steward spent 70% more than he collected.
Mayordomos appear to have experienced the same hardships and lack of land titles as their counterparts in the Nativity of Our Lady. Right before the cofradía’s closure, the scribe noted the solares donated for its income: “there is land in Barrio San Sebastián without maguey or titles” (CSNJ IV: 53r, 1778). The next year, the last mayordomo, Geronimo Joseph de los Angeles, inventoried lands on the edge of a ravine, huehueatlauhyo [a big canyon or really steep valley] in the hills that are named Cuahtepec… The lands were never institutionalized due to a lack of diligence on the part of past chief stewards. (CSNJ IV: 126v, 1779)

Even at the end, scribes employed Spanish and Nahuatl to communicate certain concepts; in this case, it was to argue that these were ancient lands long held by indigenous communities. But Popoloca lay leaders also chastised their predecessors or at least allowed their scribes or priests to do so.

Land was bequeathed to Popoloca cofradías through the wills of male and female landowners, perhaps caciques or at least principales. Four additional solares were listed:

To the east - the plot of widow Maria Gertrudis, located within the boundaries of the barrio of San Joseph; to the west - the plot of Antonio Serrano [1762-1764 mayordomo]; to the north - the plot of Joseph Porras; to the south - that of the Lady of the Nativity, bequeathed by the deceased Juan Garcia Siliceo. (CSNJ IV: 126v, 1779)

Acquiring and listing the four plots based on the four cardinal directions, also seen within multiethnic barrio sodalities, may have carried special meaning for the Popolocas. The entry was likely written in the parish church because the San Joseph barrio property, mentioned first, is indeed located a few blocks to its east. The final property belonged to the officials of the Nativity of Our Lady, which shared lands with two other native cofradías in 1755. Lay leaders from multiple cofradías collaborated through corporate landholdings in order to extend their devotional activities. Most of the
listed properties do not appear to be new acquisitions. The plots were probably sold and then the profits were used to pay off the cofradías’ debts to the Church.

**Popoloca Investment and Posturing through Ritual Celebrations, Items and Spaces**

As in other cofradías, the largest expenses were the titular festival, periodic masses and processions. Annual expenses amounted to a minimum of 30 pesos. Almost all of it went directly from the confraternal coffer to the priests, who often acknowledged payment of their services in Nahuatl (CSNJ I: 7v, 1625). Spanish ordinances outlined the January 1st fiesta, with its evening mass and procession, and perhaps a meal for the presiding priest(s), but nothing more:

The titular festival is the Circumcision of the Lord. All brethren and sisters [ermanos y ermanas] shall attend Vespers, with four carrying four lit candles. There shall be a mass the next day, in which the members [cofrades] will carry the insignias and image [of baby Jesus]. On the day of the Circumcision of the Lord, eight pesos will be taken out and given to the Fathers Priests for the celebration. (CSNJ III: 27v, Ord. 5-6, 1595)

Account records indicate that by 1676, the fiesta, with sermon (mass) and procession, cost 12 pesos. The modest increase (50%) shows rare and impressive restraint by Popoloca lay leaders and/or an enduring fiscal arrangement with priests.

Various masses, whether holy day, sung, general, or members’ funerals, account for a lot of the annual expenses. Bi-monthly masses added up to 12 pesos per year:

“There shall be sung masses for all members, living and dead. All members must come or pay half a pound of wax. Two pesos of alms shall be paid to the fathers of this convento” (CSNJ III: 28r, Ord. 10, 1595). Then there were the funeral masses: “When a member dies, all brethren shall go the burial or pay half a pound of candle wax. The burial will be paid for from the goods [bienes]. All members shall pray the Rosary” (CSNJ III: 28r,
Ord. 9, 1595). Account records reveal that priests charged the cofradía 1 peso per funeral mass. The number of members who might die in a given year was unknown, so officials would find it difficult to predict how many funds to reserve.

Processional protocol, paraphernalia and prices, for town-wide events or among cofrades celebrating the Christ child, mostly went unstated. Lay leaders and members partook in at least four processions per year: the Circumcision of Our Lord (January 1st), Holy Thursday, Holy Friday, and Christmas Vespers. Principales and naturales organized their own annual procession, which coincided with the cofradía’s fiesta and election. Holy Week penitential processions brought cofrades and the cabildo into contact and cooperation with those of San Francisco, the Nativity of Our Lady, the Holy True Cross, and the Holy Sacrament. At these events, Popolocan penitents interacted with their neighbors, residents of other towns and visiting dignitaries.

The Christmas procession and vespers integrated virtually every resident of the altepetl, town and parish. When the entire community was involved, it was inappropriate and logistically impossible for the four torchbearers to accompany the priest in the procession and mass (CSNJ III: 27v, Ord. 4, 1595). Other lay leaders, particularly Spaniards, may have insisted on their members marching closest to the priest and the Eucharist. But each confraternal council may have sponsored its own smaller celebration. Through its dedication to the naming, circumcision and image of the Christ child, the Holy Name of Jesus may have dominated Tecamachalco’s Christmas festivities. At a minimum, its members merited their own festival.
Penitential brethren fulfilled the obligations of brethren of blood (self-flagellation) and light (candles). The Nahuatl (Ord. 7) and Spanish ordinances reveal that additional flagellant processions and masses could occur in the event of great suffering:

If there is illness, famine or drought, the members shall meet with the padre guardián or the president of this convento. There shall be a procession of blood with lit candles. Members shall bring insignias and the image [the Christ child]. (CSNJ III: 28r, Ord. 11)

Popolocas engaged in self-flagellation in a public forum, well in advance of Spaniards’ attempts to exclude their native brethren. In 1605, the Holy True Cross’ Spanish cabildo targeted indios cofrades for their insignias and marching out of sequence. But as early as 1557, Popolocas partook in flagellant processions under the authorization of Franciscan friars and the bishop of Tlaxcala (Celestino Solís and Reyes García 1992: 36, Item 118, 1557; 86, Item 469, 1581). In public displays of piety, penitents whipped themselves in reaction to illness and earthquakes, pleading for mercy and demonstrating gratitude to God: “There was sickness in Tecamachalco, and so a procession was made. Blood came out of places” (Ibid: 76, 1576). The bleeding resulted from the epidemic, rather than self-flagellation. The Holy Name of Jesus’ Popolocas engaged in flagellant marches after 1595, but any who enlisted in the Spaniards’ Holy True Cross learned that their whips, insignias and tunics would not be welcome among their Spanish brethren.

Torches or candles, whips, tunics, insignias, and the image of the Christ child were all incorporated in solemn ceremonies. But the processional items listed in the inventories were insufficient to be shared among many penitents. Thus, wearing or carrying ritual paraphernalia may have been restricted to only a few members. There is no documentation of lay leaders’ roles in processions and masses. Mayordomos and diputados, directing their fellow members, were second only to the priest(s) and the
officials of other local cofradías in processions. They may have rotated privileges, such as ringing the bell, raising the banner and carrying the image(s) owned by the cofradía, amongst themselves or their members. But bearing torches was never attributed or restricted to officials. Perhaps any distinguished member who was in good standing and willing to contribute candle wax or alms could be one of the four torchbearers.

Scribes never specified how much was spent on acquiring candle wax for nighttime processions, vespers or funeral masses, nor did they document the purchase of powder for decorating processional routes. Officials and members clearly partook in the Eucharist at mass, but also on their feast day and whenever attending to dying members. There was no record of spending on wine, which contrasts sharply with the Spanish officials of the Holy True Cross, who spent more on wine than wax and all other processional items combined. Priests likely acquired and provided the wine for the sacrament rather than entrusting the Popolocas with it.

Half a century into its existence, the cofradía laid claim to few ritual items: a tunic, dress, and blouse, presumably all for an image of the Christ child (CSNJ II: 37r, 1650). In 1675, the signatures of four officials witnessed a new crown and torch, and that a processional banner was acquired by mayordomo Gaspar Juarez (CSNJ II: 54v). In 1683, Nicolas Garcia attested to the veracity of his Nahuatl-language inventory, including a robe, crown, purple tunic, bell, candle wax, and insignias of San Francisco, San Juan and the Resurrection. The primary witness was choirmaster Hypolito Rodriguez but signatures of past and present officials reveal that stewards were held accountable by colleagues and voting council members (CSNJ II: 63v-64v).
The cofradía was not entirely impoverished in its final generation. In 1765, an altar-piece, two images of the Christ child, three pairs of white trousers, more clothing, a silver communion platter, two bells, two banners, and three crosses (processional) were stored in the parish church. In 1780, Dr. Manuel de Olmedo, the “Choice Theologian” of the “Ancient College” of Puebla came to examine the cofradía’s final possessions (CSNJ V: 52v). The most sacred and valuable items were listed, including two images of baby Jesus, clothing, silver items, and the solares.

An image of the Lord of the Resurrection, never mentioned before, was to be kept in “la parroquía de los caciques.” This is the only time that the parish or its church was identified as the patrimony of native nobles. Not even the Anales’ indigenous author(s) would have dared to make such a claim. At the close of the 18th century, Popoloca lay leaders were still referring to themselves as caciques and the rightful owners of the once-native community. Unlike their 17th-century neighbors in the barrios of San Joseph, San Sebastián and San Nicolás, the noblemen who led the Holy Name of Jesus never erected their own chapels. They failed to manage their properties and funds long and well enough to leave a mark on Tecamachalco’s sacred landscape. Perhaps that is why they underscored their legitimate ties to the parroquía, even at the very end.

*Ethnic, Class, Family and Gender Relations in Membership Lists*

Scribes applied greater detail in these membership lists than in most local cofradías. Only barrio sodalities (San Joseph, San Sebastián and San Nicolás) were as well-documented. Data (952 memberships) span 1612 to 1762; the first (1595-1611) and
final books (1763-1779) are missing. Until 1680, most entries were penned in Nahuatl and listed out of chronological order.

A variety of Popoloca nobles and commoners, Spaniards and mestizos (1616-1687) joined, but ethnicity was recorded in less than 2% of the cases (16). No Afro-Mexicans were identified. Spaniards, including a priest, a criollo and couples, were most common in the 1670s and 1680s, when multi-ethnic, barrio cofradías arose. Their presence violated the 1595 taboo. As time went on, most of New Spain’s cofradías may have become more ethnically inclusive. It took only two decades here; mestizos became cofrades as early as 1616. As descendants of native peoples, mestizos were likely more attractive and less threatening than Spaniards or mulattoes. Spanish priests and other residents might be welcomed for their prestige. When ethnicity was mentioned, it was always in relation to non-indios. The overwhelming majority of members were native men, women and children (piltzinli, piltontli). But I cannot argue that 98% of members were indios naturales simply because ethnicity was not recorded. Certain titles and occupations, such as caciques, a governor, a fiscal, a choirmaster, a pintor mexicano (a Nahua painter), a carpenter, and another member’s servant, primarily point to Popolocas.

Residence was listed more often than ethnic or socio-economic status. In addition to Tecamachalco’s multi-ethnic barrios of Jonetlan, San Andrés, San Joseph, San Nicolás, and San Sebastián, there were members from Acatzingo, Quechula, San Miguel Xaltepeque, Santiago Alseseca, Tepeaca, and Tlacotepec. All but Tepeaca, a larger doctrina and cabecera, were nearby settlements demographically dominated by indigenous peoples. Scribes did not specify any haciendas or estancias, but all towns were surrounded by farms, where a mixture of Spanish, Indian and casta members
resided as landowners, laborers and domestics. New Spain’s Spaniards and castas resided in close proximity, often in the same household. But indigenous peoples mostly resided in their own semi-autonomous villages and barrios (Von Germeten 2006: 190).

Numerically, the Holy Name of Jesus was among the most gender-balanced and family-oriented cofradías in town. Perhaps this is due to something unique about native cofradías or the objects of their devotion (the Christ Child or the Virgin Mary), or it reflects the confraternal family model. Hierarchies were emphasized less here than in the Nativity of Our Lady (class) or the Spaniards’ Holy True Cross (ethnic, gender).

The cofradía was clearly a family affair. One out of every three members joined as half of a marital unit (314). Many couples enlisted with children; once an entire page was filled with the first names of the Rodriguez family, whose mass enlistment likely overwhelmed the scribe and other officials. Children and youth were commonly welcomed, even among the founders (3/22 or 14%). The youngest child who enlisted was two years old. Perhaps devotion to the naming and circumcision of Jesus led members to embrace infants, their own or their neighbors’, as cofradés. Children were incapable of appreciating rituals or fulfilling confraternal obligations. But parents would be comforted knowing that their children, as cofradés, were promised a “good death.”

Membership was evenly distributed among males (52%) and females (48%). Out of the members who joined without (or before or after) a spouse, there were only 28 more men (333) than women (305). Almost all ‘extra’ men were contributed at the founding ceremony, attended by 22 males and one couple. After the cofradía was established, there was no gender dominance, at least not numerically. In keeping with the Nahuatl and
Spanish ordinances’ emphasis on female members and informal leaders, membership lists attest to a strong female presence.

Women’s charitable contributions were not celebrated in these records. But an ecclesiastic inspector identified destitute women as the chief recipients of cofrades’ generosity: “With the contributions of the Locals, which have been of considerable quantities with respect to their limited abilities. And what is more, they have pensioned many poor women” (CSNJ IV: 51r, 1774). Assistance through a dowry, subsistence and/or a Christian education promised better prospects to widows and orphans, whether a suitable marriage or position within a household. At the end of this rare commendation, the ecclesiastic inspector called upon lay leaders to continue their efforts to “alleviate, to the extent that it is possible, the said locals.”

Lay leaders and members from the Holy Name of Jesus, the Nativity of Our Lady and four other groups were credited with the act of charity: “In the district of San Joseph, those of Our Lady of Solitude, in San Sebastián – Our Lady of Sorrows, and in San Nicolás – Santa Isabel, and the Holy Sepulcher in Cavalry.” Sponsorship of less fortunate women is one of few facts known about local female lay leaders. Our Lady of Solitude and Our Lady of Sorrows were barrio and chapel-based hermandades (minor sisterhoods). There are no records for Santa Isabel, but it should be a minor devotional group led by barrio women. The Holy Sepulcher of Calvary’s members built a chapel (El Calvario) and elected dual Spanish and native cabildos.

Popoloca cofradías were founded more than a century before the other sodalities involved and led by men. But their late colonial lay leaders sought to pool their meager resources with latecomers to Tecamachalco’s confraternal scene in order to support
women helping women. Despite the 1774 inspector’s recognition of Popoloca lay leaders’ long-time service to the community, the Holy Name of Jesus was soon closed (1779) and its ritual items were sold and/or donated (1780). In this respect, the cofradía de naturales and its partner sisterhoods (1776) were less successful than the Nativity of Our Lady (1803) and other groups, whatever their ethnicity.

**Conclusions: Defining and Situating Popoloca Cofradías**

How do Popoloca and Spanish cofradías measure up? Their lay leaders expressed a great deal of self-definition or corporate consciousness, both within and outside of their organizations. Confraternal officials presented themselves primarily in contrast to other groups. Spaniards targeted “Indians” while Popolocan elites focused on the “little commoners” and “the poor” and distanced themselves from Afro-Mexicans and Spaniards, except for their patron priests.

Total autonomy was impossible for anyone associated with cofradías. Spanish priests closely supervised native and Afro-Mexican cabildos. Spaniards lost an insignia dispute with the locals. Confraternal leaders and even local priests were expected to respond quickly and fully to all visitadores’ inquiries and bishops’ pronouncements. Only bishops “had the jurisdiction to confirm the election of chief stewards or treasurers and to name ecclesiastic inspectors, in front of whom the administrators had to produce their accounts” (Zafra Oropeza 1996: 50). Authority, even that of the friars’ was always circumscribed; Tomás Gerson and other elite native officials challenged Franciscans’ appointments and admonishments. But too many cofradías and few priests meant that indigenous lay leaders could color outside of the lines.
In terms of elections and finances, Spaniards were afforded greater leeway than the Popolocas. This double standard persisted, even though neither group could claim to be particularly competent caretakers. Throughout New Spain, excessive spending was largely the product of staging “ostentatious festivals” and processions that were unwieldy “spiritual, economic and social” entities (Ibid: 120-121). This widespread and irresistible practice invited “economic crises” upon mayordomos, cofradías, parish communities, and even the Church (Ibid: 81). Popolocas’ access to communal and members’ lands, their measured acquisition and delayed loss of ritual items suggest that Spanish lay leaders could have learned a thing or two from the Popolocas. But native abilities and resourcefulness were often downplayed and lamented by Spaniards, whether confraternal officials, Franciscan friars, secular clergymen, ecclesiastic inspectors, bishops, or even the Popolocas themselves (“el mayordomo se pida perdón”).

When compared to Spanish lay leaders, Popoloca scribes and lay leaders emphasized place and class distinctions, families, and gender parity more than ethnic and sexual antagonism. It was entirely logical for indigenous peoples to cultivate ties to space more than Spaniards or Afro-Mexicans. While early colonial Spanish mayordomos repetitively invested in the convento, Popolocas focused their energies on the hospital and confraternal lands. As the land’s original inhabitants and altepetl rulers, Popoloca noblemen who led cofradías had centuries-old ties to the area. The Popolocas shared a vested interest in associating their individual and communal lands with sacred work, images and celebrations. Popolocan mayordomos administered solares, sheep and maguey donated by Popoloca men and women. Popolocan scribes mentioned members’ places of residence more frequently. Popoloca cofradías united Tecamachalco with
Acatzingo and other subject native towns and barrios. Within and among cofradías, spatial ties and separations were real as well as symbolic, and they were closely linked to class and ethnicity.

Ethnicity was not stressed in ordinances, elections and memberships because it was almost a given. Despite enlisting some Spaniards and mestizos, all lay leaders and most members would be indios. As a large subordinate group, Popolocas may have strategically emphasized their connections to pre-conquest titles and lands rather than their ethnic identity. Publicly constructing one’s ethnicity in opposition to the Spaniards and putting it to paper would be risky and futile. Xenophobic statements were unlikely to be approved by ecclesiastic authorities and would only invite unwanted attention or rivalry from equally powerful or even dominant groups.

Gender was not divisive within Popoloca cofradías, whether due to Pre-Columbian gender complementarity or less emphasis on flagellation. Native and Afro-Mexican cofradías reportedly integrated women better than did Spanish organizations (Von Germeten 2006: 44). The male-female ratio was much more balanced in Popoloca cofradías than in the Spaniards’ Holy True Cross. But all scribes downplayed women’s contributions, if not their needs, at least in the beginning (16th century). Except for two female scribes, four ladies, land donors, and some casicas, the numerous women admitted into Tecamachalco’s native cofradías simply faded into the background. Women and men exhibited piety and charity at the hospital and funeral masses but also fulfilled informal leadership positions. Scribes framed native women as an integral part of their families and cofradías, but they could do much more to unveil and honor women’s roles.
New Spain’s cofradías were well-suited to elite lay leaders’ sense of noblesse oblige. The Popolocas’ notion of class differences and responsibilities may reflect attempts by caciques and principales to hold on to a last vestige of usefulness and authority within their communities. By running hospitals, supporting destitute women and burying the dead, native lords demonstrated that they were still relevant to their families, neighbors, constituents, and to the Spaniards.

Popoloca lay leaders were not necessarily more classist and regionalist, or less racist and sexist, than their Spanish counterparts. Regardless of ethnicity and generation, lay leaders’ main foci were families (real and fictive), splendid fiestas and salvation through charity and penance. Elite Popoloca men acted like “little fathers.” Similar to paternalistic priests, they safeguarded their own patrimonies or legacies on behalf of past, present and future generations of Popoloca spiritual leaders. With Popoloca cofradías, the stakes were high; the conversion of the Indians and the peace of the colonies partially rested on cofradías serving the functions assigned to them by ecclesiastic authorities. That is why Popoloca lay leaders had to be watched and reined in, not only for their own good, but for that of the Church, State and colonial Mexican society. In Tecamachalco, the great experiment of Indian cofradías appeared to be working, at least for now.
Footnote

#1: When there were no satisfactory Nahuatl equivalents, Spanish was used: hermanos, Santa Cofradía, Dios, ermita, procession, and penitencia. Barry D. Sell (2002: 7) observed that “once in Nahua hands [Spanish] loans could change their meaning as well as their spellings.” Abbreviations of frequently-used Spanish words were also common: Herm for hermanos, Pn for pueblo, as was shorthand for saints’ names: Mn for Mary.

Primary Sources

Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City; Documental Group: *Indios* and *Iglesias*

Petitions relating to Tecamachalco’s native leaders and commoners, 16th-18th centuries

Parish Archive of Tecamachalco, Puebla, Mexico; Documental Group: *Disciplinar*

Confraternity of the Holy Name of Jesus, 1595-1779 (Leg. 2, 4 books)

(membership, election and accounting records, inventories, constitutions, and visitations)
This map shows Tecamachalco’s relationships to some of the towns that are documented in parish records. (Source: Government of Mexico, map posted on-line)
This map of Tecamachalco’s urban plan shows the traza, the barrios of San Sebastián (NW), San Antonio (SW), San Nicolás (E), and La Villa (SE), and the roads to San Mateo Tlaixpan (N), San José Tuzuapan (N), and Tochtepec (SW). The locations of churches and barrio chapels, shown by letters, were added after my pedestrian survey.
The Founding of a Spanish Town and Confraternity: Population Matters

The long trajectory of the Cofradía de la Santa Veracruz (1575-1809) reflects evolution in demography, lay spirituality, social stratification, and ethnic politics. While numerically inconsequential, Spanish men dominated through their centrally-located homes, leadership positions and resourceful cofradías. The self-proclaimed cofradía de españoles was a model for its contemporaries and successors. Cofrades and non-members who went on to form their own groups engaged in interactions of conformity and conflict, coexistence and competition.

A small group, yet a relatively large proportion of the town’s Spanish residents, founded the Holy True Cross in 1575. The initial membership, recorded prior to the ratification of the charter, was 27. Widespread illiteracy, regardless of class, ethnicity or gender, is supported by many attendees signing with an X or symbol of the cross. The signatures likely represent only a subset of the founders, due to the ceremonial nature of the foundation, in which only officials, local dignitaries and other key players were acknowledged publicly. There was no record of women, perhaps because cofrades’ wives, sisters, daughters, and unattached women were not full members; women could not be blood penitents (ASV IV: 3r, Ord. 7, 1605). If admitted entry, any woman present, a founding member’s wife, would be treated as superfluous. The founders were presumably all Spanish-born or descended. No indios, mestizos or other castas were noted. Any mestizos or castizos present had successfully “passed” as Spaniards.
The 27 male founders (1575) represented a quarter of Tecamachalco’s Spaniards (1580): “[There are] 100 Spanish residents, who have their houses and living quarters amongst those of the natives, even though, for the most part, [they reside] within the [town] boundary and the grid plan of the said plaza” (Acuña 1984: 236). Throughout New Spain, many españoles resided in the traza (town center) or on estates, at least part-time. Encomenderos and mayordomos, whether they were españoles or mestizos, males or females, often lived amongst their indigenous and casta employees. Local baptismal records and parisioner registries reveal that most indios resided on farms, in subject towns, and in barrios on the outskirts of town. Female commoners, whether indias or castas, served as domestics in Spanish households in the traza and barrios.

Surrounded on all sides by indios and eventually castas, españoles turned to the institution of cofradías for solace. Spanish lay leaders later claimed to belong to the community’s dominant, oldest and largest cofradía. Overtly dominated by one sex and ethnic group - male Spaniards, the cofradía was symbolically identified with a ritual icon - the Holy True Cross, and spaces - the Ex-Convento, followed by the Parish Church of San Sebastián, which capitalized on the interfacing zócalo (plaza). After the mid-17th century, scribes claimed that the Holy True Cross was founded in the parish church but previous scribes identified the Monasterio as the host church. Whether intentional or accidental, scribes’ neglect of the cofradía’s foundation within an earlier religious structure served to emphasize a connection to the town’s current religious center.

A wealth of detailed documents (8 books) paints a vivid picture of the complex business of running a cofradía in colonial Mexico. Membership, electoral and financial data are most useful when treated as reported practices contrasted with the policies or
ideals extolled in ordinances. I primarily focus on the inclusionary and exclusionary rhetoric of two charters. The first is the group’s foundational text, approved by the bishop of Tlaxcala in 1575. An amended constitution was ratified as confraternal policy in 1605. The revisions include several new ordinances as well as editing that reflect the evolving concerns of confraternal hierarchies.

Waves of Spanish settlement and Christianization shaped Tecamachalco’s physical and cultural landscapes. Between 1541 and 1641, Tecamachalco fell under the bishopric of Tlaxcala and the spiritual tutelage of the Franciscans, who dominated evangelization efforts in the region (Archicofradía de la Santa Veracruz, Book III: 54r, 1605). Native land was appropriated, native labor was exploited, native hearts and minds were evangelized, and artificial communities were created and pacified. Spaniards forced the locals to resettle in their lowland agricultural center.

As Tecamachalco grew in territory, bureaucracy, socio-economic and ethnic diversity, its population fell. At the time of the first confraternal foundations (1563-1590), locals were recovering from three major epidemics (1520, 1542-1543 and 1576; Acuña 1984: 231; Celestino Solís and Reyes García 1992: 28, 76). In 2000, 60,000 inhabitants still failed to match pre-conquest levels. Drawing on tribute censuses, Jack Licate (1981: 44) estimated the pre-conquest (1519) population at 159,000. By 1568, there was an 84% drop to 25,000, with 3,939 tributaries in 1570. Tecamachalco accounted for nearly a third (28%) of the tributaries in central-eastern Puebla, indicating a large and/or productive community. Subject towns (Tlacotepec, San Salvador El Seco, Aljojuca, Chalchicomula) and Quecholac contributed only 201 tributaries. By 1580, the population had fallen further (20,000). At this time, Tecamachalco was a cabecera (head
town) that oversaw 29 aldeas (villages). The Relaciones geográficas provides an estimate of 7,000 vecinos naturales and 100 vecinos españoles (1.4%; Acuña 1984: 230, 236, 239). These numbers likely represent male heads of household, not all residents.

Indios and non-indios were counted in the censuses, but there are no data on ethnicity, sex or age. Colonial census takers faced linguistic and cultural barriers with sometimes absentee or evasive residents. Due to lack of access and cooperation, the size, shape and distribution of the locals might have been rather amorphous and potentially unknowable. Population estimates may reflect ideals or best guesses rather than actual counts based on systematic census events.

Tecamachalco’s share of the regional population was consistent for at least 60 years. Then it jumped by 17% sometime between 1581 and 1595. Despite continued population decline (14,000 in 1595), the town and farms in the valley received a large influx of Spaniards in comparison to nearby areas (Israel 1975: 32). In other words, there would have been more Spanish residents ruled by the Holy True Cross’ 1605 charter in comparison to the 1575 original.

In 1641, secular clergymen transformed the former Popoloca altepetl and pueblo de españoles into a parroquia. Ecclesiastic authorities in nearby Tepeaca oversaw Tecamachalco’s religious administration under the new bishopric, which was centered in Puebla de los Angeles (ASV IV: 2v, 1605). By 1700, Tecamachalco was recognized as its own partido (district), doctrina and comisario (judicial station) of the Holy Office of the Inquisition (ASV VII: 11v). By 1700, españoles and castas formed about 15% of baptized parishioners. Despite immigration and intermarriage, the local Popolocas, the
more dominant Nahuas and/or even the transplanted Otomí formed a huge majority well into the 18th century (footnote #1).

### Population Estimates Derived from 16th-Century Tribute Censuses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Regional Population</th>
<th>Residents of Tecamachalco</th>
<th>Share of Regional Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1519</td>
<td>276,000</td>
<td>159,000</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1568</td>
<td>43,000</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1580</td>
<td>35,000</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1595</td>
<td>19,000</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source - Licate 1981: 44)

### The Strategies of Spanish and Criollo Lay Leaders: Feigning Antiquity and Superiority

The cofradía’s inception and initial development, including claims to antiquity and authority, merit a closer inspection. Here is the Act of foundation (ASV I: 1r, 1575):

Year 1575. Book of the confraternity of the penitents of the Holy True Cross, and that is in this monastery of the glorious Saint Francis of this town of Tecamachalco, which was granted a license to unite from the illustrious and reverend Don Antonio Morales de Molina, Bishop of this bishopric of Tlaxcala, as it appears ahead. In this book are the ordinances of the said members and the brethren, and members who are seated, and entrance fees of members, and alms, and that which is handed over, and naming of officials, and earnings and the expenditures of stewards, as are in the said book.

The head of this confraternity and its first steward was Pedro Ruiz, and Lopez Jaramillo, and Pedro de Beristáin were its deputies, and the members, brethren of the confraternity, as is everything from this point forward in the said book, which later appears.

The Spanish residents’ petition to form their own association was received and approved by the bishop of Tlaxcala, who ceded a license. Devotion to the Holy True
Cross acknowledged the ultimate sacrifice by Jesus Christ. Cofrades likely chose their own religious image and structure from a limited repertoire provided by the Franciscans. The Cross and the Holy Sacrament were adored with greater frequency and fanfare than any objects or saints adopted by local groups.

The founding members’ scribe also introduced the types of information contained in the records, all relating to the group’s spiritual and civic matters. As a whole, entries revolve around rules for behavior, money matters and actual people, but with few details. Items of confraternal business had to deal with at least one of these issues in order to warrant a scribe’s commentary.

Despite lay leaders’ later claims to antiquity, the Holy True Cross had contemporaries, even predecessors. Scribe Pedro de Beristáin noted confraternal collaborations in which members of the Holy True Cross and the Holy Sacrament (parish-wide) were admonished to celebrate mass together and participate in joint processions along the streets of Tecamachalco (ASV I: 14v, Ord. 30, 1575). Two images, the Cross and the Eucharist, were to be carried to the Church of Saint Francis, which was completed in 1557. An offering was to be made, likely towards the living expenses of the Franciscan friars residing at the Monasterio. The procession was accompanied by the two chief stewards and all members, as well as the paid indios cantores. By performing their costly and pious duties, cabildos and cofrades from the two groups came into contact and coordinated a plan of action with one another on at least six separate occasions per year (every two months). Was this cooperation entered into willingly, with harmony, or forcefully, with resentment? I suspect the former: both parish-wide groups revolved around powerful religious imagery and eventually obtained Arch-confraternal status.
In the 1575 constitution, measured parity and autonomy were norms that guided relations between the two cofradías. Officials from each cofradía paid for their fellow members’ funeral masses:

In the head town, if someone should die, there shall be a particular mass held, with an offering of the necessary wax, and payment to the singers…. In the masses of the other confraternity, the Holy Sacrament, of this town, is to be charged. (ASV I: 13r, Ord. 11, 1575)

In the 1605 charter, other cofradías were not mentionable, at least not by name. Collaboration was no longer of issue, but perhaps competition and conflict still were:

…and that no one shall lend our insignias, nor the images, their vestments, their standards, nothing, to the Indians, nor to other people, even to the friars of the monastery, even if they may be the stewards or the deputies, because they must be protected for times of devotion and they were purchased with alms. (ASV IV: 7v, Ord. 31, 1605)

The lay leaders’ assertion of autonomy, not only in relation to “Indians” and other confraternal councils but even their priestly supervisors, suggests that Spaniards were as concerned about outsiders as Popolocas and Afro-Mexicans. The difference was that Spanish lay leaders may have been able to do something about it. Indigenous and casta cofrades would not have dared to ban friars from meetings or utilizing ritual paraphernalia. But Spanish Catholics clearly felt that their group’s prosperity and legitimacy were under assault. Late colonial secular clergymen donated lands and images to local cofradías. But early colonial lending, sharing and/or selling ritual items among churches and lay societies may have been rare or forbidden.

The Holy True Cross pre-dated the cofradías de naturales (San Francisco, the Nativity of Our Lady and the Holy Name of Jesus) mentioned in the Anales de Tecamachalco. So why was it overlooked? The only logical answer is that the Anales is an indigenous history and that the Holy True Cross was a cofradía de españoles. Archives
are incomplete for a host of reasons. It is useful to correlate various types of primary sources, such as confraternal records from the parish archive and the indigenous-authored Anales. But we should acknowledge that the scribes who produced these texts drew from distinct bodies of information and served separate agendas.

Through later appropriation of a unique title, Archicofradía, lay leaders and/or scribes expressed the group’s superior standing and the special circumstances of its foundation. The prefix Arch emphasizes preeminence and relative antiquity when compared to the standard terms of cofradía and its alternative, hermandad (minor brotherhood; Taylor 1996: 303). At the time of the foundation, scribes did not refer to it as an Archicofradía; it was a cofradía. If few local cofradías existed when the bishop’s license was requested and granted, then there would be little justification in elevating or disparaging this sodality in relation to its contemporaries.

More than a century passed before the group earned the right or felt the need to be declared ancient and/or deserving of an honored position amongst so many cofradías (15 by 1743). Growing concern for the differential status led to an amendment of the cofradía’s name. Archicofradia was written on the books’ front covers, but in terms of an individual entry, it first appeared in 1699 (ASV V: 68r). It may have been used earlier without being memorialized in writing. Lay leaders, likely concerned about emerging self-conscious groups, may have revamped the group’s title in order to prove uniqueness. Lay leaders and members of later groups would have been entirely unaware of a name change. Nevertheless, the prefix Arch would have clearly instructed confraternal latecomers on how to treat the Archicofradía’s personnel. I would expect to see more privileges and resources in Archicofradías than in later or smaller groups.
The timing of the name change may not be entirely happenstance, considering what was transpiring within other local cofradías and residential areas. Spaniards and other non-indios remained numerical minorities in the region and local cofradías until the end of the 17th century. On the confraternal front, ethnic evolution appears to have led to the initiation of several new cofradías, which were clearly smaller and more based in barrio and multi-ethnic solidarity than their predecessors. The Holy True Cross’ lay leaders were likely fully aware of other cofradías’ petitions for licenses. Council members solicited the Bishop, who was the only official with the authority to confer Arch-confraternal status, in order to establish their own long history and founders’ pedigree. Spanish lay leaders and scribes contrasted themselves to individuals whom, and social segments that, they perceived and labeled as latecomers, interlopers or outsiders.

*Leaders, Members and Non-Members: Friends or Foes?*

The cooperation and *convivencia* implied in the hierarchal family model of cofradías was occasionally disturbed by ethnic and class tensions. Paternalism and competition among factions, reflecting rifts within the larger community, could inspire discord within and among cabildos. Peruvian and Yucatecan cofradías may have reinforced political discord between commoners and elites and between native and Spanish authorities (Lavrin 2002: 31; Megged 1996: 141).

In both the 1575 and 1605 charters, members and leaders alike were admonished to work together peacefully, despite their differences, whether real or imagined:

In order that they [the council members] read to all, each one [of the ordinances] to the brethren who wish to be seated first [of the highest order] in this confraternity, who are admitted [as members], so that they will have wisdom about what must be looked after and taken care of in this brotherhood… Here are
the ordinances, [that shall be read] aloud, with their reformation. Penalties if they are not obeyed. Everything [is to be carried out] in moderation (ASV IV: 5r, Ord. 16; 10r, ending statement, 1605).

Conciliation and paternalism were both evident. Reading the ordinances aloud once a year in the presence of all members ensured that no one could claim ignorance of committing an infraction against the cofradía or its brethren. Conflicts were avoided or resolved by adhering to the cofradía’s many rules, effective communication, granting concessions, and even punishment:

We have the love and friendship that our Lady commands. And if in some occurrence among them, they have some disagreement, or grief that the steward or deputies shall be obligated to confer with them, and that they come to friendship. And those brethren shall be obligated in this certain matter to what the said officials ask of them. If they resist, it is a penalty of half an arroba [12.5 pounds] of white wax (ASV IV: 4r, Ord. 14, 1605).

When offenses were grave or relationships beyond repair, family structure could be restored through penance. Fines were incurred by members or non-members who violated or disrupted the cofradía’s smooth and customary execution of business:

If one goes against the ordinances, then he must pay. Fines are collected every Thursday afternoon if one goes against the ordinances. If one is not a member, then he shall not interfere with the confraternity, or he shall donate white wax to the steward or deputies. (ASV I: 14r, Ord. 21-23)

Tensions between members and lay leaders, and between non-members and founding members, were intimated. Outsiders, likely Franciscans or members of other cofradías, were potential threats to the integrity of the cabildo but also the hierarchal family of the cofradía.

Rather than alms, penance usually took the form of a set amount of candle wax. If offenders failed to admit fault and ask for forgiveness, they could even be expelled:

And concerning the brethren who incur penalties, the chief steward and the deputy stewards order that he shall pay within eight days if he violates the
ordinances. His name may be erased and he shall have to pay to be admitted anew (ASV IV: 8r, Ord. 34, 1605).

Exile from the cofradía would have been the most persuasive dissuader to potential rule-breakers. Removal of an individual’s name from the registro likely meant social stigmatization for an entire family, certainly within the confraternity but also the parish as a whole. The threat alone, rather than any action taken, might have been enough inducement to bring any wayward or defiant members into renewed compliance. Note that Spanish lay leaders, unlike Popolocas, did not entertain the idea that offenders could be female, at least not in this instance.

**Modeling Cofradías on Hierarchal Families**

Two genres of sources were consulted in my assessment of the cofradía’s membership: the original and amended charters and the mostly continuous and contiguous membership lists (1590-1740). Qualitative and quantitative analyses are useful in my reconstruction of the cofradía and town’s historical demography and social relations. Membership lists reveal how closely certain criteria or ideals, projected in the policies, were followed. I explore the ordinances as rules and rhetoric, contextualizing my findings with published studies on cofradías.

Individuals and entire nuclear families who were admitted into the cofradía were cofrades (members) or hermanos (brethren, spiritual/blood brothers). The terms emphasized the idealized relationship of ritual or fictive kin. Like early Christian churches and monasteries, cofradías were modeled on the ideal of the Christian family. Within family units, members enjoy privileges and accept responsibilities; everyone “earns their keep” or their right to belong. Through active confraternal membership, men
and women were afforded certain opportunities to forge spiritual bonds as well as social networks with one another. When neighbors worked together as blood brothers and sisters, they did so in the interest of salvation - their own and each other’s.

Family models structured “politics, religious institutions, economic agencies, and social life” (Terpsta 2000: 7). In multi-ethnic and socially-stratified societies, ritual kinship enabled diverse groups to adapt, socialize and legitimize themselves (Ibid: 8). Cofradías were “agencies that directed social welfare and control of marginal and subordinate groups” (Ibid: 5). In Florence, Italy, confraternal membership, service and leadership were channeled through a hierarchic family model that promoted order and obedience. Members engaged in shifting relations of cooperation, cooptation, and suppression with social hierarchies and political authorities… The internal ordering [of cofrarias] reflects the equality of souls in the eyes of God, yet everything from seats in the oratory to place in procession was ranked hierarchally. (Ibid: 2)

What united and socialized medieval Europeans satisfied similar objectives in New Spain. Cofradías placed in the hands of Nahua converts provided them with moral rules and a sense of community (Sell 2002: xii). Afro-Mexicans’ vulnerable socio-economic positions and fluid kin networks were well-suited to the family structure of cofradías: “Often baptized as “without known fathers” or as orphans in the 17th century, Afromexicans (labeled negros, morenos, pardos, or mulatos in colonial documentation) created fictive families for themselves by joining confraternities” (Von Germeten 2006: xi). In 16th-century Iberia and New Spain, “as artisans moved into new cities,” guilds were consolidated into Spanish confraternities (Lavrin 2002: 23). Waves of Spanish settlers “replicated the local institutions that most easily expressed their individual and
corporate religiosity” (Ibid: 23). Cofradías were founded and succeeded as long as there were enough wealthy and generous members to sustain their costly activities.

Cofradías welcomed all lay Catholics, at least ideally. In practice, they could be quite exclusionary in terms of membership criteria. But, in general, doors were opened, albeit not all the way, to most townspeople. As long as there was space, prospective members who could pay and prove their spiritual or social desirability would be considered. In Cocula, Jalisco, cofradías expanded so much and so quickly that they had to be closed to new members until some current members died (Zafra Oropeza 1996: 31). I doubt that specific membership limits or quotas were set unless cabildos were forced to do so by ecclesiastic authorities or limited funds. Members usually meant more wealth, prestige and power in relation to other cofradías. There were no closure policies in Tecamachalco until 1776. By this time, in an era of Bourbon Reforms and a colony on the brink of independence, cofradías already ran their course or served their purpose.

The pseudo-family structure compelled cofrades to collectively gather alms and plan religious festivals, as well as express piety, charity, humility, and acceptance of established hierarchies. Tecamachalco’s cofradías contained many hierarchies modeled on the structure of families. These hierarchies involved council members versus regular members, leaders versus followers, alms-keepers and donors versus alms-collectors and recipients, supervisors versus workers, and processional penitents who sacrificed their own blood (cofrades de sangre) versus ones carrying torches (cofrades de luz). There were also clear distinctions between married and single men; older and younger men; men of fortune or influence and those who could serve the organization with their labor only; men and women; and among españoles, indios and castas.
A Hierarchy of Souls: Membership Levels, Dues and Privileges

In a preamble to the 1575 charter, the founders were addressed *en masse*, as a supposedly homogeneous unit. But then various membership types or ranks, reflecting social differentiation, emerge. Even before the ordinances, hierarchies were communicated to all potential members.

All of the people who wish to enter into this confraternity and brotherhood of the Holy True Cross, shall give an offering, the brethren who are named of blood, who are those who are obliged and who desire to be in the procession that is held on Friday of Holy Week, and it will be five pesos of common gold, and of its brethren, who are those who go in the procession,… of the occupied [participants] – In other matters related to the procession, and fifteen pesos of common gold from those who wish to be seated in front of the stewards who are outside of the said confraternity. For those who are seated in the memory of the register that is made of the said brethren, so that until that day those who are seated may enjoy the said indulgences and pardons (ASV I: 4v-5r, 1575).

Despite an initial appearance of spiritual and social equality, members could attain various levels. These ranged from quite basic - with members’ names entered into the register, to intermediate - some degree of participation in local processions (5 pesos), and advanced – potential council members (15 pesos). Processions and elections were contested public arenas. Social mobility and other individualistic agendas coexisted with solidarity or cofradías’ communal aspect. Office-holding was reserved for married men of a certain age, usually over twenty-five, who were españoles. This distinction was not unique to the cofradía, Tecamachalco or Spaniards. There were usually exceptions to certain rules, even those that concerned elections, age and/or ethnicity. Men with stated or latent political ambitions would be charged the larger fee upon inscription. If not, their membership types could likely be amended at a later date.

What were the criteria or cultural logic that Spanish lay leaders exercised in order to construct membership categories? How were internal divisions used to channel rights
and responsibilities? Did they reflect the social differentiation seen within colonial Mexican society as a whole? Cofradías did not exist within a socio-cultural vacuum. Membership differentiation should illuminate the multi-ethnic, gendered, socio-economic, and geographic organization of the town of Tecamachalco as a whole, at least to a certain extent, encapsulated within a certain point in time. Membership may have also been constructed differently over time. There is significant variation in membership administration among Tecamachalco’s various cofradías.

Differentiation of brethren into categories of men and women, españoles and indios, continued on the pages preceding the charter. An atmosphere of both inclusion and exclusion was cultivated. The mention of various groups may signal that all are welcome, yet the very act of categorizing people is divisive: “Spaniards and Indians…blood brethren…men and women pay for their entrance into the confraternity…everyone is to participate, from this point forward, in all of the indulgences and pardons of the confraternity” (ASV I: 6r, 1575). The conditional promise of rewards, granted in exchange for voluntary service, generosity and other good deeds, is reminiscent of real as well as symbolic kin. The pope granted cofrades access to religious indulgences that saved souls from an eternity in purgatory (Lavrin 2002: 28; Zafra Oropeza 1996: 131). Gifts of time, land, workers, and alms were amassed in individual spiritual accounts.

With increasing regularity, Spanish lay leaders began to draw what they saw as clear and meaningful distinctions among their fictive or ritual kin. But in the first generation, socio-ethnic categorizations were understated. Early scribes were more engaged with members’ sex, marital and social statuses, expressed through titles that
could be occupational (governor, priest, singer, artisan, farmer, servant), inherited or honorary (señor, don, doña, doncella). Distinguished members were drawn from the full range of local officials, such as friars, alcaldes, fiscales, or the wives of affluent, politically and/or spiritually active men. Elites were well represented within the cofradía’s leadership. There was a much larger group of people referred to as man or woman, cofrade, hermano, vecino, natural, español, indio, or mestizo, but no other castas.

Aurea Zafra Oropeza’s (1996: 113-114) synopsis of colonial confraternal charters from Cocula, Jalisco, revealed factors shaping lay leaders’ constructions of membership types: Did a member join alone or with a spouse? Was he or she a recognized community leader or someone less visible; living or dead; lay person or priest? Were dues, goods or services surrendered?

Additional sources of differentiation emerged in the Holy True Cross. Women who inscribed with husbands paid less (2 pesos) than single women or widows (3 pesos). Family discounts may also reflect women’s partial memberships or conditional statuses within cofradías that were led by Spanish men. Expecting unattached women to surrender their own dues, as long as free memberships were not given to widows or orphaned doncellas, suggests that women accessed their own wealth and benefits; cofradías were serving as social-leveling mechanisms.

Potential members who were labradores could substitute a portion of their harvested corn or wheat for membership dues and even processional privileges (ASV III: 125v, circa 1627, 1675). Franciscan friars could pay to join like everyone else or serve instead. Priestly “gifts” of at least six masses amounted to 20 pesos, which was substantially more than the standard dues (3 pesos), or what most other members were
capable of giving (ASV IV: 12r). This barter system, which involved friars Francisco de Velasco, Pedro de Ribera, Bartolome de Velas, and Pedro de Ranodys, lasted between 1590 and 1630, before the secular clergy arrived. The friars’ presence meant direct supervision, which could legitimize, but also interfere with, lay societies. Spanish lay leaders had sought to impede friars from engaging in cabildo matters. But friars’ individual gifts of 20 pesos, which were greater than the elector participation fee (15 pesos), were attractive.

Dues, collected from all new members by the cabildo, produced revenue integral to the cofradía’s survival. Operating a cofradía was expensive. Corporate events and commemorating of its members’ rites of passage depended on a constant flow of dues. Thus, it was simply good business and government to attract as many paying members as possible. Funds were invested into sponsoring masses and festivals, burying deceased members, paying priests and indios for their labor, and purchasing ritual paraphernalia. Leaders might consider the generosity and service of old and new members to outweigh the collective toll of their membership. In both charters, dues were addressed in the first ordinance as well as in three additional ordinances.

One was no longer a cofrade without the timely and full payment of dues: “If a member does not pay his dues, then he will not participate… They must be paid to the chief steward” (ASV I: 13v, Ord. 17, 1575). The stipulation came with a few exceptions. A wealthy deceased Spaniard enlisted in the Holy True Cross after a sizeable donation of twenty pesos (ASV IV: 3r, 1596). Deceased neighbors merited confraternal generosity, even without their surviving relatives’ alms. Lavrin (2002: 29) noted that cofrades in Mexico City paid monthly or even weekly dues to ensure their last rites. The chief return
for paying dues was a “good death,” including the rite of extreme unction, a funerary procession, mass, shroud, and a burial on Christian ground. Many men and even more women joined multiple cofradías, likely due to concern over receiving a Christian burial (Von Germeten 2006: 66-68). Others enlisted right before death or were posthumously inscribed by their surviving family members or through wills.

After the death of a paying member, the final rite of passage was recorded in the margin, alongside the notation of his or her initial enlistment (ASV IV: 1v). An updated tally of active members was financially and politically useful for lay leaders; the cofradía had to appear viable in the eyes of local ecclesiastic authorities. Death indicated an end to dues or alms, unless the deceased bequeathed money, land, ritual items, or other property to the cofradía in a will.

Funerals were paid from members’ past dues, estates or corporately-held confraternal funds. Lay leaders recognized that all Catholics, whatever their particular means or their membership statuses, desired and deserved a proper funeral mass and burial: “If one is poor, they may be registered into the confraternity or mass for free. But if one lied, they shall pay twenty pesos” (ASV, IV: 3r, Ord. 9, 1605). A penalty clause suggests that the benefit had been abused. The council could not afford to show charity to applicants who were unwilling to be investigated.

Ideally, there were free memberships for any potential member who could not pay: “If a sick person wishes to enter the confraternity and he is poor and does not have the money to become a member, then his entrance must be paid. It shall be twelve pesos of gold, no less. The steward shall see to this” (ASV I: 12v, Ord. 10, 1575). The cofradía, represented here by the chief steward, took on the burden of the poor, but at a grossly
inflated 300% of the standard dues. Perhaps the amount went directly to the costs of the funeral mass, procession and burial, with payment made to a priest and singers. Alternatively, it may have included an original joiner fee (4 pesos) and an estimate of annual donations that would have been made (8 pesos) had the recipient not been so poor and/or sick. But in practice, an anonymous donation of as little of 5 pesos secured the membership of the “poor sick person, Jusepe Holgines” (ASV IV: 11r, 1634).

Although the funds’ origin or donor went unspecified, the cabildo would not charge or pay itself. Affluent cofrades were likely called upon to assist in the incorporation of the town’s disadvantaged, especially their neighbors or employers. The donation would more than pay for the new member, so remaining funds could be channeled into other business. The charitable act of patronizing the less fortunate fostered charity among existing cofrades and generated even more revenue for corporate good works. Dues were insufficient to bankroll all interests. But the coffer could be regularly replenished through the collection of alms as well as leasing land plots.

Were dues charged upon enlistment, annually, or even more often? For some reason, the Holy True Cross’ lay leaders obscured these matters. A joiner-fee was required of all members, even if a relative or patron paid. Most cabildos requested a half-real each week, every other week or every month (Germeten 2006: 211). Continuous depletion of the coffer likely meant that everyone who could was expected to make an annual gift. Generosity could also take the form of commissioning special masses for departed loved ones or items given in order to participate in processions or running for office. In addition to money, candle wax, cloth, jewels, maize, wheat, sheep, and skilled labor supplemented the growing expense of celebrations and possessions.
**Ethnicity and Means as Membership Criteria**

The amount of dues collected per person or per year is irrelevant. But if I contrast men and women, españols and indio by cross-correlating data on membership dues and types, a vibrant picture of confraternal social relations and interactions emerges. Socio-economic data provide a window into cofradías’ ideal and real operations, especially how social segments were perceived and managed. In Celaya, Guanajuato, the Holy Sacrament’s 1774 constitution invited “all people of whatever state, class, age, sex or condition, excluding those of scandalous habits” to pledge, albeit with varying levels of membership status (Von Germeten 2006: 196).

I turned to confraternal records in order to trace the evolution of socio-political relations, noting the interplay of ethnicity, class, gender, and place of residence within local hierarchies. Ethnic categories are dynamic; new categories are constantly created, make their way into everyday use, and then these are interpreted by a wide spectrum of users. By its very nature, ethnic identity research is problematic, methodologically and theoretically. Ethnicity is subjective, “in the eye of the beholder.” Here the beholders were scribes who maintained membership lists. Most cofrades would be indios, who outnumbered urban and rural Spaniards.

Compared to the sacramental series, ethnic identifiers were employed inconsistently in confraternal records. But ethnicity was equal to, if not above, all other criteria used to identify cofrades, including sex, marital status, social status, age, place of residence, and relationship to other cofrades.

At the end of the 17th century, a few scribes began to apply a binary opposition to cofrades. Españoles and indios were sometimes listed in separate membership lists. Dual
lists attest to confraternal membership, if not leadership, being ethnically plural yet divided. But the only clear evidence of this practice is in the Holy True Cross, the Holy Sepulcher of Calvary (dual cabildos and membership lists of españoles and naturales) and San Sebastián (a native-led barrio brotherhood). Alternatively, we find the occasional annotation of a member’s socio-ethnic designation immediately after his or her name. These data permit me to explore whether this group and town merited the designations of Archicofradía de españoles and pueblo de españoles: “…confraternities that existed in the said town of Spaniards” (ASV IV: 9v, Ord. 22, 1605).

In 1575, dual orders of light and blood were introduced rather mysteriously:

Members shall pay four pesos as an entrance fee to join the confraternity, paid to the Lady of Light, for the adoration of the Virgin, and those members of blood shall pay in gold …the steward shall see to this. (ASV I: 12r, Ord. 1, 1575).

Cofrades de luz were referenced first, but their joiner fee (4 pesos) was less than what was mentioned in the preamble to the charter (5 pesos). Perhaps only those españoles who wished to be recognized as blood brothers on Holy Friday paid 5 pesos.

Generic members were endowed with fewer privileges than those of the two orders, but they were not necessarily less pious or deserving of full participation within the cofradía. Most rewards would be bestowed on long-term residents with access to resources or patronage from more affluent neighbors. A 20% discount (4 versus 5 pesos) for those who did not qualify to be blood brothers was trivial in comparison to the polarized standards of colonial life. On one side were Spanish and mestizo landowners, and on the other - disenfranchised, mostly indigenous and Afro-Mexican peasants, carpenters and domestic servants. There would also be Spaniards and castas who were poor or disreputable, as well as landed and noble native families.
Upward and downward social mobility existed simultaneously, as R. Douglas Cope (1994: 106) found among the plebes of late colonial Mexico City’s ethnically diverse neighborhoods. Family status could fluctuate wildly thanks to a series of wise or foolhardy investments, business monopolies or competitors, strategic or unfortunate marital alliances, and episodes of excellent or poor health.

Other than a seat on the council, blood fellowship was the highest distinction. The men carried out penitential acts, most likely self-flagellation with whips, during the annual march. The 1605 charter was largely an instrument crafted by a Spanish hierarchy to exclude indios and “women of any quality” from misappropriating preferential processional positions traditionally enjoyed by Spanish blood brothers. But membership lists reveal numerous exceptions to this pattern, with women, indios and mestizos gaining entry. Ethnicity usually went unmentioned, so few definite correlations can be made. If ethnicity was not the deciding factor, then sufficient age (>25), social standing or connections, and economic means were likely to have been.

On paper, brethren who carried torches in night-time processions were never formally tied to any particular ethnicity or sex. Cofrades de luz were entitled to wear black processional robes, while white robes and self-flagellation, denoting purity and devotion, were reserved for blood brethren. With lesser privileges, there should also be reduced responsibilities, including smaller dues, donations and service expectations. A brief entry in an inventory of the cofradía’s possessions reveals that white was for españoles and black was for indios (ASV IV: 1606).

In the 1605 constitution, a 1 or 2 peso reduction in dues was made: “All who join the confraternity shall pay three pesos for their seat, three pesos for brethren of blood”
(ASV IV: 2v, Ord. 1, 1605). A fee reduction could be a brilliant recruitment strategy by the 1605 cabildo, aimed at inclusivity. But lay leaders and/or priests may have also recognized the financial limitations of prospective members. The bishop of Tlaxcala or the local Franciscan friars may have interceded on the cofrades’ behalf. But fiscal reform was not initiated until 18th-century ecclesiastic edicts. In addition to a universal reduction, it now cost the same to pledge to the order of blood as regular membership (3 pesos). The order of light was not even mentioned here, even though members continued to dedicate themselves to it, at least until 1675. But the last blood brother was recorded in 1635. Orders were replaced by multiple insignia paths in 1675.

Membership types and dues correspond to specific times, places and social climates. The earliest cofradías in New Spain arose well before bureaucrats and elite families insisted on limpieza de sangre (racial purity). Perhaps ethnic markers were initially used so infrequently in confraternal records because español and indio were seen as too distinctive to confuse or to allow for widespread intermarriage. Emerging intermediate socio-ethnic categories contributed to a fluctuating and amorphous system, which, at the time of the founding of the Holy True Cross, had yet to be fully codified and ranked. In most cases, indigenous peoples formed the majority of cofrades, even when they were not in charge (Lavrin 2002: 30). The founders of 16th-century cofradías could not anticipate the 17th-century influx of mestizos and other castas.

Mestizos and other castas were never addressed collectively in the charters. In the dual membership lists of españoles and indios, the only two mestizos recorded as such were grouped with españoles. Mestizos were not banned from running for office, so they likely paid the same dues as españoles. This arrangement was likely customary in most
multi-ethnic cofradías. But Nicole Von Germeten (2006: 211), who compared cofradías from the states of Guanajuato, Guerrero, Jalisco, Michoacán, Orizaba, and Veracruz, found that mestizos were sometimes charged the same dues as other castas and indios. Von Germeten (2006: 213) noted that “any town with a growing mixed-race population and a clear distinction of wealth among races might have had confraternities that specified differences due to race.” Cofradías echoed colonial divisions. But most groups with ethnically-specific dues emerged only after the middle of the 17th century.

After the Holy True Cross’ first generation (1575-1605), membership lists rarely revealed ethnicity. Perhaps population growth and ethnic mixing rendered this sort of record-keeping tedious. It certainly was not because españoles, indios and castas were considered to be social equivalents. The omission predated the shift within baptismal record-keeping by almost two centuries. A binary opposition of gente de razón (people with reason: españoles and mestizos) and indios (and darker-skinned castas) was applied consistently until the turn of the 19th century, after which the focus became legitimate versus illegitimate birth (natural, without marriage).

Quantitative Analysis of the Membership Lists: Goals and Methods

I employed demographic analysis to reconstruct the cofradía’s evolving membership, growth and decline. The data also illuminate the proportion of cofrades by ethnicity, gender and marital status, but social status and place of residence are more elusive. Membership lists contain rather mundane information: the member’s sex, joiner fee, date of joining, marital status, any accompanying family members, ethnicity, title, place of residence and name, although scribes rarely annotated the last four descriptors.
Individuals and families, living and dead, were seated as members within the confraternity, upon their names being inscribed within the membership book. Scribes referred to this procedure as *asentar* (to be seated) and *inscribir* (to be recorded).

In principle, stewards and scribes maintained three separate books at any one time: “one book for *posiciones*: officials and members, another for expenses, and another for ordinances” (ASV IV: 4v, Ord. 15, 1605). Inventories of ritual items and receipts for alms, masses, and fiestas were to be grouped together. According to an 18th-century bishop’s edict, the constitution(s) was to be preserved in another book. But the edict came too late to influence confraternal record-keeping in Tecamachalco. A third book for memberships and elections was not maintained; members’ names and fees are found throughout the eight books. Lists were often chronologically-ordered but haphazardly interspersed with other day-to-day business. Lack of organization and varying detail concerning individuals obscure certain membership trends.

Quantitative analysis of the lists is beneficial but also limited. We learn the identity of cofradas as individuals and in relation to one another, as well as some of their privileges and obligations, but not their actions, motivations. Members’ qualities, or their perceived spiritual endowments, are addressed elsewhere in the records. Raw data on 730 members (1590-1740) illuminate confraternal composition more than relying on founders’ claims. The data partially reflect the evolving historical demography of the larger multi-ethnic community of Tecamachalco, which underwent various population climaxes and crises. The influx of epidemics and immigrants may be observed through ebbs and flows within confraternal membership data. In some cases, I can identify which
barrios, agricultural estates or distant metropolises were most frequently represented and how these may have changed over time.

ACCESS, a relational database management program, facilitated my analysis. I inputted each member’s enlistment year, sex, ethnicity, title (nobility, honorific or occupational), processional order (blood, light) and insignia path (confraternal standard, bell, image of the Virgin, the Christ, or the Holy Cross). I recorded other members as deceased, friars, spouses, widowed, parents, children or other relatives (siblings, aunts or uncles). Then I crafted queries to apply to the dataset. Responses usually took the form of numeric values. In order to pinpoint and verify trends, I applied various time intervals (5, 10, 15, 25, 30 and 50 years). Related queries were used to build onto one another progressively, until a more complete picture emerged.

Rights and responsibilities were extended to men and women of various backgrounds. Over 150 years, various kin ties were apparent, but I isolated each member for analysis. Individuals were sometimes memorialized with few details other than their names. In addition to the 730 members, 186 members joined between 1575 and 1589. But lack of detail led me to exclude them from the database. No consistent recording method is apparent (ASV II-IV). Book IV contains the 1605 charter, which addressed the efficient maintenance of confraternal records (ASV, IV: 4v, Ord. 15, 1605). Officials were instructed to organize their paperwork in anticipation of visits from ecclesiastic authorities, but they sometimes failed to impress. The lists were maintained continuously, until a lapse in 1643, right after the secular clergy took over.

Most members remain largely invisible and seemingly replaceable, and perhaps they were treated as such. Membership could be temporary or revocable. Anyone who
neglected his or her dues, customary donations of candle wax, or voluntary service, or violated any ordinance, could be fined, see their privileges restricted, or be expelled (Ord. 6, 17, 21, and 34, 1575; Ord. 34, 1605). Non-compliant or deceased members were symbolized by their names being crossed out. Upon re-payment of dues, perhaps through the generosity of an affluent relative, neighbor, employer or patron, the names of wayward individuals could be added to the membership lists. This arrangement means that I may have counted a few individuals twice. Scribes did not tabulate concurrent or cumulative membership. My analysis accounts for all new members recorded in the preserved books, reflecting trends but only an estimate of the total enlistment.

*Membership and Population Ebbs and Flows*

Membership ratios are useful indicators of the relative success or failure of confraternal recruitment efforts. Recruitment could be influenced by the cofradía’s reputation, competition from other cofradías, the financial and social standing of potential members, migration, and other sources of population growth and decline, such as epidemics. Before the end of 1575, 49 members joined the initial 27, for a yearly total of 76 members (ASV I: 7v). This total included 23 new members on Holy Tuesday. The next year brought 40 more, for a total of 116 members. Dramatic increases in confraternal membership often coincided with the timing of annual elections and religious festivals. The elaborate ritual pageantry and generosity expressed on holy days, particularly the anniversary of a cofradía’s inception, meant exposure and prestige for cofradías and cofrades, perhaps inspiring townspeople and visitors to join. Also at play were concerted efforts by priests or stewards who sought to augment revenue for good works.
Certain early (1575-1576) and late (1736) years brought membership booms, but minimal expansion and even stagnation or attrition typified other years. Three cycles emerged: a peak at inception, a century later (1670-1690), and again in the mid-18th century, to a lesser extent. The first 15 years (1575-1589) were most fruitful (12.4 members/year). After the 116 members who joined at foundation (1575-1576) are factored out, the annual average is relatively low (5.4; footnote #2).

Between the two charters (1575-1605), members joined at a rate that was unparalleled until the end of the 17th century (272 or 9/year). By 1600, the inscription rate was consistent (5-7/year). A greater number and variety of members were targeted in the 1605 charter than in 1575, when only 27 members were acknowledged. Members would have died, become inactive, joined other groups, or left the area in the interim, but membership had stabilized. Townspeople had not yet lost interest in cofradías; 6 groups were founded by 1595, 5 more by 1689. Early on, the Holy True Cross faced competition for Spanish, native and mestizo enlistees from the Holy Eucharist, San Francisco, the Nativity of Our Lady, and the Holy Name of Jesus. The cabildos’ membership criteria would also dissuade certain residents from attempting to enlist. An influx of diverse members seeking recognition proved to be so problematic for the 1605 cabildo that the relative positioning of indios and women took center stage in the amended charter.

In certain generations (mid 17th century and early 18th century), membership slowed to a halt, was poorly documented, or both situations may have been at play. A rate decrease does not necessarily signify a drop in popularity. Due to migration and epidemics, the pool for applicants experienced constant fluctuations, particularly in the 17th century. Following a drop in the 1620s (2-3/year) and a brief recovery in the 1630s
(7/year), there were no members recorded between 1643 and 1669, even though baptismal and census records attest to a rise in active parishioners. Clearly Spanish parishioners were still joining the Holy True Cross but the book for the period (1643-1669) was misplaced after the transition from regular to secular clergy.

An increase in the proportion of local españoles, and likely mestizos too, would provide the Holy True Cross with a constant flow of new members. Spaniards composed only 1.4% of Tecamachalco’s population in 1580 (Relaciones geográficas), 9.4% of baptized children in the mid-17th century, as much as 49% of those receiving sacraments at mass in 1668, but only 11.2% of the region in 1681 (Thomson 1989). In 1660, non-indios attending mass were 14 times more numerous than in 1580; an additional 36% surfaced by 1668. Spaniards mostly resided within town limits (87%), close enough to the parish church to attend confraternal events. By 1668, there were 35% more urban non-indios and 41% more rural non-indios. But the proportion of naturales, residing on farms, native hamlets and peripheral barrios, expanded by only 23%. Indios whose work obligations prevented them from attending mass would be underrepresented.

Parishioner counts and regional population estimates illustrate ethnic transformation and the total pool from which cofrades were selected. At the end of the 17th century, the rising proportion of españoles and mestizos coincides with patterns witnessed in confraternal records. In the 1680s, the Holy True Cross accommodated its greatest rise in membership since its 1575 founding. The same period brought the proliferation of new multi-ethnic cofradías that corresponded to specific localities (barrios) and populations (indigenous and mulatto). The Holy True Cross’ 1680-1709 membership boom (10-11/year) was most pronounced in the late 1680s (1685-1689),
when two barrio brotherhoods were founded, and between 1705 in 1709. Local devotions may have been most active in the 1560-1595, 1680-1709 and 1720-1740 generations.

The late-17th century membership spike coincides with the foundation of other cofradías. The Holy True Cross’ yearly average (10-11) was a respectable gain, but it likely paled in comparison to new groups, which used barrios to attract multi-ethnic constituencies. Latecomer cofradías capitalized on their novelty and relative inclusivity, in not their antiquity. In the eyes of potential cofrades and officiales, new groups would seem more malleable to their agendas because leadership monopolies had not yet formed. In contrast, the older, Spaniard-dominated Holy True Cross incorporated the entire parish and bishopric, even the cities of Puebla and Orizaba, Veracruz. Leaders hosted meetings and housed possessions in the town’s preeminent church rather than its barrio chapels. Any apparent membership rise or better record-keeping may be linked to an increase in criollo self-consciousness. Spaniards, recognizing their relatively small numbers, may have chosen to recruit newcomers. Facing competition from other cofradías, recruiters were more likely to target non-Spaniards and non-residents as eligible or ineligible.

There is no direct evidence of revitalized recruitment efforts in order to gain an advantage over other cofradías. But whenever new cofradías arose, the Holy True Cross’ membership rate also rose: 1575-1595, 1686-1689 and the 1730s. Between 1730 and 1740, a modest rise in female membership culminated in 23 women enlisting together in 1736. In this decade, female religious activism was also expressed in three local sisterhoods. Late colonial lay leaders actively courted women and/or women joined multiple organizations at the same time for their own reasons. Lay leaders repetitively appear to intensify recruitment efforts whenever new competitors emerged onto the field
of lay Catholicism. Another possibility is that there was simply an ongoing cycle of enthusiasm and disinterest towards cofradías in general among parishioners.

By the mid-18th century, a lack of new members appears to plague the Holy True Cross. The average annual inscription (1590-1740: 5/year) dropped even further in the final generation (1710-1740: 3/year). Two decades of stagnation (1710-1730: 0-3/year) were followed by a decade of renewed growth (1730-1740: 6/year). Then the records end abruptly, even though the Holy True Cross did not close until 1809. Devastating epidemics swept though Puebla and Mexico City between 1737 and 1739 (Cuenya Matheos 1987; Cope 1994). But there is no evidence that the epidemics reached Tecamachalco or shaped local demography, whether through population decline (mortality) or growth (migration from cities to towns). The regional population (Tecamachalco, Quecholac, their sujetos and haciendas) more than doubled between 1743 (33,790 inhabitants) and 1793 (72,538), but then it declined slightly before 1824 (69,170; Thomson 1989). When we consider the steady rise and stabilization in population, it appears that the final seven decades of membership lists (1741-1809) must have been recorded in a book that was misplaced, or there was an overall decline in the quality of confraternal record-keeping.

Despite regional population growth, parishioner counts indicate minimal growth followed by a decline in the number of active parishioners: 3,261 in 1660; 4,254 in 1668; 3,342 in 1745; 2,283 in 1768. Tecamachalco’s share of the regional population in 1793 (72,538) produces 10,155 potential parishioners. Parishioner counts are not equivalent to population; they cannot account for those unable or unwilling to attend parish events, whether too young, old, sick or scandalous to receive the sacraments, or people who
frequented other parishes. Baptismal records do reflect population growth. Between 1660 and 1668, an average of 154 indios (92%) and 14 españoles (8%) were baptized each year. By 1740, twice as many babies were being baptized annually, with 30.5% (99) born to “people of reason” and indios accounting for 69.5% (226). These proportions support regional estimates, which demonstrate a sizeable and steady increase in non-indios: 11% in 1681; 24% in 1743; 31% in 1793 (Thomson 1989).

Tecamachalco’s growing population likely continued to join the Holy True Cross at steady levels until its closure in 1809, but I do not anticipate further membership booms. I estimate that at least another 400 members joined between 1741 and 1809. By 1740, when the membership lists end, there may have been as many as 15 cofradías operating simultaneously within Tecamachalco. Confraternal foundations and membership booms may be best attributed to immigration and inter-confraternity competition. A population boom in the late 18th century would mean little for confraternal membership if most cofradías were financially weakened. Few groups could thrive as they vied for members, prestige, funds, chapels and property, while the Crown stripped the Church of many of its resources. Throughout New Spain, a period of confraternal decline was already well under way, which can be seen in restrictions on lay membership, activism and spending. Alternative forms of religious and civic engagement may have also begun to capture the townspeople’s imagination. I would not necessarily expect an additional peak in membership in the final decades of the Holy True Cross.

A pattern of membership decline did not necessarily spell disaster. Fresh membership dues were required in order for the Holy True Cross to remain financially and spiritually solvent. As long as existing members supplied the coffer and participated
in spiritual activities, then the cofradía was still viable. Earnings and expenditures reflect late colonial decline. But a competent council and a few generous members may have been enough to keep the cofradía afloat.

**Member Identity and Status: Gender, Family and Class Dynamics**

Confraternal charters and membership lists reflect continuity and change in parishioner interactions. I crafted queries in order to expose the relative presence of women, men, españoles, indios, and mestizos, as well as the relative positions and socio-economic networks of cofrades.

Some personal identifiers that I sought were optional or irrelevant within cofradías, at least in certain time periods. There was inconsistency in identifying kin groups and ethnicity. Volunteering specifics about certain members but not others is indeed puzzling; most people were simply referred to through their sex and dues. There are few data on honorary titles or occupations (8%). Some local dignitaries may have been undocumented because scribes were ill-equipped or unwilling to leave such records. Likewise, more men and women may have joined the orders of blood or light, but the status was seldom annotated (18%). Perhaps scribes who neglected details felt rushed when processing new members, although there were few instances when a crowd joined on the same day. Another possibility is that some lists were recorded after the fact, partially from memory or even second-hand information.

There is no guarantee that relationships among all individuals enlisting on a single day were observed and added to paper. Sex was always apparent, as would be expected, but other factors that would be easily assessed were reported sporadically. Some data are
too inconsistent for analysis. Men and women joined alone or with family members, particularly with spouses, but the exact numbers are elusive. Scribes did not state, “the member joined alone.”

Women joined alone or as part of family units, alongside husbands, siblings, parents, and/or children. Men dominated by monopolizing offices and the right to assembly, but political majorities are not always numerical. Women were numerous and played key roles in cofradías. As informal leaders, they contributed through their service, even if politically invisible. I anticipated women to constitute a numerical majority, especially by the 18th century, when Tecamachalco’s sisterhoods were founded. Such a scenario would mirror other research on cofradías. Germeten (2006: 65) estimated that there were twice as many cofradas as cofrades in New Spain, and that women joining with husbands were frequently overlooked. When 27 founding members were listed in 1575, only the names of the men appeared, with a brief note stating whether they were accompanied by their wives. This could be a one-time occurrence, or one of many times when female enrollees and attendees were overlooked and underrepresented.

There is no evidence to support women ever outnumbering or even matching men. Between 1590 and 1740, a total of 528 men (72%) and 202 women (28%) enlisted. In male-dominated cofradías, membership lists remain the best place to see women. Absent from electoral records, women were mentioned only briefly in ordinances and as alms donors or collectors. All of the available data point to men being numerical and political majorities.

The highest yielding years for female membership were 1736 (23 women) and 1686-1687 (16). There were 9 women memorialized in 1597, 1613, 1630, 1632; 6 in
1670; and 5 in 1594, 1596, 1614, 1623, 1675, 1690, and 1708. The best years for male enlistees were 1686-1687 (57 men), 1694-1695 (51), 1630-1632 (45), 1706-1709 (41), as well as 12 men in 1613, 1702, and 1739. These data mostly coincide with the years in which the total membership rate peaked: 1686-1687 (73 members), 1630-1632 (53), 1694-1695 (51), 1736 (23), 1613 (21), 1597 and 1708 (18). It is clear that men were largely responsible for most membership growth and decline.

The 1590s, 1610s, 1630s, 1670s-1700s, and the 1730s attracted a greater number of females, but their proportion was still usually below that of males (20-40%). The only exceptions were in 1596-1597 (50%); 1614, 1623 and 1670 (60%+); and 1736 (100%). Between 1730 and 1740, during the era of Tecamachalco’s sisterhoods, the gender ratio was exactly 1:1 (32 men, 32 women). In 1736, 23 women and no men enlisted. In many years, even an entire decade (1710-1719), no new female members were recorded, making 1736 a true anomaly.

Men steadily replacement women, at least in the records: 35% female (1590-1639), 25% (1640-1689), and 20% (1690-1740). Female enlistees made a strong start in the 1590s, followed by long-term decline and recovery after 1730. A downward trend in female membership began in the 1680s (18%), dropping further between 1690 and 1709 (15%), until bottoming out to nothing (1710-1720). The timing is curious; total inscription was highest between 1680 and 1709 (306 members or 42%). As the local population grew or at least stabilized, men enlisted more frequently while establishing rival, male-dominated cofradías.

Where did the women go? If male-dominated cofradías offered little formal recognition to women, then their energies may have been better invested elsewhere.
Membership benefits were less extensive for women than for men. Some women may have been discouraged or even impeded from enlisting due to family or work obligations. Another possibility is that women’s numbers were not accurately represented by the scribes, particularly if they were seen as merely accompanying their husbands or fathers. Lastly, women who did not join the Holy True Cross may be counted as members of other local cofradías. Other groups may have welcomed women through discounts on membership dues, leadership roles, and locating activities closer to home.

More patterns emerge when gender is correlated with ethnicity. Ethnicity is known in only 14.5% of the cases. Most of the data pertain to 1590-1610, the 1630s, and the turn of the 18th century. Men accounted for 71% of the 59 reported Spaniards. The Holy True Cross was founded by and for Spanish men. Among the 45 identified indios, the gender distribution was more balanced: 53% female. For the 624 individuals of unknown ethnicity, the male-to-female ratio was roughly 3:1 (74%), which conforms to the data on españoles (71%) and the entire dataset (72%). Indias were persuaded to join more frequently than españolas. There would be relatively few españolas residing in Tecamachalco. Spanish women were less active in male-dominated sodalities, whether in the Old or New World, often serving only through auxiliary prayer groups (Casagrande 2000: 48; Von Germeten 2006: 46). This circumscription is likely attributable to the popularity of flagellant processions, in which male penitents publicly shed blood (Weigle 1976: 144). But women in Nahua, Maya and even Afro-Mexican cofradías were often paired with their husbands in formal leadership positions (Von Germeten 2006: 52).

In some cases, members joined as spouses, parents (with children), children (with parent(s)), other categories of relatives (siblings, aunts or uncles), widow(ers), or
deceased individuals, whose dues were usually paid by surviving relatives or wealthy patrons. If these data were not provided, then the member may have joined alone. But kin, friends or neighbors may have been present and their connections were simply overlooked by the scribe. Certain members, such as priests, clearly joined alone. Approximately 74% of members joined independently, rather than in a family unit. Individual memberships were most common in the following years in 1686-1687 (71), 1694-1695 (51), and 1736 (23 women), which suggest concerted recruitment campaigns. I could not establish correlations between ethnicity and joining alone or with kin.

Marital status is a component of gender cooperation, interdependence, and (in)equity within the confraternal family model. The data cannot address these issues, but they provide a useful juxtaposition to gendered discourse in the constitutions. The most fruitful years for joint memberships were 1613 (8 couples) and 1632 (6). In total, 120 individuals reportedly joined with a spouse. This figure should represent 60 couples who enlisted together, on the same day. Instead women’s marital statuses were the most relevant; 62.5% of the spouses were members’ wives. A gender discrepancy is most likely attributable to male dominance within the cofradía and colonial society. Within households and communities, women would be the impetus for male memberships. But framing women as members’ spouses or other relatives reflects Spanish lay leaders’ and scribes’ treatment of female memberships as honorary or superfluous.

Many women would be widowed at some point during their memberships. But only 5 widows and 1 widower were identified as such when enlisting (0.8%). Scribes likely overlooked this status. Widowed members, regardless of ethnic identity (española, india or mestiza), joined alone or alongside a relative. But they did not have to rely on the
charity of friends or strangers and they could even access special confraternal privileges (cofrades de sangre or luz).

In order to secure a “good death,” difunctos were registered as honorary members: 3 men and 1 woman. Recognizing the strong link between cofradías and Christian burial, I expected many more difunctos, but perhaps scribes did not record this after the early colonial period. The deceased include an español (1596) and an indio whose poverty and devotion attracted the charity of a local friar (1604). A widower’s donation ensured his wife’s posthumous membership (1607) and a deceased man’s relative, likely the donor, enlisted alongside him (1615).

Very few members enlisted as parents joining with minor or adult offspring (1%), but there were 39 known children (5%). There is no guarantee that all kin ties were specified, unless family members joined as a unit. Scribes did not formally associate most children with their parents, and some children might be orphans. Most parents were mothers (71%), usually joining without or perhaps after their husbands; men were mostly overlooked as parents. When with parents, children were likely welcome at masses, processions and other festivities. But spiritual and temporal immaturity disqualified hijos from full membership. Most hijos were male (61.5%). Hijos indios and españoles were equally common but the ethnic data are incomplete.

Familial ties not specified in concrete terms led me to create the category - “joined as relatives.” Only 4% of members fell into this category. Recruiting even just one member with extensive kin ties was a lucrative strategy. In 1604, most enlistees were identified as a member’s spouse, child or relative (10/14 or 71.4%). Men dominated (59%) the relatives’ category.
Socio-economic status was reflected through occupations, titles and payments for special privileges in 22% of the cases. Class-related data was recorded with greater regularity for men (25%) than women (13%). Women were relatives of mayordomos (12), Doñas (5), generous donors (2), skilled workers employed by a mayordomo (2), a lay devotee (hermana de la tercera orden), a farmer’s wife, an estate owner or inhabitant, a maid, and a sick person whose dues were paid on her behalf. In most cases, female status was linked to labor, confraternal service, or ties to powerful men. I expected to find the town’s elite - Doñas, property owners, affluent patronesses, and even local nuns. The scant documentation of women’s elevated status appears to reinforce their dependency on men and their marginality in the cofradía. Baptismal records reflect many local madrinas and mothers, whether españolas, indias, mestizas or other castas, who enjoyed various titles and positions, not necessarily tied to those of their husbands or fathers. If these women joined cofradías, then confraternal scribes undervalued their statuses.

The more numerous options for men included generous donors (77), friars (16), men who donated their services as dues (6), ill or poor men given free memberships (6), incoming stewards (5), stewards’ relatives (4), men whose dues were paid by stewards (4), servants (4), choir directors (3), men from distant cities (3), Señores (2), skilled workers employed by a steward (2), a man whose dues were paid by a friar, and a governor. Within the cofradía’s formal and informal hierarchies, male status was best elevated through charity. Pronounced social differentiation is evident in the presence of secular and ecclesiastic authorities, dignitaries who resided in Mexico City, Oaxaca or Guatemala, and as recipients of other members’ generosity.
The many references to mayordomos, as individuals, and their family members, employees and beneficiaries, reflect the centrality of the office. The enlistments of 5 local men coincided with their elections. Potential leaders were active members in good standing, owing no dues or alms to the cofradía. But through a campaign of donations and/or proven leadership ability, some men could apparently buy their way into the confraternal hierarchy, thereby side-stepping a long-standing member. The dues of accompanying relatives would render these upstarts even more attractive to the existing cabildo if the confraternal coffer was low.

Another means to rank men and women are the processional orders of blood and light, which involved the payment of extra dues and service obligations. Eligible brethren, who accounted for 18% of members, enjoyed unique privileges. Of the 27 female penitents (13% of all cofradías), most were cofrades de luz (81.5%), the less expensive and prestigious order. Likewise, among the 102 male penitents (19% of all cofrades), most were cofrades de luz (61%). Among blood brethren, men were dominant (89%), as they were among the brethren of light (74%). Males found it four times easier or more desirable to achieve full membership privileges as cofrades de sangre. But the honor of becoming a cofrade de luz was more within reach for both men and women. The proportion of men and women who pursued processional orders is similar to, and may merely echo, the cofradía’s gender composition (72% male, 28% female).

Processional insignia paths were positions for hire. They were recorded for 37% of the members, which after sex and year (100%), was the highest reporting rate. Purchased through donations or services, insignia paths represent a mostly complete dataset, maintained between 1675 and 1740. Through donations of money, goods, and/or
services, members secured their places within the confraternal hierarchy, at least for the coming year’s ritual calendar. Men enjoyed most formal processional positions (87%). Whenever a member’s insignia path was mentioned, their ethnicity was not. Likewise, members’ orders (blood, light) went undocumented whenever insignia paths were referenced, suggesting mutual exclusivity and replacement. Orders were recorded until 1675, which was the same year in which insignia paths were initiated.

Why was there a shift in assigning, categorizing and managing preferential positions and responsibilities within processions? Growing differentiation is evident. Where there were only 2 orders of penitents (sangre and luz), 7 insignia paths (campanilla, estandarte, guión, Jesus/Jesus Nazareno, Santa Cruz, Santo Cristo, Virgen) suddenly emerged in 1675. Insignia paths were linked to specific ritual items (bells, banners or standards) or images of saints. Perhaps insignia paths surfaced only after the acquisition of a great deal of ritual paraphernalia. The cabildo’s creation of the insignia paths would also generate extra revenue. 1675 was a symbolic year for the cofradía – the centennial. Insignia paths may have been created in preparation for the centennial procession of the Holy True Cross. More roles would also accommodate the late-17th century membership rise. As the group grew larger, interest in selective clubs may have led lay leaders to change a policy. There was nothing printed in regard to this change in policy, whether through an amendment or petition to the bishop of Puebla.

There was a concentration of insignia paths in the 1730s, mostly among women (30 between 1728 and 1740). In 1736, 23 women dedicated their paths to the cult of the Virgin (66% of female insignia bearers). Many of these women would have known each other, at least as neighbors, if not as cohorts who chose to enlist together. The women
collectively planned their inscription’s timing and purpose during the first generation of the parish’s three sisterhoods. Why did so many women follow a female devotion in a male-dominated cofradía? In modern Tecamachalco, various women, accompanied by their daughters, devote time, resources and skills into adoration and maintaining the statue and shrine of the Virgin Mary. Female volunteers far outnumber men in the yearly round of festivals and processions. They vie to host saints’ images in their home shrines. Each year, the parish office publishes a calendar poster that indicates the recipients of this honor. The roles of the 23 women from 1736 likely went beyond jointly carrying the Virgin in one procession. Women may have served in various ritual contexts, giving of themselves as they could, and receiving a measure of fellowship and prestige in return.

The insignia paths were largely gendered. The bell (31% of male insignia bearers) was the longest running insignia path (1675-1739). The coveted, highly visible honor of announcing the procession to other cofrados and townspeople was bestowed on men only. Bell carriers led processions through their spatial location - in front, and by sounding the sacred object. The guión and estandarte also symbolized the head of the procession. The banner was waved by 24 men (10%; 1687-1726), no women. The standard was raised by 10 men (4%; 1687-1719), no women. Men were also dedicated to an aspect of the cult of Jesus Christ, such as the Cross (the cofradía’s namesake) or the Crucifixion. The path of Santo Cristo attracted 54 men (23%; 1676-1739) and 1 woman. The path of Santa Cruz netted 44 male members (19%) and 1 woman. Another 26 men (11%; 1688-1740) and 3 women were dedicated to Jesus Nazareno. Most female insignia bearers exalted the Virgin (86%; 1686-1740), but they were also joined by 3 men.
Gender outliers may suggest scribal error or a small degree of gender flexibility or complementarity within lay devotions. Spouses may have permitted to pledge certain insignia paths in order to escort or chaperone one another. What was firmly outlawed in 1605 (in the amended charter) was acceptable a century later; men and women could “pair up” in processions.

**Ethnicity and Status Obscured**

Despite the founders’ claim of a cofradía de españoles, ethnically-charged ordinances from 1605, and the continuous documentation of ethnicity in baptismal and matrimonial records, the ethnic data in the membership lists are sparse. All individuals would have been assigned to a racial category, virtually since birth. But ethnicity was reported in only 14.5% of the cases. Certain eras, events or factors may have influenced ethnicity being emphasized or overlooked.

The 1590s were the only decade in which ethnicity was assessed with any regularity (93% reporting rate), accounting for 61% of all members with ethnic identifiers. In the 1630s, there was a 24% reporting rate, which contributes 17% of the ethnic data. Between 1670 and 1709, ethnicity was recorded on only a few occasions, after which the pretense was abandoned altogether. The last español noted, a priest, joined in 1708; the last known indio joined in 1701. Unlike baptismal records, separate membership lists based on ethnicity were not maintained. In a Spanish-dominated cofradía, it may have been useless or redundant to memorialize ethnicity.

Are there other ways to infer ethnicity? In the charters (Ord. 1 and 7, 1575; Ord. 1, 1605), dues were associated with a member’s sex, marital status and ethnicity. In 1605,
membership dues were set at 3 pesos, regardless of ethnicity, for everyone except those whose ability to pay was constricted by being female, poor or ill. Unless charged as a couple or family unit, fees ranged from 2 pesos to 3 pesos and 4 reales, after an increase in 1606. Thus the fee schedule presented in the 1605 may have been adhered to for only a year. Some individuals chose to pay more in exchange for privileges, such as running for office (15 pesos) or carrying an insignia. Sums as large as 30 pesos were paid on behalf of deceased and sick members. Extra charges for brethren of blood and light were not mentioned. Priests and affluent residents paid dues and alms through services or materials, so monetary values are not always available for analysis. The hierarchy of dues does not provide a useful strategy for addressing ethnicity, only class.

The available data on ethnicity (1590s and 1630s mostly) reveal a few patterns that may be short or long-term. Ethnicity was mentioned for only 59 españoles (71% male), 45 indios (53% female) and 2 mestizos. In the 1590s, there were 32 españoles and 32 indios, and a mestizo blood brother. In the 1630s, there were 15 recorded españoles, 2 indios and a widowed, mestiza sister of light. Ethnicity was documented for 21% of female members but only 12% of males. Spanish men were a large dominant majority, at least during the first generation of the cofradía. At the turn of the 17th century, few women would have immigrated to Tecamachalco from Spain or other settlements in New Spain. Male Spaniards often married indias or mestizas, perhaps joining the cofradía with them. Indios were more likely to join as couples, which might explain their roughly equal numbers. Between 1590 and 1701, 47% of indios joined as part of a marital unit, including 13 wives and 8 husbands. Among españoles who joined between 1590 and 1708, couples were less common (30.5%), with twice as many wives as husbands.
Scribes considered a woman’s marital status to be most noteworthy, but this was especially true among Spaniards.

The 1630s produce an entirely different outcome. The 15 españoles were 60% male and there were also an indio, an india, and a mestiza. Those of unknown ethnicity were 64% male. When ethnicity was mentioned, only male Spaniards were mentioned with any frequency. I suspect that scribes highlighted Spaniards, not that Spanish men were numerically dominant.

The documentation of parent-child relationships also reflects the cultural construction of ethnicity in the parish. Ethnicity was not recorded for mothers and fathers, but it was for 28% of child members. Perhaps scribes noted children’s ethnicities in order to avoid ambiguity; the offspring of mixed unions may have been common. There were only a few more españoles (15%) than indios (13%). Spanish boys dominated (67%) but girls surpassed (60%) native boys.

Among the 538 individuals (not joining within a family), ethnicity was seldom recorded (10%). Once again, whenever ethnicity was reported, male Spaniards (31) dominated all other groups, while indias (10) continued to outnumber indios (8), españolas (3) and mestizos (1).

The cofradía’s founders once equated blood brethren with Spanish men. Native men and even women were more likely to be accepted as brethren of light. No members pledged both orders at the same time, so they appear to have been mutually exclusive. Members may have first attained the order of light and then the order of blood and even a seat on the council. There were 84 brethren of light and 45 brethren of blood; ethnic data were provided in only 20% of cases.
Constitutions paint an ideal picture, one that is only partially supported by membership data. The order of light appears to be less prestigious, which explains its larger membership. It should entail fewer requirements or restrictions for eligibility. Indios appear to have been banned from the order of blood; they were penitents who were not to intermingle with españoles’ self-flagellation in processions (Ord. 3, 1605). Indios could not carry insignias, even while serving as processional penitents (Ord. 18, 28). Female roles and positions within processions were also circumscribed in relation to those of Spanish men (Ord. 3). Women were categorically excluded from certain spaces and meetings, and perhaps the order of blood by extension (Ord. 7). The omission of indias and mestizas from the 1605 prohibitions frames them as ineligible candidates for the processional orders or other participatory roles, except as spectators or stragglers.

But membership data question the male and Spanish exclusivity of the order of blood. Ethnicity was mentioned for only 31% of blood brethren; most were of unknown origin (69%: 28 men, 3 women), followed by españoles (20%: 8 men, 1 woman), indios (9%: 3 men, 1 woman), and one mestizo. Rhetoric on ethnic and gender exclusivity proved to be unenforceable or unsustainable. What had sounded wise in principle - at a cabildo meeting, and looked so effective on paper - in a 1605 ordinance, simply did not work in practice. The plural nature of the cofradía and the parish of Tecamachalco could only tolerate so much social differentiation. Perhaps lay leaders anticipated benefits from the alms and voluntary service of the town’s affluent indios and mestizos, rather than from reinforcing a racial hierarchy that already existed among their members. Men were still a dominant presence (89%) among the blood brethren.
Among 84 brethren of light, few were identified by ethnicity (14%). Of these 12, there were more españoles (9.5%: 7 men, 1 woman) than indios (3.6%: 1 man, 2 women) and one mestiza. There were three men for every woman, a ratio that was less pronounced than among blood brethren. Despite fragmentary ethnic data and no ordinances proclaiming ethnic or gender exclusivity among brethren of light, the dual orders’ compositions are similar. Male Spaniards dominated among cofrades de luz but to a lesser extent than among the cofrades de sangre.

Priests encouraged and supervised local lay religiosity by joining cofradías. Out of 16 priests, most were marked as españoles (81%). A Franciscan friar, an español, joined in 1590. In 1708, a Spanish priest’s enlistment represents the final instance of ethnicity documentation in the membership lists. Three priests secured membership through service to the cofradía (1607, 1620). It appears to have been customary for ecclesiastic authorities and landowners to barter their resources as capital. One Spanish friar who joined was from Mexico City, whether a visiting dignitary or a newcomer to the local religious hierarchy (1632). When ethnicity was not recorded (1690s), scribes likely assumed that everyone already knew that priest meant Spaniard.

Despite the scarcity of data, ethnicity and socio-economic status can be partially linked. Out of 33 members who held honorary titles or respected leadership positions (4.5%: Señores, Doñas, mayordomos and their relatives, and maestros de capilla), we know the ethnicity of only two individuals – a chief steward and a priest, both Spaniards. In comparison to sacramental records, membership lists obscure the ethnicity of town leaders. Even when baptismal scribes omitted parents’ or padrinos’ titles and occupations, their ethnic data were nearly complete. Among 14 individuals identified by
occupation or place of residence, ethnic data were more common (29%). There were 5 servants, 2 of whom were indios, and various men and women of unknown ethnicity, including a farmer’s wife and four skilled craftsmen (2 men, 2 women), employees of the chief steward. At the other end of the social spectrum were a Spanish lady who owned an estate and 3 distinguished newcomers, including a priest, the Señor from Mexico City.

There were 85 individuals who invested resources into the cofradía (11.6%) and 11 who benefited from cofrades’ generosity (1.5%). Extra dues were paid by 77 men and 2 women of unknown ethnicity. Maize, candle wax and alms supplemented the confraternal coffer. Service memberships were earned by 6 men, including 3 priests, 2 of whom were identified as españoles. An indio and 3 men of unknown ethnicity also bartered services for their memberships. Charity recipients included a poor sick español and an indio sponsored by a Franciscan friar. Many more members must have qualified as donors or recipients of charity but perhaps not upon enlistment.

When subjected to quantitative analysis, sources unveil their potential and limitations. Mostly contiguous data (except for 1643-1669, 1741-1809) reflect evolving membership. Data on sex facilitates an assessment of a broad range of gender-related factors, such as when scribes chose to highlight marital status, acceptance into special orders or insignia paths. These avenues of exploration are simply impossible along ethnic lines. In the next two chapters, I employ the Holy True Cross’ electoral and financial records, ordinances and amendments to identify the ethnic, class and gendered facets that shaped the complex interplay of lay leaders and members.
Footnotes

#1: Various groups migrated to Tecamachalco and received the gloss “indio” in parish and secular records. The naturales were Popolocas, meaning one who speaks Nahuatl poorly. Popolocan caciques probably spoke Nahuatl or Mexicano, the lingua franca of the central Mexican region, rather well. There were Otomí migrants, likely from Hidalgo, and various other transplants living amongst them (Acuña 1984: 231-232).

#2: Please see the following graphs generated through ACCESS and EXCEL

Tecamachalco Parish Archive Documents Consulted for this Chapter

Group: Disciplinar, Asociaciones

Books I-VIII of the Archicofradía de la Santa Veracruz, 1575-1809

(1575 and 1605 constitutions, membership lists dating to 1590-1642 and 1670-1740)

Group: Cordilleras y Edictos, Padrones (parishioner counts) - 1660, 1668, 1745, 1768

Group: Sacramentos, Libros de Bautizmos (baptismal record books), 1641-1740
Male enlistments are shown in grey; female enlistments are shown in black. Note that the male inscription rate was usually higher than that of females. There were membership peaks among men in the late 17\textsuperscript{th} century, when barrio brotherhoods were formed, and a membership peak among women in the mid 18\textsuperscript{th} century, when barrio sisterhoods arose.
Beginning in 1675, processional insignia paths were created to offer male and female penitents more options than the orders of blood and light. Note the many insignia paths monopolized by men and the clear association between the Virgin Mary and women. The few examples of gender outliers may represent spouses accompanying one another.
VI - Good Government in the Holy True Cross: Confraternal Political Economy

My comparative and diachronic analyses of political and economic data facilitate reconstruction of the Holy True Cross’ evolution as it responded to religious imperatives and financial pressures, both external and internal. I identify periods, cycles and causes of growth as well as recession. The cofradía’s relative wealth, the quality of its record-keeping, and revision of business management principles may coincide with the organization’s rise and fall. Spending more on feast-day masses and processions may reflect a change in member recruitment strategies and tallies. Data discontinuity is disadvantageous, but variation in record-keeping points to the oversight and relative integration of the cofradía as an institution. Ever centered on agency, I evaluate the choices and actions of the key players involved in fiscal management. I identify the individuals or groups credited for the cofradía’s gains and/or blamed for its losses.

Confraternal administration is illuminated through various forms of record-keeping: the 1575 and 1605 constitutions, annual election results of mayordomos, diputados and escribanos, annual accounts of earnings and expenditures, occasional inventories of corporate property (1575-1809), baptismal records (1641-1740), legal correspondence, and bishop’s edicts.

I focus on the criteria used to define suitable leaders (sex, ethnicity and social standing), electoral procedures and results, and the cabildo’s inner workings. My exploration of the naming of officials addresses the following questions: What were the most desirable qualities in a lay leader? Were these criteria practical or mere ideals, unmet by officials? By what means did candidates gain popularity, legitimacy and
authority? How closely did voters and officials adhere to electoral and leadership policies? Were officials largely at liberty to administer funds or did ecclesiastic authorities interfere in lay religious matters, even those of Spaniards?

The electoral data are mostly contiguous (1575-1579, 1603-1642, 1670-1699), but sometimes the data were irregular or lost (1580-1602, 1643-1669). In the 18th century, non-pagination was common and the data became sparse, with only 10 elections recorded between 1700 and 1809. The data primarily consist of the victors’ names, which indirectly indicate sex, reelection and perhaps some family relationships. The ethnicities, titles and family ties of officials were seldom annotated. For the final decades of the 17th century, I examined baptismal records in order to identify confraternal officials within another sphere of local, lay religious leadership - as the padrinos of the children of their kin, neighbors and employees. The secular town records begin in the late colonial period so I could not substantiate leadership monopolies and dynasties by comparing individuals from the parish and municipal archives.

Finances are revealed through ordinances outlining proper procedure and annual accounts (29 years). The late 17th century is well-documented but sources of incoming funds, justifications for outgoing monies (receipts signed by priests and singers), inventories of possessions and bishop’s edicts (after 1765) are not all contiguous.

*Eligibility for Office: A Small Circle of Spanish Men*

At the annual commemoration of the 1575 foundation, on the day of the Holy Cross, a new cabildo was elected by all members eligible to vote: “New officials shall be
named on every May 3rd (ASV I: 13v, Ord. 19, 1575). The same requirement, described in greater detail, was provided in the amended constitution:

Now concerning the election of officials. Each year, in the afternoon after Vespers, a meeting and council of the brethren is to be held. The purpose of the meeting is to elect one chief steward, two deputies and a scribe… (ASV, IV: Ord. 16, 1605)

Confraternal councils consisted of four officials: a mayordomo, two diputados, each with their own distinct responsibilities, and an escribano. The most visible members were elected leaders and the priests and scribes who attended to the cofradía’s sacred and secular business. The structure of the council largely mirrored that of the secular, town or municipal cabildo (Haskett 1991: 122; Lavrin 2002: 31). Many titles and administrative duties were similar, just on a smaller scale. Rather than a purely political focus, the foci were spiritual, social and economic.

A mass and procession affixed public and spiritual seals to the electoral results. All current and prospective members and leaders were to attend (ASV IV: Ord. 15, 1605). Their compulsory presence ensured that the transfer of power would be witnessed and legitimized:

And concerning giving notice of the elections; there shall be a member with the hand bell, who with his cloak, the tolling of the bell shall be heard throughout the whole town. This task will be performed by an Indian, who will be paid for his work, and everyone shall be obligated, upon hearing it, to attend the court of the council that is to be found in the town. If anyone is absent, the penalty is two pounds of white wax. All members shall be present in the council and town in order to be elected. (ASV IV: Ord. 26, 1605)

Although indigenous men were prevented from running for office and even voting, they were the appropriate demographic to announce elections. An indio cofrade was armed with a bell and cloak, proving that he was dispatched on official confraternal business, in order to summon his fellow members to the election. The fact that he was
paid suggests that Spaniards did not see their indigenous brethren as full members or that it was simply charitable to reward indios.

Continuity and change in leadership trends are apparent. It was a prestigious burden to undertake the spiritual welfare of one’s neighbors (Lavrin 2002: 32). I examine the extent to which certain families and ethnic groups came to monopolize the town’s highest ranks by rotating their positions among a select few. Electoral guidelines and outcomes reflect contests in social status and networking among the male elite of the cofradía as well as the town and parish. Personal resources, reputations and family relationships factored into, and evolved throughout, men’s careers in local politics. This negotiation involved the rotation of offices among neighbors and kinsmen, as well as rewarding sound economic stewardship and public acts of generosity.

Key criteria for both candidates and voters were attendance at the election and to be a male Spaniard, but other factors were at play. No statutes specified that officials be married or of a certain age, but a man who owned property and married a respectable woman would fare better than his younger, single, up-start neighbor. Candidates had to live within the parish, at least part-time, in order to attend to the regular stream of confraternal business and address emergencies. Long-term residents with established social networks were among the most attractive candidates.

After each election, only the victors’ names were memorialized. Thus, it is not clear if candidates who were unsuccessful in their initial bids tried again, eventually securing a position. In the final book, in between two pages, there was a lone election tally card (ASV VIII: 68v-69r). The size of a business card, it contained the names and titles of three candidates, listed in this order: Don Dionicio Gutierrez (9 votes), Don
Leandro Serrano (none), and Don Josep Orduña (18). The card was not meant to be preserved as an official record; it was the only one of its kind to be found and the year was not noted (late 1770s or early 1780s). There were no election records preserved between 1768 and 1808 and the men’s names were not found elsewhere.

The tally card, however hastily written and forgotten or misplaced, generates several revelations. The electorate from this year totaled 27 men (9+0+18), the same number as the founders, all reportedly españoles. Thirty men signed their names to the 1605 charter, including a mayordomo and two diputados, but not the escribano, who wrote his name at the very end, apart from the list. Thus the long-term signing or voting constituency, the cofradía’s inner circle, entailed 27 Spanish men. A current board member may have had to die, move out of the area or become ineligible in order for another Spaniard to join the steering committee. The ideal size of the voting pool was never presented but the recurrences do not seem to be purely coincidental.

All three candidates were referred to as Don. Titles did not usually make their way into electoral records; leaders, usually mayordomos, were identified as Señor (1577, 1579, 1674) or Don (1670, 1767, 1776) on few occasions. The use of honorary titles became more customary in the late colonial period. Don no longer indicated nobility or wealth only, but also deference to men of a certain age, accomplishments or leadership roles within the community, as seen today.

Preserving hierarchies among and within cofradíás, based on location (core versus periphery), foundation date (earlier versus later), and member ethnicity (españoles versus indios), was pursued in lay leaders’ racially-driven rhetoric, ceremonies and practices. Colonial Latin America’s most exclusive cofradíás “belonged to affluent whites,
followed by a spectrum of occupational and devotional groups in the cities, and at the
top confraternities founded in …towns and barrios” (Lavrin 2002: 32). But urban
demography and industry tended to promote multi-ethnic cofradías. Leaders of
indigenous communities, which were often multi-ethnic and multi-lingual, often
dominated rural cofradías, as seen in Tecamachalco’s Popoloca and barrio brotherhoods.
At least at its inception, the Holy True Cross was a cofradía de españoles that asserted the
lay religious leadership of what its founding members saw as a pueblo de españoles.

An 1805 edict sent by Puebla’s bishop, Manuel Ignacio, through the notary
Romero, delineated cofradías by lay leaders’ and members’ ethnicities: “Of the
Confraternities that have been established, distinguishing them from the ones that are
actually [composed] of Indians only” (Cordilleras y Edictos: 29v, 1791-). By the time
that the edict was in the hands of local priests, lay leaders and members, many groups had
disbanded, so the decree was moot. Ethnic legitimacy was likely emphasized even more
in 1805 than at the cofradía’s inception in 1575.

Ethnic identity was a key qualification for running for office and even voting.
According to Pedro de Beriztain, scribe of the 1605 constitution, all council leaders and
voters were españoles, even if the ethnic identities of individuals were recorded only
sporadically.

… And let it be known that the Indians are not to be admitted into the council in
order to vote. And consider that in regard to, in this said confraternity, there are
admitted as members some native/local Indians. Let it be known that these enjoy
due only to the grace and indulgences of the said confraternity, to whom we
exempt them [as ineligible], we defer [reject them] for being indecent and
incapable people, who shall not be present in the meetings and councils in order
to vote in any matter, nor shall they be given any office concerned with the said
confraternity… (ASV IV: Ord. 17-18, 1605)
Only españoles were suitable for the honors and burdens of leadership, decision-making (voting) and the right to assembly (attending council meetings). Perhaps the officials’ ethnicities were never called into question because everyone knew that only Spaniards could vote for only Spaniards. As such, there was no need to mention ethnicity, at least in the eyes of scribes. Due to indios’ and women’s perceived limitations, these groups were summarily excluded. Castas were entirely overlooked. Election days and all council meetings were closed yet partly public affairs. Attempts to violate electoral law, such as allowing indios or “women of any quality” to attend meetings, were impossible to coordinate or hide (ASV IV: Ord. 16, 17, 30, 1605). Male Spaniards’ sexual and ethnic monopoly of leadership echoes their numerical dominance. Female and indigenous members are rendered nearly invisible in electoral and financial records, even though they served as informal leaders through alms collection, music, artistry and manual labor.

Leadership Monopolies and Dynasties

The newly elected cabildo frequently closely resembled the old cabildo. Reelection, office rotation (among scribes, deputies and chief stewards) and nepotism often came into play. Out of 81 men, 27% were elected more than once. No statute barred stewards from continued or repeat service, as long as the possessions and accounts from the previous year were maintained to the electoral committee’s satisfaction: “Now, concerning the offices not being for more than one year, except for the chief steward, who is managing the accounts well, or the scribe, who is experienced and competent. But there will be elections every year” (ASV IV: Ord. 19, 1605). In other words, no one could stay in office without some oversight and ceremony. At least 10 deputies won reelection,
including 5 who served in consecutive years. A postscript, added after the amendments were ratified, reiterated the fact that fiscal responsibility bought reelection: “Now, let it be known that members shall not elect or reelect the same person if he cannot be entrusted with the property and expenses” (ASV IV: Ord. 40, amendment to 19, 1605).

Reelections can be associated with promotions. Political allies and rivals ascended from deputy to chief steward or maintained their positions. It was just as common for diputados as mayordomos to be elected to second terms. No diputados were promoted to mayordomo for their second year in office. About half the time, terms were consecutive, but there could be as many as 18 years between a first and final term of office. Leaders elected to 3 terms had more time and opportunity for promotion, but 4 of 6 men who began as diputados remained in this position.

Confraternal officials expanded their lay leadership, crossing ethnic and class barriers through baptismal compadrazgo. Diputado (1670, 1689) Don Cristobal Mendel sponsored at least 3 indios, including an orphan (1666-1679). Diputado (1683, 1684, 1687) Xines Martin sponsored a mestizo and 4 indios, including an orphan (1676-1695).

Officials elected to 2 terms (10 men or 12% of all recorded leaders)

1577, 1579: mayordomo Señor Bernardino de Balderas za Gotos
1608, 1614: may. Juan de la Caleta 1624-1625: may. Andres de Orea
1629, 1640: diputado Juan Alvarez de Zuniga 1636-1637: may. Anton de Castro
1670, 1689: dip. Don Cristobal Mendel 1673-1674: may. Juan Garcia de Lizeo
1705, 1711: may. Antonio de Lisama
Officials elected to 3 terms (8 men or 10% of all recorded leaders)

1603-1605: dip. Ortuño de Lisama
1603, 1605, 1610: may. Luis Muñoz de Arebalo

1612-1614: may. Pedro de Sagastiberría
1620, 1622, 1626: dip. Vicente Martín

1620, 1622-1623: Alonso de Aguilar Infante, promoted from diputado to mayordomo

1626, 1631, 1641: Melchor de Melo Vasconselos, diputado to mayordomo to diputado

1677, 1686-1687: dip. Antonio Muñoz

1683-1684, 1687: dip. Xines Martín

A few men dominated the 17th-century political arena. Others met with similar successes, but not to the same extent. In one example of reelection and nepotism, Miguel de Sagastiberría was mayordomo for 5 years (1604-1610, except for 1608). In the 1607 auto de visita, in which the Holy True Cross came under ecclesiastic review, Sagastiberría attested to the “legitimacy of everything that was written” (ASV II: 24v). After making a sizeable and well-timed donation in 1608, Sagastiberría won re-election in 1609 and 1610. He entirely sidestepped the position of diputado, ascending to mayordomo from relative anonymity. The distinctive last name suggests that Pedro de Sagastiberría, the 1612-1614 mayordomo, was Miguel’s known relative.

In the 1620s and 1630s, Salvador García was involved in nearly all elections and transactions. After becoming diputado in 1624, he was elected 8 more times. He travelled to Mexico City at great expense to the cofradía (12 pesos, the price of 6 new memberships), presumably to pay dues to the archbishop (ASV II: 63v, 1624). On the same trip, García sought the aid of Alonso Ximenes de Castilla, the Procurador de la Real Audiencia (Solicitor of the Royal Court), in collecting 70 pesos but only 50 pesos were recovered (ASV III: 5v). Juan Rua, the “painter of this sacred confraternity,” had likely contracted and paid to produce a painting, but he failed to do so in a timely
manner. Lay leaders commissioned obras pías or religious artwork as a symbol of their collective piety and sacrifice; some still hang in Mexico’s churches.

On some Sundays, García could be found outside the church, begging for alms from congregants (ASV III: 113r). In 1624, he collected 54 pesos in money and corn, which was invested in a new cloak for the cofrades’ statue of the Virgin (ASV III: 115r). By 1625, García had managed these tasks well enough to be promoted to mayordomo, where he remained for 6 years (1625-1630). After a long hiatus, he returned to office for a final 2 years (1638-1639). In a 1626 receipt for services rendered by Fray Francisco Cavalleros, he was identified as Salvador Garcia Velasco, sindico fiscal (treasurer) and mayordomo (ASV II: 66r). Salvador García also signed his name to the 1605 charter. Unless the man was his father, other kinsman or a stranger, Salvador García enjoyed the greatest longevity and visibility in the cofradía’s history.

There were at least 5 generations of Lisama lay leaders, 3 of whom were reelected: Ortuño de (1603-1605), Joseph de (1674-1677, 1683-1690, 1699-1700, 1705), Antonio de (1705 and 1711), Carlos de (1726), and Joseph Lisama (1745).

Señor Joseph de Lisama first took office in 1674 and held office for 15 years (over 3 decades), enjoying unprecedented influence until his death in 1708. In 1675, he was promoted from diputado to mayordomo. He was so outstanding or well-connected that other lay leaders were admonished to display his fiscal wisdom: “Improvements and growth that Joseph de Lisama brought about during the years that he was the chief steward of this confraternity” (ASV VI: 2v). Financial gain likely came in the form of more donations, better savings or even a few prized ritual acquisitions. Other officials
may have credited Lisama for the membership boom during this period, which was integral to the cofradía’s financial viability.

At a minimum, Joseph de Lisama served consecutively between 1674 and 1677 and 1683 through 1690; the 1678-1682 election records are missing. Reelected as mayordomo in 1699, 1700 and 1705, Joseph de Lisama was replaced by Antonio de Lisama during his final term. Joseph’s wife was identified as Antonio’s mother in a baptismal entry from 1699. Antonio paid for 15 masses in honor of Joseph’s passing in 1708. *Misas particulares* were and are dedicated to the deceased by surviving spouses, children or siblings. Antonio’s act ensured that his father was buried in the perpetual path of Santo Cristo. As Joseph’s son, Antonio would have inherited some of the good will if not the good sense for which his father had been recognized.

There were always exceptions to rules, even the firmest ones, if there was good reason. In 1705, a woman named Mariana Rendon was appointed mayordoma (ASV VII: 3v). While this act first appeared to be truly revolutionary, Mariana never was an officiating chief steward. This task fell instead to Joseph de Lisama, replaced later in the year by Antonio Lisama. Mariana actually received the honorary title as a reward for her extraordinary contribution to the cofradía - she made and donated an image of Jesus Nazareno. Did Joseph de Lisama elevate her in this manner due solely to her gift rather than a relationship to a prestigious and/or affluent husband?

Mariana Rendon’s true identity is revealed in the baptismal records. In 1679, when she was still a doncella, she sponsored Antonio, a native orphan. Serving together as padrinos on at least 6 occasions (1685-1698) is compelling evidence in support of a marital union between Joseph de Lisama and Mariana Rendon. Two of the children were
named after padrino Joseph. Except for one mestizo couple, the parents were all married españoles. Two later cases reveal that Mariana Rendon was indeed Joseph de Lisama’s *muger (1696)* and *esposa (1698)*.

By 1700, nearly every resident should have known, or at least known of, Mariana Rendon. Her husband’s formidable reputation and her own religious activism, especially her presence and participation at baptismal masses, made her one of the most visible female congregants in the parish. By 1699, Mariana Rendon was referred to as Doña when she sponsored an orphan of Spanish descent, alongside her son, Antonio de Lisama, who later married a Doña and became mayordomo (1705 and 1711). The cofradía’s recognition of Mariana Rendon likely reflects more about the character and triumph of her husband than any semblance of gender parity among cofrades. Only a man as influential as Joseph de Lisama could secure the singular honor. He died 3 years later, after promoting the cofradía and his wife. Perhaps Lisama acted selflessly, for God and cofradía, but he also sought to better himself and his family.

Serving as a child’s spiritual guide attested to the “good name” of Lisama. It was often found amongst the padrinos of baptized children. A young Joseph de Lisama acted as padrino, without his wife, for at least 3 indios, including an orphan (1663-1676). He also sponsored 3 españoles and a mestizo, including a baby Joseph the child of a Doña (1680-1697). Joseph de Lisama fully embraced his role as a lay leader, inside and outside of the cofradía. Negotiating the highest and lowest echelons of local society, he established himself as an influential patron. He entered into mutually-beneficial relationships with a wide array of his neighbors, regardless of ethnicity or social standing, but he probably did not see native or mestizo cofrades as his equals.
Lisama is an anomaly. In 1700, he supervised 4 diputados (ASV VII: 1v). Two sets of officials were extraordinary, except for in the dual cabildos of mixed-ethnicity cofradías (Holy Sepulcher of Calvary) or early on in Popoloca groups (San Francisco). Perhaps there was too much business to handle, especially for Lisama, who was advanced in age; he had already served for 26 years. If votes had been evenly distributed among 4 diputados, this compromise may have been reached in order to keep the peace among the political elite. Lastly, Señor Joseph de Lisama may have deputized the wives of the elected diputados; the names, sexes and roles of the 4 ‘deputies’ were not provided. The chief steward transgressed the very ordinances that he swore to uphold. Violating certain policies, even those concerned with hierarchal structure, was not necessarily treason. Constitutions were not laws; they were flexible, negotiable guidelines.

If a chief steward died during his term of office, or was unable to perform in this capacity for some other reason, then a suitable replacement was found in a timely manner. A few records reveal that a presiding official became ill or died suddenly. Succession was immediate, perhaps without the formality of an election. Luis Muñoz de Arebalo replaced mayordomo Miguel de Sagastiberria, who died in office (1610). Two years later Pedro de Sagastiberria took over (1612). In 1705, Antonio de Lisama relieved his father, Joseph de Lisama, who died in 1708. Perhaps Joseph ushered in his son or he was relieved of certain duties while acting as figurehead. Male relatives and deputies most commonly replaced chief stewards in emergency or defacto-elections. Another cofrade could be recruited and deputized to fill the lesser position. It seems most likely that the more senior deputy was asked to replace an ailing or deceased chief steward.
Once elected, officials had to embrace the title and responsibilities associated with it: “Now concerning the acceptance of offices without excuse. If elected, then they must accept the duty, or the penalty shall be one arroba of white wax” (ASV IV: Ord. 17, 1605). The ordinances and electoral results were read aloud on each election-day, so candidates had to comply. Some men may have failed to take their candidacies or obligations seriously. The sizeable onus placed on lay leaders included their time, diplomacy and even wealth. If a man was nominated by well-intentioned or even rival neighbors, he might not be prepared for all that leadership entailed.

An official scribe was seated on the cabildo, but several men usually performed the role concurrently and over a long period of time. The signatures of various men who claimed to be the escribano are found throughout records that date to the same year. The first scribe, de Beriztain, who penned the 1575 ordinances, signed cofrade y hermano - member and brother (ASV I: 16r). In his official capacity as scribe, Beriztain was a member of the founding cabildo. Hernando de Oujedo and Luder Alderar soon came to serve concurrently as scribes (1575-1577). Multiple scribes meant that one was always available to undertake urgent confraternal business. It was also an honor to serve in this manner, so several men might volunteer. Escribanos, rarely identified as notarios, were cofrades compensated for their services; a scribe was paid 3 pesos, 4 reales, which just happened to be the price of membership for some cofrades (ASV I: 50v, 1620).

Pedro de Beriztain was an active scribe and member when the amendments were crafted in 1605. He appears to be the same scribe from the 1575 charter, 30 years earlier. Penning both charters elevates Beriztain to the preeminent scribe of the cofradía. If these are 2 men, then the de Beriztain family was firmly entrenched among the elite of the
confraternity and community. Later de Beriztain are found in confraternal and baptismal records: Joseph (1642 mayordomo, padrino in 1641), Don Pedro (1670 mayordomo, padrino in 1671-1679, 1686, 1692), and Don Francisco (member in 1673, padrino in 1677). Like Mariana Rendon, the Beriztain women were also active and influential parishioners, serving as madrinas multiple times in a single year.

Authority and Service

Cabildo members drew their authority from the consent of their fellow cofrades as well as local ecclesiastic and secular officials. Like priests, lay leaders reserved the right to reward some members for compliance and punish others for non-compliance: “If a confraternal member commits an injustice, then he shall pay one pound of candle wax and recite ten Our Fathers and ten Hail Marys, with the authority of the town” (ASV I: 12v, Ord. 6, 1605). The cabildo could saddle native cofrades with sizeable workloads, but there was to be no interference between confraternal pursuits and existing work obligations, the prerogative of local secular leaders:

And if for any personal service concerning the matters of this confraternity, there was a need for some Indians, then the chief and deputy stewards are to pay them for their work. [The cabildo] can force the said Indians who are members to assist in it. And [if] in this they [are] impeded [by] the governor, the justices of the peace [alcaldes], nor other officials of the said town of Tecamachalco, on penalty of one pound of wax from each one towards the said confraternity, and only the said penalty. The said Indian members shall assist with what the said Spanish officials order them, in matters of the said confraternity, paying them according to what is said of their work. (ASV IV: Ord. 18)

The racially-charged language used by Pedro de Beriztrain may have been too harsh for the supervising friar and/or bishop. An amendment, gentler in wording and approach, was added soon after. Only a handful of the policies were targeted for further
amendments, so Ordinance 18 must have left some important matters unclear or perhaps all too clear (footnote #1).

And as to the contents of the eighteenth ordinance, in which the Indians, being brethren of the said confraternity can be compelled to assist in the necessary matters of it the confraternity, paying them for their work what is their due, making a gift in moderation, without requiring wasteful spending. [Brethren of] light, petition and entrust this to the governor and mayor and notables, do not impede them [Indians], instead, before, inspire them to assist in the necessary matters of the said confraternity since all are its brethren. (ASV IV: Ord. 39, 1605)

Native work obligations were frequent causes for litigation. In 1591, a petition was sent to Mexico City, addressing personal services likely performed on the land holdings of Spaniards:

The mayor of Tepeaca and the governor, the constables and nobles of Tecamachalco, request that the service of the Indians should not be obligatory. The Indians who specialize as painters, masons and other offices are already busy. They should not take part in the work order [repartimiento de pares] and other personal services, which have become bothersome [una molestia]. (AGN, Indios, Vol. 4, Exp. 384, Fojas 124-125)

A 1767 edict from the bishop of Puebla forbade landowners from forcing their employees to fulfill agricultural work obligations (labor de los campos) on their estates and ranches, on the occasion of 20 holy days (Cordilleras y Edictos, 1765-1771). The workers were indios and African slaves, whose absence at church events was troubling to the bishop. But “due to their poverty,” indios were “permitted to work” more festival days than españoles. Mestizos, other castas and Afro-Mexicans were never directly integrated in the edict. But a later entry enjoined everyone: “sean [whether they be] españoles, mestizos, mulatos, o negros.” Despite the artful wording, the concession benefitted the landowners and the State, not the agricultural laborers.
Despite the cabildo’s implied collusion with secular authorities in exploiting native cofrades, non-members with political clout were framed as potentially dangerous or at least meddlesome. Any non-cofrade, but no one specifically, was barred from council meetings:

As to the times that it is appropriate to have a meeting and Council of brothers to elect chief stewards and officials, as well as other matters concerned with service to God, of the said confraternity, in which [people] congregate and gather together, and serving [by reciting] perfect prayer, kneeling down in the presence of the insignias of Jesus Christ crucified and resuscitated, and of the most sacred Virgin, his Mother, communicating, talking and ordering to that end. So that the council and meeting, where there is no admittance for any person of whatever quality, whoever he may be, who is not a member of this confraternity, whoever he may be. And [if not, officials shall] administer justice. (ASV IV: Ord. 2, 1605)

The problematic social segment was soon identified. Franciscan friars who were not cofrades were confraternal outsiders, at least to Spanish lay leaders. Priests would not have seen themselves as interlopers. But lay leaders forbid them from influencing election outcomes or interfering with confraternal business: “Let it be known that no one who is not a member shall interfere with the confraternity. The friars and judges cannot vote…” (ASV IV: Ord. 20, 1605).

Priests who were cofrades could attend council meetings, at least in theory; membership and Spanish descent ascribed them this privilege. Priests’ memberships guaranteed an added measure of ecclesiastic oversight, which may have been resented as much as it was welcomed. While priestly presence indicated legitimacy or sanction from the Church, it also violated the ideal of a purely lay society. Spanish lay leaders and members did not elect priests to formal leadership positions but frequent contact occurred through monthly masses and processions.
Cofradías can be framed as conservative institutions that merely replicate colonial structure and status quo or that exacerbate existing political rivalries. More often than not, lay leaders may have facilitated the agendas of local religious and secular authorities. But the above ordinances signal considerable cabildo autonomy in relation to cofrades and neighbors, as well as official representatives of the Catholic Church and Spanish Crown. Council members who supported one another could collectively exercise substantial authority during, and perhaps even after, their terms of office. Officials who ruled well would find their efforts transformed into greater prestige, gratitude and deference within the cofradía and parish as a whole.

The rewards of service were inevitably accompanied by monumental responsibilities. Each year, officials organized their fellow members into productive cooperative units that made insignias, repaired ritual items, managed corporate lands, collected alms, and visited the sick. Expense reports indicate that the first tasks appear to have largely fallen on paid native artisans. Ordinances and earning reports attest to officials accompanying cofrades in the most visible acts: alms-collecting, usually at the church, and attending to the poor and ill, through home visits.

Members were fully aware of their work obligations and relative positions. No one could undertake any service without explicit request or approval from an official:

The brethren and members shall do as they are ordered by the officials, on penalty of one pound of white wax. And they shall not take on any authority or responsibility without being sent by the officials, on penalty of half an arroba of white wax. (ASV IV: Ord. 20)

Officials provided cofrades with instruction through the annual reading of ordinances. No member could claim ignorance of confraternal protocol. Only potential future leaders were addressed at first: “In order that they read to all, each one to the
brethren who wish to be seated first in this confraternity, who are admitted, so that they
will have wisdom about what must be looked after and taken care of in this brotherhood”
(ASV IV: Ord. 16, 1605). Then the cofrades de luz were enjoined: “And on Palm
Sunday, there shall be a council. In the afternoon, the ordinances shall be read. The
brethren of light shall accept their responsibilities from the chief steward and deputies. If
they do not obey, [it will be a] penalty of two pounds of wax” (ASV IV: Ord. 27, 1605).
There must have been distinct tasks for the brethren of blood and light. Special
announcements may have been made whenever a new task or role was to be undertaken.

The required skill-set for leaders included expertise in communication and
conflict resolution. Lay leaders were to keep the peace among the members, neighbors
and the cabildos of other cofradías. Effective lay leaders were gifted and patient peace-
makers, moderators or diplomats who listened to their fellow brethren’s concerns and
strove for compromise:

Let it be known that we have the love and friendship that our Lady commands. And if in some occurrence among them [members], they have some disagreement, or grievance, that the chief steward or deputies shall be obligated to confer with them, and that they shall come to friendship. And those brethren shall be obligated in this certain matter to do what the said officials ask of them. If they resist, then they must pay the penalty of half an arroba of white wax. (25 pounds; ASV IV: Ord. 14, 1605)

Officials were to resolve intra-confraternal conflicts after careful and perhaps
lengthy deliberation and reflection, rather than impose their own perspective or will in the
matter. There is no evidence of anyone performing the task particularly well or poorly.
Resorting to punishing a disenfranchised member through a forced donation or expulsion
could be interpreted as failure.
Despite differences of opinion, a cordial atmosphere was to be cultivated within the council. Officials were admonished to resolve any conflicts that arose: “There is to be peace among the officials, who should act obediently and reverentially, or they shall pay a pound of white wax to Maria” (ASV I: 13v, Ord. 16, 1575). There was no mention of leaders remaining impartial in their decisions. Some men may have possessed sizeable reputations, egos and personalities. Had leaders forgotten their ultimate mission, their disagreements could have become frequent, heated and distracting to one another as well as to their fellow members.

Stewards spear-headed all funerary, bi-monthly and feast-day masses and processions. Processions were large-scale events requiring the orchestration of most if not all members. This vital role was mentioned in 10 ordinances in the 1575 and 1605 charters. Three examples best outline lay leaders’ processional roles: “The officials shall ensure that the procession begins before ten or eleven [am], and implore a priest from the churches to be there among us before the procession proceeds, leading us in charity” (ASV I: 12v, Ord. 5, 1575); “There shall be a mass at the beginning of September, on the 14th, on the day of the Exaltation of the Holy True Cross, led by the chief steward, another mass shall be sung, and the chief steward shall take the procession throughout the courtyard…” (ASV I: 14v, Ord. 31, 1575); “As to the officials of the confraternity who shall gather together on Holy Thursday, and a priest shall lament in honor of the Glory of God before the departure of the procession” (ASV, IV: Ord. 4, 1605).

The mayordomo joined the presiding priest in heading processions, which culminated in leading congregants into the church for a special mass. While only a layperson, the mayordomo may have been treated with as much deference as the priest on
these occasions. The mayordomo was personally responsible for the attendance and solemn participation of his fellow members.

And as to the members of blood who are not serving on Holy Thursday. And this penalty shall be requested in the presence of the Ecclesiastic Justice. And consider that to the members who are of blood, and the chief steward and deputies, except in the case of extraordinary necessity, are not to be required to do anything on Holy Thursday, inasmuch as they are performing their penitence in the procession. And if one of them, without legitimate cause, is noted to be absent from the procession, that when the chief steward learns of this matter, then he shall be obligated to do due diligence, paying towards the confraternity five pounds of white wax by such a member. They are not to be found outside of the procession. (ASV IV: Ord. 30, 1605)

Deputies shepherded disciplinants according to Spanish Catholic custom. They were to be treated with great deference by other cofrades. There was a concerted attempt to differentiate between the deputies in the Holy Thursday procession: “And one of the two deputies shall carry the said standard with his sword in his sash, with no other deputy with a staff directing the said procession” (ASV IV: Ord. 3, 1605). Only one deputy could participate in a leadership capacity. The rule was reiterated a bit differently for the Holy Cross procession (May 3rd – election day):

The banner, carried by one of the deputies, and the other deputy carrying the staff and insignia of the government of the procession… And if by some negligence or carelessness of the chief steward, or deputies, there is failure to act on this day according to the aforesaid practice, then they are to pay four pounds of white wax, everyone jointly to the said confraternity. (ASV IV: Ord. 15, 1605)

Only one man was entrusted with a task at any one time. Perhaps the priests and/or scribe of the 1605 charter anticipated that deputies would quarrel over their physical placement in processions or the ritual items that they would carry. It was not until 1675 that cofrades purchased the privilege to bear confraternal banners. At least between 1575 and 1605, the honor appears to have been enjoyed by only deputies and
only one at a time. From early on, insignias were carried by Spanish men, but the confraternal staff was monopolized by deputies.

There may have been senior and junior deputies, but for most purposes, the men appear to be social equals. Perhaps deputies alternated their positions and tasks within processions, council meetings and other confraternal business in order to maintain parity. There would be more than enough work to spread between two men. The task of safeguarding funds amassed as alms, until they were transferred to the chief steward, in order to be placed within the cofradía’s coffer, appears to have fallen on only one deputy at a time (ASV I: 14v, Ord. 26, 1575).

Attendance at rituals was reportedly tracked and enforced by lay leaders and their assistants. Baltazar Valiente was imprisoned for missing the 1568 fiesta del altepetl (Celestino Solís and Reyes García 1992: 56). All lay leaders and members were expected at these events, which were prime opportunities to express piety and charity, socialize with neighbors, curry favor for future elections, and beg for alms. They were also the best occasions for cofrades to display the number, organization and ritual paraphernalia of for the benefit and envy of attending townspeople, visiting dignitaries, residents of other settlements, and members of other cofradías.

Cofrades occasionally participated in community-wide processions (ASV I: 13r, Ord. 11, 1575; ASV IV: Ord. 41, amendment to Ord. 22, 1605). Lay leaders and members from the Holy Sacrament and the Blessed Souls of Purgatory collaborated with those of the Holy True Cross:

Members shall carry two images from the monastery with the chief steward, and every month an offering, members of the other confraternity [Holy Sacrament] and the native singers, on May 3rd, at the beginning of May, July, September,
November, January, and March. (6 annual parish-wide processions; ASV I: 14v, Ord. 30, 1575)

The arrangement required diplomatic coordination among the cabildos of various cofradías, which the friars would have encouraged. Deciding whose members walked first or nearest to a saint’s image acknowledged differential status among cofradías and cofrades. Lay leaders negotiated the details, perhaps alternating between which cofradía held the position of greatest honor in that year’s procession. Expenses could be another bone of contention; who paid for what and when? Expense records indicate that inter-confraternal partnerships were long-term. There are no direct data regarding the frequency, intensity and outcomes of these collaborations.

Despite the late colonial disintegration of cofradías, parishioners and neighborhoods still unite through monthly processions. I attended lay religious council meetings in order to witness the coordination of the feast-days and processions to be held in 1999. Most event preparation occurred “behind the scenes” rather than at the democratic and productive meetings. This was probably also true in colonial times; council members plan but many others perform the labor.

*Financial Leadership: Bankrolling Piety*

Rik Hoekstra (1994: 181), also working in Puebla, calls for more attention to be paid to the economic operation and networking of cofradías, which I pursue here. Confraternal finances were closely linked to the Church and State; when founding cofradías, “communities could re-channel properties and financial assets to… [cofradías] thus saving part of the assets from the royal officials” (Lavrin 2002: 32). By
commissioning religious artwork and sponsoring festivals, Spanish, native and casta peoples invested most confraternal wealth into the Church instead.

Accounts, election records, bishop’s edicts, and ordinances emphasize the financial means and wisdom of existing and potential leaders. Effective business management primarily entailed good stewardship and careful transfer of sacred property and records: “The outgoing chief steward and deputies will pass on the responsibility of the confraternity’s book and commands to the new officials” (ASV I: 14r, Ord. 20, 1575). Books once formed a large part of the cofrades’ corporate wealth. Besides surviving chapels and saints’ images, books are all that is left of local cofradías. The books sanction lay leaders’ and members’ triumphs and failures.

Leaders were praised for meticulous book-keeping and conservative spending. Amassing, conserving and judiciously spending funds called for honesty, transparency, generosity, charity, persuasiveness, and even a certain amount of financial wizardry. Mayordomo Joseph de Lisama was commended for his long-term and consistent influence on confraternal finances (ASV VI: 2v). Conversely, leaders of other groups apologized for not being unable to collect or save more.

Five kinds of financial information were employed in order to illuminate the cofradía’s internal evolution and its place within the parish. Ordinances (1) establish the protocol for garnering, safeguarding and dispensing confraternal wealth. Receipts (2) for services rendered in masses and feast-day processions were signed by priests and native singers. Accounts (3) of earnings and expenditures (cargo y descargo), and the difference or remainder (alcanzar) were maintained in most years. Inventories (4) reveal the ritual items that were acquired in honor of the Holy True Cross. A few entries,
interspersed throughout other confraternal business, were written in order to credit or blame a group or individuals for financial wisdom or wasting (5).

Lay leaders played pivotal fiscal roles. Among the most generous donors were incoming mayordomos and their immediate family members. At least 4 mayordomos, perhaps seeking their fellow cofrades’ good will, subsidized membership dues for their less fortunate neighbors. Mayordomos were required to dip into the confraternal coffer in order to pay for the dues and life necessities of any deserving poor or sick enlists (ASV I: 12v, Ord. 9-10, 1575). In the membership lists, 16 enlisting cofrades were identified as relatives of the presiding or incoming mayordomo. This mass enlistment ensured the presence of friendly faces for the chief steward, but it also bolstered the cofradía’s bottom line through dues. In 1676, a group of incoming cofrades were the family members of Joseph de Lisama, who was first elected in 1674.

Some scenarios could be interpreted as mayordomos buying their office. But running for and holding office came at a high personal expense, as they still do among contemporary civic-religious cargo-holders in rural Mesoamerica (Ennis-McMillan 2006: 82; Sandstrom 1991: 314). All political campaigns involve a certain amount of money transfer or the promise of future favoritism between candidates and supporters. There were no documented cases of rampant corruption or electoral fraud in the Holy True Cross but a few fiscal problems did arise.

Cabildo members shared or rotated financial duties, at least in certain years. A few officials were referred to as the sindico fiscal (treasurer). The occupational title was assigned to Diego Hernandez (1607 diputado) and Salvador García (1626 mayordomo). At other times, the official’s position was not specified, but he collected and/or
administered confraternal funds and property: Ortuño de Lisama (1603-1605 diputado?), Pedro de Sagastiberria (1614 mayordomo?). At any time, the chief financial officer could be a mayordomo (Andres de Orea, 1625), diputado (Juan Alvarez de Suniga, 1640), escribano (Pedro de Beriztain, 1604), or secretario (Juan de Gortas, 1670). Secretario surfaced only in the 1670s as a generational substitution for escribano.

Mayordomos and diputados had to account for their yearly handling of business, both gains and losses. The transfer of funds among leaders, and between members and leaders, was to be carefully supervised by cabildo members and local ecclesiastic authorities: “A deputy shall always bring the alms to the chief steward” (ASV, I: 14v, Ord. 26, 1575). The alms would then be counted and the amount was written in the book, listed under the appropriate year. Monies were placed in the confraternal coffer, which was locked. The key was secured by an official.

No single leader could act independently nor reserve funds for his purposes. Instead, officials had to confer with one another about even relatively small expenses. All transactions, such as loans of ritual items or payments for services rendered, were to be noted in the records, in the appropriate place:

The chief steward is obligated to provide clear and certified guarantees in which the property and adornments of the said Holy confraternity are handed over. The chief steward must consult with the deputies before spending more than six pesos. (ASV IV: Ord. 16, 1605)

In the cofradía’s final years, valuable ritual items were lost and accounts were irregular. Extravagance required lay leaders to involve the local religious hierarchy. Ecclesiastic oversight impeded the cabildo from spending too many resources on a feast-day, with its mass and procession: “The chief steward and deputies shall not use up the goods of the confraternity surpassing thirty pesos without conferring with the bishop or
the inspector” (ASV IV: Ord. 38, amendment to Ord. 16, 1605; footnote #2). A mayordomo could gain considerable popularity from hosting a particularly lavish procession, but also alienate future officials and members if treasury was later found to be wanting. It is ironic that priests, who likely benefitted the most from the fees and charitable acts of cofrades, placed so many confines on confraternal spending.

Creative accounting practices and overspending on religious festivals plagued councils, at least according to an edict from the bishop of Puebla, Favian y Fuero:

The growing expense of the functions of the Church, chief stewards of the convents of the religious of our affiliation have become insupportable, and the same situation applies with the confraternities of the parish churches of this our bishopric. (Libro de Cordilleras desde 1767 hasta 1790: 92r)

Lay leaders were portrayed as men who had failed their communities. They may have simply lacked the expertise and/or ethics to administer funds to the satisfaction of the bishop. Another possibility is that the bureaucracy of a financially-weakened Church responded to its circumstances by attacking the reputations of cofradíás and lay leaders.

The primary source of income was cofrades. Membership dues, alms and fines produced a meager yet continual stream of resources. In the summary of the indulgences and pardons of the cofradía, the founding cofrades proposed a membership rate of 5 pesos, 15 pesos for Spanish intending to run for office (ASV I: 5r, 1575). An immediate reduction was adopted so the prerogatives of less affluent prospective members or benevolent friars may have prevailed.

The founders’ first orders of business were setting the standard fee, dual processional orders of light and blood, and the mayordomo’s accountability in these matters: “Members shall pay four pesos as entrance into the confraternity. This shall be paid as an offering to the Lady of Light. And those members of blood shall pay in gold.
The chief steward shall take charge of this” (ASV I: 12r, Ord. 1, 1575). Dues initially appeared to be the same for all, then they were universally discounted in the 1605 constitution: “All who join the confraternity shall pay three pesos for their seat, three pesos for brethren or members of blood” (ASV IV: Ord. 1, 1605). The decrease suggests that lay leaders reduced the fee further in order to attract more members. Alternatively, sufficient operational funds may have been amassed through means other than dues, such as alms given annually by cofrades and non-members.

Cabildo and regular members were regularly tasked with collecting alms throughout the region. A statement preceding the 1575 charter specified how alms were gathered among native cofrades (ASV I: 9r). An indio cofrade was dispatched to beg alms in the tianguiz (market); others were soon incorporated in the task. Annual accounts reveal that alms collection occurred on every Saturday in the pueblo and tianguiz, at church, presumably on Sundays, and in nearby settlements and agricultural estates, such as Santa Clara:

On Saturdays, of every week, they shall go to the houses for alms, begging at the door. The chief steward shall ask for the alms of one pound of white wax. In Santiago [Alseseca], alms shall be requested, [by the brethren] of blood. (ASV I: 14r, Ord. 14, 1575; footnote #3)

In addition to native members, blood brethren and the chief steward served as ambassadors. In 1605, more detail was provided, not in terms of logistics but as a slight directed at indigenous donors:

Now, as to the Indian member to whom the chief steward gives the basin of the confraternity - on Saturdays in the afternoon, he will be obligated so that he goes to the market of this said town and begs alms among the natives. Even though that which they [Indians] give is more in the style of obtaining in this confraternity, the style of the Spanish officials in times past, in that the interest that they obtain [is in the amount/form of] ten cacaos that they give, and four handfuls of corn… (ASV IV: v v, Ord. 18, 1605)
Alms collectors were legitimized by carrying the confraternal cup or basin. The 1605 cabildo understood that the weekly market was the best place to encounter indigenous residents, who would be best persuaded by one of their own. Requiring the dish to be used symbolized sanctity and ensured that members and non-members alike could not deviously usurp funds in the name of the confraternity. Donors could enrich certain cofradías and fundraising efforts, such as sponsoring the dowry of an orphan, restoring an image of the Virgin, or erecting an altarpiece.

Indios’ giving was framed as inconsequential. Indios gave as little as former Spanish stewards collected. Indios also donated a portion of the products of their agricultural labor, rather than pesos or candle wax. The scribe ignored the fact that cacao was the key form of currency among naturales. Sending alms-collectors among indios on a weekly basis was not justifiable unless it benefitted the cofradía’s bottom line.

Collecting and donating alms was an extension of confraternal piety and charity, but cofradías were also businesses and political agencies. I view the ordinance as more polemic discourse by Spanish lay leaders against their native brethren. The message was clear: Indians are inferior, but we, as Spaniards and Christians, should still extend confraternal indulgences and pardons to them, at least up to a certain point.

Another amendment, perhaps in reference to Ordinance 18, framed not just indios but all brethren as being of little means and/or generosity: “Now, the price of two pesos of alms shall be paid for admission, because the brethren give little” (ASV IV: Ord. 36, 1605). The 1605 cabildo knew what the 1575 founders did not - navigating the cofradía’s financial health and future was not going to be easy. High operational costs could render
any amount of alms to be insufficient. Each year, cofrades resorted to begging for alms on at least seventy separate occasions:

And concerning the begging of alms - that just as [members] shall beg alms on all of the times that the general and individual masses are given for the members, and as much as all of the Sundays of the year, Holy Thursday and Friday, Easter in the morning and on the secondary days of the Feast of the Holy Spirit, and of Christmas, after the turn [procession] of the Most Sacred Sacrament. They shall beg for alms for this confraternity. And on the day of the Holy Cross +, in May of each and every year, beg only along the circuit of this said confraternity and not along any other. (ASV IV: Ord. 21, 1605)

The geography of alms collection prevented cofradías from invading each other’s imagined communities and territories. Perhaps an unspoken inter-confraternal agreement circumscribed the collection of alms to specific people, days and locations. Targeting the *traza*, certain barrios or along processional routes might have also been most efficient.

Alms could entail candle wax, corn or even the services of one’s employees. In addition to enlistment dues, members surrendered candle wax every year: “Members shall pay one pound of wax for the said confraternity, the monastery” (ASV I: 15r, Ord. 31, 1575). Wax was the price of maintaining membership and participation in processions: “On the morning of Easter Sunday, members will go out in the procession, and you shall go in front of them, with each member paying one pound of wax for the work” (ASV I: 13r, Ord. 13, 1575). The chief steward and perhaps the deputies are instructed to lead the procession of Resurrection, incorporating only those members who made the requisite donation. The cabildo and Franciscan friars stored and replenished their supplies of candle wax for the purposes of feast-day masses and processions.

Most alms were anonymous and apparently voluntary, but some were associated with special privileges. Upon payment of dues and perhaps an extra donation, eligible members were assigned to prestigious processional orders and insignia paths. These
statuses came with high expectations, including generosity, discipline, self-denial, and the commission of rather lowly tasks. In 1624, several farmers gave bushels of corn to be sold (ASV III: 115r). Donations of goods and services, such as tunics and funeral expenses, suggest that members purchased items or positions as prestige. The price of carrying the bell in the Holy Thursday procession was once traded for 9 pesos of corn. It may have been tempting for lay leaders to sell these privileges for personal monetary gain, but all funds were ideally funneled back into the coffer. A 1743 edict required that all left-over alms be sent to the bishop of Puebla, Gaspar Antonio Méndez de Cisneros, at the risk of excommunication (Cordilleras y Edictos, 1606-1864). Presumably confraternal alms were included in this edict, but excess alms were rarely available or reported.

Additional revenue came in the form of penalties paid by members. The main offenses were dishonesty, failing to pay annual dues, absence at mass or a procession, acting on behalf of the cofradía without cabildo permission, aggrieving another member, violating an ordinance, and even accidents: “The member shall pay if he drops or burns something [image, statue, tunic, or banner] with the candle in the procession” (ASV I: 12v, Ord. 8, 1575). In 1624, a front piece of the white cloak of an image of the Virgin was replaced after it was burnt, likely by a penitent’s candle (ASV II: 63r). The incident would have violated the cofrades’ sense of sanctity and required valuable resources, particularly the materials and time needed to repair the damage.

The strongest penalties were monetary and substantial: “Now if one is poor, they may be registered into the confraternity or mass for free. But if one lied, then they shall pay twenty pesos” (ASV IV: Ord. 8, 1605). Failure to pay dues brought the most serious repercussions – expulsion: “Everything is to be recorded within the book. Members will
pay as an entrance fee wax, [or] the chief steward [and/or] deputy will erase [their names] from the book” (ASV I: 15r, Ord. 34, 1575). Penalties were surrendered in a timely matter or the offender forfeited privileges and likely faced public humiliation: “And concerning the brethren who incur penalties. The chief steward and the deputies order that [he] shall pay within eight days if he violates the ordinances. [If not] his name may be erased, and he shall have to pay to be admitted anew” (ASV IV: Ord. 34, 1605). The threat alone should have been sufficient to correct any cofrade’s wayward path.

The most common penalty for infractions was candle wax, used in all masses and processions. In one year alone, the expenses for candle wax was 60 pesos (ASV II: 59v). Donations of wax meant that the cabildo was free to dispense funds on other necessities. Wax’s importance was expressed through repetition, even in a single ordinance:

Now, let it be known that everyone in the town shall attend the procession of Holy Thursday and other feast days, including those of the estates. All shall participate unless they are ill or prevented. If one does not attend, then the penalty shall be one pound of white wax. Now concerning absent brethren, if one fails to attend the procession, the penalty is fifty Hail Marys and five Our Fathers, offered to the five mysteries of the passion of Jesus Christ, with rosary, and delivery of one pound of white wax to the confraternity. (ASV IV: Ord. 5, 1605)

In desperate need, a cabildo might lend ritual items to other cofradías. But this recourse was strictly forbidden:

And let it be known that no one shall lend our insignias, nor the images, their vestments, their standards, nothing to the Indians, nor to other people, even to the friars of the monastery, even if they may be the chief stewards or the deputies. Because they must be protected for times of devotion and they were purchased with alms. (ASV IV: Ord. 31, 1605)

Penitential robes were rented out, whether to cofrades of the Holy True Cross or another group (ASV V: 5v, 1671). This temporary privilege would bring in revenue throughout the year.
Most funds were expended on masses and processions, particularly on feast-days.

Every two months, the cabildo commissioned and paid for a mass:

And concerning the masses of the year, and consider that the chief steward shall cause to be said, in the church and monastery of the said town, in every year, six general masses, according to what is the practice and custom, for all of the brethren and members, living and dead, paying four pesos, three pesos to the monastery and one peso for the singers. There shall be masses on the first of May, first of July, fourteenth of September, first of November, first of January, first of March. They are to be punctual, on penalty of four pounds of white wax. And all of the brethren shall be present in the council, stating that in these six masses, there shall be light, and a Holy Cross + of May, which are blood, and these are to be said on the first Friday of every month. (ASV IV: Ord. 25, 1605)

Most masses marked events in the Catholic calendar. Two masses coincided with the cofradía’s patron-saint days, the Feast of the Cross (September 14th) and the Day of the Holy Cross. The May mass was scheduled for May 1st, but elsewhere it was recorded as May 3rd, election day. The names of the dual processional orders were crossed out, so a friar or the bishop may have refused to differentiate between them in mass. Alternatively, the scribe may have intended to refer to torches and whips as ritual items because the Holy Cross was also listed.

Masses and processional paraphernalia contributed most to lay leaders’ expenses and responsibilities. Considerable generosity was extended to the presiding friars and native singers: “And as to the Indian singers. They are to be paid two pesos for the procession of Holy Thursday” (ASV IV: Ord. 28, 1605). The friars’ substantial rewards for service to the Holy Cross were likely channeled into their own cost of living, church upkeep and taxes:

And when they enter the said monastery, and next, in the mass that is celebrated before or after the procession, they will prepare a sermon, in exchange for a meal, which will be given to the friars of the said monastery. For this mercy and charity that they provide, they are to be given twelve pesos of common gold for the expense of it, at the cost of the confraternity. (ASV IV: Ord. 14, 1605)
In an amendment, frugality was further emphasized: “Twelve pesos shall be paid to the priests for the procession, mass and sermon, along with a meal as small and simple as possible to be prepared” (ASV IV: Ord. 36, 1605). The last ordinance provided the final word on bankrolling masses:

There shall be general masses and sung masses. The officials shall collect four pesos, three for the priests, and one for the singers. And on the feasts, the officials shall collect eighteen pesos, paying twelve to the priests and six pesos to the singers. (ASV IV: Ord. 40, 1605)

Pay receipts memorialize the exchange of money and services between lay leaders and ritual ‘performers.’ The signatures of priests and choir masters sanction the scribes’ contract summaries. Working from a standard formula, scribes noted names, occupations and titles of everyone involved, including the official who surrendered the funds. The receipts for native singers, signed by the maestro de capilla, were mostly in Nahuatl (after 1674). Once recorded, the contents would likely be read aloud to the singers, who were then asked to demonstrate their approval by signing their names. But the singers were illiterate, so the symbol of the Cross (+) was made, as was customary in New Spain. In the case of priests, Spanish was always employed:

I declare that I friar Matheo Lopez, guardian of this church of Saint Francis, which is founded in this town of Tecamachalco, that it is true that all the masses contained herein, general as well as funeral, I have received for them, from the hand of Alonso de Aguilar Infante, deputy of the confraternity of the Holy True Cross. And it is true __ my name in this church, on the 14th day of the month of April, sixteen hundred and twenty years.

F. Matheo Lopez 33 pesos (ASV II: 50r, 1620)

The pay receipt represents only a fraction of mass expenses. It did not incorporate the candles or payments to native laborers and musicians. Several priests served simultaneously, so hundreds of pesos could be paid to them in a single year, especially
during the cofradía’s prime. In 1622, Alonso de Aguilar Infante, promoted from deputy to chief steward, paid a total of 80 pesos to Fray Francisco de Velasco (ASV II: 58r). The solemn celebrations of Holy Thursday and Easter Sunday were included within this sizeable tally (footnote #4).

With all of Tecamachalco’s feast days, the Holy True Cross’ bi-monthly masses, funeral masses, and the events of other cofradías, native singers relied on a steady supply of income. One year the cabildo paid the singers 50 pesos. In a 1674 pay receipt, two men signed for 6 pesos. In 1699, 6 pesos were paid and 6 names were recorded, with crosses serving as signatures. A set amount was shared among the singers, regardless of their number. Each native singer was paid 1 or 2 pesos for accompanying a misa particular.

Native singers who were cofrades could donate their services, but the cabildo may have preferred to pay the singers. With money, Spanish lay leaders could compete with priests and other cofradías for the singers’ time.

Cofrades and residents, usually indios, were paid for their service: “The said Indian members shall assist in that which the said Spanish officials order them, in matters of the said confraternity, paying them according to what is said of their work” (ASV IV: Ord. 18, 1605). In 1626, Juan, a mestizo artisan, was paid 4 pesos for his fireworks, including a castle of fire, like those used today (ASV II: 67v). The work of the indios oficiales is presented in the next chapter.

Even at the very end, lay leaders spent up to 36 pesos on a single holy day. Expenses for the Festival of the Holy Cross on May 3rd, 1807, were itemized into 22 entries: flowers, renting a horse, incense, the procession, compensating the sacristan for his efforts, candlesticks, torches, singers, musicians, and a bell. Officials were not to
spend more than 30 pesos without express permission from the bishop or inspector (ASV IV: Ord. 38, 1605). Perhaps the 1807 fiesta was seen as a final celebration in which reserve funds could be exhausted, or Spanish lay leaders, like the Popolocas, may have consistently neglected priestly attempts to curtail their spending.

Funds were also invested in more lasting ways, in ritual paraphernalia: “The confraternity shall retain power over all of its possessions, which were financed before its naming, in order to have good [government]” (ASV I: 13v, Ord. 18, 1575). The same policy applied to all property subsequently acquired by the cofrades:

And as to two torches that the confraternity own for the sacrament of Holy Thursday; the chief steward shall give two torches of new wax in order to illuminate the Most Sacred Sacrament, which is enclosed in the monument [altar of repose]. The remainder of the wax will be surrendered to the confraternity. (ASV IV: Ord. 32, 1605)

The cabildo also invested in people, by enlisting and burying its humblest members (ASV I: 12v, Ord. 9-10, 1575): “If there is an ill person in need, then the chief steward is tasked with using our possessions for him, as well as a pound of wax” (ASV I: 12v, Ord. 9, 1575). Members in good standing were guaranteed a Christian burial, which could be expensive for cofrades and cofradía alike: “If someone dies, three pesos will be paid to the confraternity for the candle wax” (ASV I: 13r, Ord. 12, 1575). A funerary mass, procession and internment could be paid through the deceased’s estate, by means of a will, by surviving family members, generous neighbors, or confraternal funds. Ideally, anyone whose membership dues and annual alms were current was entitled to a “good death.” The 1605 cabildo valued this privilege to the extent that it was memorialized in 3 consecutive ordinances that specified types of cofrades and expenses.

There shall be an Indian with his green habit, hand bell and a charter, which states the name of the confraternity, so that all of the brethren shall be present at the
house of the said deceased. And people shall carry him to the church and
monastery of this said town, where he shall be buried honorably at the expense of
the confraternity. There shall be a recitation of his particular mass, as has been the
practice and custom. And, as to paying for it, it shall be four pesos to the
monastery, with three to the friars and one to the singers. And the same is to be
done for members who die outside of the said town, each and every time that this
knowledge comes to the officials. And to the Indian who came with his hand bell,
he is to be paid for his deed, even if he is a member. Now the same is to be done
for Spaniards, charging four pesos as well. If he dies in his house, being in
service, then he is to be buried by the said confraternity. In the head town, if
someone dies, then a particular mass must be said, an offering of the necessary
candle wax, and the singers shall be paid, in the other confraternity, that of the
Holy Sacrament, of the town, in order to pay for it. (ASV I: 13r, Ord. 9-11, 1605)

Funds, administered by officials, were taken from and given back to deserving
cofrades. Cofradías operated as businesses, social clubs and political parties, but they
were fundamentally spiritual and charitable in their resource management. Fiesta-day
masses and processions were meant to be lavish affairs, but even the humblest cofrade
was afforded a “good death.” The mention of Spaniards at the end suggests that the
majority of burials, and cofrades, were native.

_Fortune’s Ebbs and Flows: Confraternal Inventories and Accounts_

Confraternal prerogatives and practices are illuminated through inventories. The
relative health, wealth and community-wide influence of local cofradías over time can be
seen. Ritual paraphernalia held in common by cofrades were presented as long ‘laundry
lists.’ Items were presented briefly without indication of sacred function or value, not
even the original purchase price or donors. A few extensive and detailed inventories were
produced in conjunction with examinations of records by the bishop’s emissary (1575,
1576, 1604, 1612, 1614, 1621, 1623-1625, 1630, and 1670). Some items can be
associated with certain rituals. When the items appear in other records, such as yearly accounts or descriptions of processions, a fuller picture emerges.

A few categories of ritual paraphernalia dominate the inventories. *Cera blanca* (white candle wax), imported from as far away as China, was mentioned most frequently. It was essential to all masses and night-time processions, especially funerals. Sacramental wine was frequently depleted and later recouped. *Tunicas* (standardized robes) worn by penitential brethren were often accompanied by *disciplinas* (whips) and *insignias* (badges), but there were only ever enough of each for a select few cofrades, which soon caused problems (footnote #5).

The most prized possessions were religious statues or images of saints housed within, and perhaps held in common with, a church. The care and sponsorship of statues, clothing and adornments were paramount issues to lay leaders, members and local clergy. Images were believed to have the power to heal, grant requests and forgiveness. They were meant to be seen and adored by the faithful. To that end, they were paraded along processional paths, but usually only on patron saint or feast days or for alms campaigns, across long distances (Osowski 2006: 157). The rest of the time, they were on display inside a church or secured in a sacristy.

The purchase of big-ticket ritual items and events was a sizeable investment, as was their continuous replenishment and upkeep. The 1575 and 1576 inventories represent the cofradía’s original holdings and relative positioning in the parish, in comparison to lesser and later groups. The 12 primary expenses, presumably listed in order of highest price, began with the 1575 procession. Next were carpenters’ and painters’ fees for crafting the platform that supported the madre Señora, repairing the statue’s eyebrow, and
the paper, powder and paint needed for the image. Lay leaders sought to “heal the brethren with these things [images]” (ASV I: 10r). There was also palm-tree oil for blessing or curing, candle wax, more painters’ fees, the slipcover for a cross, a silver platter, and the cofradía’s book. Masses, alms, singers, and the offerings used to pay for them were all grouped together. White cloth was used for fashioning tunics, presumably the ones worn only by españoles in processions, and penitential whips were also listed (ASV III: 53v, 1575). Lastly a portion of the funds was directed at the sponsorship of Catholic missions. Individual prices were not itemized, but the grand tally was 556 pesos.

Earnings and expenses were not organized into a separate section nor always summed at the end of each year, even those were the policies. Instead, scribes itemized sources of income and spending anywhere they pleased. A page total can be tabulated and then associated with a specific year, but this is a rather laborious and misleading task; a new year was not always clearly marked. I analyzed only the years in which the data were straightforward, which enabled me to track continuity and change in collecting, spending and saving habits over time. The best documented years were the last quarter of the 17th century, during the membership boom.

In a few cases, notaries appear to be unable to distinguish between earnings and expenditures within their double entry system (ASV V: 61v, 1694). At first glance, there would appear to be more earned than spent, even though the opposite was true. Such an error on the part of a professional scribe sounds unlikely, suggesting incompetence and/or corruption. But these may be the perennial reasons for visiting inspectors to review the books at regular intervals.
Lay leaders were already over-spending by 9% in 1575; the revenue of 510 pesos still failed to meet the need - 556 pesos. Ideally, a reserve was passed on to subsequent years, but this may have been an impossible goal. The accumulation of 587 pesos in 1576 would have satisfied the debts from 1575, but the cabildo acquired more of its “greatest possessions” (ASV I: 17r). The list of more than 30 items began with the most expensive – a statue of the Virgin Mary with her crown (30 pesos), skirt and taffeta for additional vestments. Other fine material and clothing adorned the images of other saints or was worn in the procession of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday. There was another crown purchased for a second image, a painting and a large crucifix, presumably for funerary processions. The confraternal bell, which heralded processions, funeral masses, elections, and the collection of alms, was also acquired. The silver platter was now described in greater detail: it cost 11 pesos, a cross formed in its center, and it held alms.

Additional procession-related expenses included tunics - 6 white and 6 black. The association between ethnicity and tunic color was not specified until a 1603 expense record: “black tunics that are to be for the Indians in order to carry the insignias on Holy Friday” (ASV III: 53v). The white tunics, and thus the order of blood, were reserved for the Spaniards. Six whips were to be employed in the blood brethren’s self-flagellation. The cofrades de luz were the procession’s light bearers, who required candelabras, lamps and a constant supply of wax. There were many more active members and hopeful penitents than could be accommodated by the 12 tunics and 6 whips. Like the insignia paths, the robes and whips were rotating privileges, perhaps sold for a price, through goods and/or services, or eligible males may have waited their turns.
The initial restriction in the number of ritual garments and paraphernalia was a mostly economic issue. The completed 1576 inventory was signed by the cabildo: mayordomo Pedro Ruiz, escribano (Pedro de) Beriztain, and two diputados. Later that year, two black tunics were added, whether for indios or 2 men who accompanied the burial of deceased members. After April 20th, 4 more penitential whips were acquired, just in time for the May 3rd procession. Members appear to have intensified their alms campaigns right before the end of the fiscal year and election, in order to ensure the glory of the Holy True Cross. Mayordomos who were credited with coordinating funds in a timely manner may have regained enough popularity for reelection. Diputado Salvador García collected 54 pesos, the largest donation in 1624, and then he was promoted to mayordomo (1625-1630). Miguel de Sagastiberria overcame temporary political defeat by a sizeable donation in 1608, returning to office (1604-1607, 1609-1610).

The amount expended in 1576 may have rivaled the income, leaving little to settle debts. Many of the funds spent in 1575 and 1576 would be gained through the 116 members, for a maximum of 464 pesos, if every member was male, of Spanish descent, and paid 4 pesos. But in addition to the option of donating wax, married women and indios were charged less (2-3 pesos), so the total amount was probably significantly less (ASV I: 43r). In 1575, collecting alms produced at least another 321 pesos. The bishop or friars may have also donated a start-up fund.

At the start of the 17th century, the cabildo mostly operated within its means. Instead of buying expensive religious artwork from Puebla, Spanish lay leaders stimulated the local economy and saved money by commissioning native artisans, seamstresses and carpenters to create original works, such as paintings, insignias, robes,
and crosses. The one exception to this frugality was 1608, when Miguel de Sagastiberria served as the cofradía’s benefactor. After underwriting 1608’s superfluous expenses (64% over budget), Sagastiberria secured reelection, perhaps as a well-deserved reward. But he was just one of many named and anonymous donors from that year, whose actions would have brought great distinction to the cofradía as a whole.

Why did the 1608 cabildo override its budget and rely on emergency funds? Revenue was respectable (665 pesos), so that was not the problem; it was the 871 pesos spent by mayordomo Juan de la Caleta, apparently on a single item - a retablo or altarpiece (ASV II: 26r). Caleta was reelected in 1614, indicating that he did nothing wrong. A new trend had emerged - investing in the convento, especially its altar and altarpiece. It was not technically the responsibility of the Holy True Cross, nor any cofradía, to bankroll church décor, whether the interior or exterior. But it was an opportunity for special recognition. The retablo invited Spanish lay leaders to assert their dominance over indigenous residents in the multi-ethnic community of Tecamachalco.

The convento already housed a retablo, which reflected the persistence and autonomy of the Popolocas. The first altarpiece was completed and installed in 1585, despite an order from Mexico City’s Royal Court (Real Audiencia) barring such an extravagant acquisition (Celestino Solís and Reyes García 1992: 91, 95). The prohibition, arriving on Saturday, August 4th, 1584, impeded townspeople from erecting an altarpiece to house images (teyuxtla). But the retablo planning committee must have intervened through legal correspondence or by circumventing the order. There was no record of any further legal exchange between the naturales and the court. It is not known if the retablo was commissioned by only native cofrades or townspeople in general. But the gift was
documented in the Anales de Tecamachalco, so the naturales clearly credited themselves. In any case, the gesture preceded that of Spanish lay leaders. There was certainly room for both retablos to stand atop the convento’s large altar space. One retablo may have been larger and more elaborate, but community members could boast of two. I wonder if churchgoers could differentiate between the two altarpieces as Indian and Spanish.

The prestige gained by such a grand gesture of generosity and piety was priceless to Spanish lay leaders. Public recognition for enriching and elevating the town’s most sacred space in relation to those of other settlements imbued cofrades with a degree of what Bourdieu (1986: 47) would have called symbolic capital, or cogency, which members of lesser cofradías could only dream of. Every time churchgoers viewed the retablo, they could be reminded of the cofrades’ collective sacrifice. On occasion, friars may have praised the donation in community-wide masses. This would be an ideal juncture in which to encourage others to follow the charitable Spaniards’ example, even though men and women of various backgrounds would have contributed.

The corporate gift was not anonymous, but individual donors may have been. Initially, 54 members donated to the fund, for a total of 160 pesos (ASV, II: 27r). Perhaps to acknowledge his fellow members’ individual acts of benevolence and sacrifice, one of the diputados, either Juan Rogel or Luis Conso, surrendered his own 54 pesos. It may represent a “matching gift” – one peso for every person who donated, but it was not presented in this light. Then Diego Hernandez, the diputado and sindico fiscal of 1607, superseded his successor with his own gift of 100 pesos. More alms poured in from other members, mostly for the retablo but also for the cofradía’s basic needs. With the finish line in sight, mayordomo Juan de la Caleta donated the remaining 369 pesos. The scribe
overlooked the alms that were provided by non-members, even though friars and lay leaders would not have refused external donations. Unnamed cofrades had likely saved for this special purchase for years before 1608, but such a possibility was never recorded.

That same year (1608), the leaders and members of the Holy True Cross sealed their benevolent act by hosting a commemorative celebration. An additional 42 pesos was expended on the “mass and music for the festival that was given for the image and altarpiece” (ASV II: 26r). The event raised the retablo-related expenses to 913 pesos. In comparison to annual holy days (those honoring the Cross on every September 14\textsuperscript{th} and May 3\textsuperscript{rd}), the ceremony was a huge investment. The presiding friar and singers had to be paid and fed, and a meal may have been prepared for all friars and members present. Native workers were contracted for the “fine decoration of the convent,” especially the altar (18 pesos). A native sacristan and his assistants would be charged with guarding sacred objects. Another 5 pesos was spent on painted items for the altar and 9 pesos for the “decoration of the brethren,” for what appears to be the same fiesta. These entries were listed immediately after the mass and music expenses, suggesting an event total of 76 pesos and a retablo total of 945 pesos, for a staggering 87% of that year’s expenses.

Other expenses were incurred in 1608, but frugality now prevailed. Masses, singers on Holy Thursday and candle wax contributed to a grand total of 1092 pesos. This was easily the most expensive year on record, for any local group. The amount may have been matched or even surpassed in subsequent years, but later lay leaders drew less attention to their excesses, such as large donations to priests and rather loose spending on wine. The cabildo also sent a petition to the provisor to request a license to fashion yet another new ornament (ASV II: 26v). It seems as if the cofradía had reached its zenith or
defining moment, and that its leadership was all too conscious of that moment. Conspicuous spending indicated that the organization was thriving and seemingly stable, although these same actions may have initiated insecurity and decline.

Placing Sacred Treasures in the Hands of Poor People

In the eyes of lay leaders, scribes and ecclesiastic supervisors, inventories attest to past officials’ effectiveness, or alternatively, their ineptitude or corruption. Inventories were calculated only sporadically, likely whenever major items were acquired or used up. Ideally, they were checked and updated annually by outgoing and incoming mayordomos. This could be the same individual, in a scenario that did not encourage much accountability or oversight.

Between 1604 and 1624, more funds were collected (average: 700 pesos/year), but spending was variable (140-1092 pesos or average: 501 pesos/year). In 1604, a great number and variety of items were acquired, mostly for the solemn celebration of Holy Thursday, beginning with tunics. Diminishing stocks of candle wax, wine (15 pesos) and powder (for decorating processional routes) were replenished, plates for carrying and dispensing the powder were acquired, and an image of Our Lady as well as the cross of crucifixion, also used by the penitents on Holy Thursday, were renovated (ASV II: 22v).

There were 2 tunics, more black tunics (for indios) and 3 white penitential hoods (for españoles). A recent increase in security concerns was reflected in storing the tunics in a new box and fastening a lock to the room where the images were housed (ASV II: 23v).

There were 3 whips, painted insignias of the Passion of Christ (crafted by an indio named Baltasar), 2 jars to house the holy water used by penitents, and 2 cross-shaped torches to
illuminate the path of the penitents “being healed” (ASV II: 21r-22v). The improvements and other expenses associated with masses and processions amounted to 406 pesos, which was comfortably covered by that year’s earnings (704 pesos). So many procession-related expenses are expected; the main topic in the 1605 charter is processional protocol.

Most years were relatively uneventful in terms of property acquisition and loss. But by 1612, there were several items constructed of precious metals. A silver crown and the gold appliqué for a green cross were commissioned in anticipation of the annual fiestas of Holy Thursday and the Holy Cross (ASV II: 34r-35v). By 1614, there were several crowns, more items of gold and silver, additional tunics, 5 books, and 4 sacred images (ASV II: 40v). The 1623 inventory revealed the 4 images to be: “two images of Our Lady, [one] that is in the altar and the other one there inside, which is in the procession of Holy Thursday. One Christ Crucified. One image of Jesus Christ resuscitated…” (ASV II: 53r). The second Virgin was likely secured in the cofradía’s storeroom or among the convento’s sacred treasures, guarded by the sacristan. The last image may have been Jesus Nazareno. A new Jesus Nazareno was donated by Mariana Rendon in 1705 and penitents followed this processional path in the 18th century.

In the 1620s and 1630s, lay leaders divided resources equally between processional paraphernalia and the convento altar. Little did they know that the church would be symbolically supplanted a mere decade later, after secular clergymen replaced the Franciscan friars. No one anticipated this transition, so Spanish lay leaders continued to better their home church. In 1621, various altarpieces were sponsored by the cofrades, adding to the ones installed in 1585 and 1607. Penitential brethren also received new processional garb, lanterns and rosaries fashioned from gold and silver (ASV II: 51v). In
1625, indios were paid from confraternal funds to paint the church’s altar as well as to help bond or glue parts of the church that had fallen into disrepair (ASV II: 65r). Carpet was applied to the altar of the Virgin, and gold and silver were affixed to the altar of the True Cross. Drapery was hung on a church window, which just happened to be located nearest to the altar of the True Cross (ASV II: 65v). The gifts were strategic, not subtle.

In 1630, the acquisition of 8 tunics with hoods and 7 whips meant that 20 or 30 men could serve as penitential brethren at the same time (ASV II: 77r). With new tunics and numbers, the cofrades españoles and indios looked impressive in processions. Two new standards or banners, bearing symbols of the True Cross, were to be carried at the front of processions, likely by the diputados. For the first time, precious stones were itemized - pearls combined with simulated gold. Older possessions were repaired and even more money was directed at the altar. In 1631, indios sacristanes were paid to help at the altar, presumably during a confraternal mass, and cofrades were rewarded for their special care of the altarpieces (ASV II: 82v).

The benevolence of Spanish lay leaders was anything but subtle; it was pointed, directed and overt. Both charters required charity towards existing and potential cofrades, but expenses related to charity were seldom found elsewhere. Instead, the specific targets of most public acts of generosity centered on the church’s altar, indicating that the cabildos’ gifts were strategic. Through highly visible mnemonic devices, cofrades and other townspeople drew automatic associations among the space of the church, the image of the Holy True Cross and the cofradía that was dedicated to its cult. Spanish lay leaders who accessed a network of wealthy donors enjoyed a level of legitimacy that was beyond the reach of most of Tecamachalco’s laypeople.
Feedback on the quality of lay leaders’ political and economic prowess came in the form of occasional visits by the bishop’s emissaries. Salvador García was ultimately the only person responsible for the inventory of 1630, which was witnessed by the Señor Visitador (ASV II: 77r-v, 79r). Initially, everything appeared to be in order, but at the end of the document, accusations were made against Alonso de Aguilar (Infante, 1620 diputado, 1622-1623 mayordomo; ASV II: 79r). Inventories of the cofradía’s possessions were executed in 1623 and 1630, with none in between, so the complaint likely referenced Aguilar Infante’s poor management of confraternal funds and/or property in or before 1623. In between the inventories, only Andres de Orea (1624-1625) and Salvador Garcia (1625-1630) served as mayordomos. The accusation could reflect these two men colluding to protect themselves, rather than any wrongdoing by Aguilar Infante.

The cofradía was robbed (by outsiders) only once - in 1638. The sole targeted item was a handkerchief given by a Franciscan friar to the statue of the Virgin. Compared to platters and jewels of gold, silver and pearls, corporately-owned by the cofrades, fabric was of no monetary value. But it was spiritually significant due to its associations to the sanctity of the Virgin and the friar’s sacrifice. The ‘thief’ may have sought to heal a loved one with the handkerchief or to place it in a home shrine. The hero who pursued and apprehended the thief was not identified by membership status, name, ethnicity, nor even sex, but was awarded 4 pesos (ASV II: 93r).

If we jump ahead to the last quarter of the 17th century, there was something awry with the cofradía’s finances. Cargo and descargo were now a fraction of what they once were. In the meantime, several pivotal events had occurred. In the 1640s, the secular clergy replaced the Franciscans and the bishopric’s center was transferred from Tlaxcala.
to Puebla. The cofradía experienced its greatest membership boom since forming and there were several new cofradías, most with a multi-ethnic and neighborhood-centered membership base. The specific impacts that these transitions had on the cofradía’s economic strategies and outcomes are far from obvious.

The 1670 inventory took place when the parish church was in operation. Ritual items were most likely stored there or in the casa parroquial, the priests’ residence. The parish church hosted masses, the exit and entrance of processions, cabildo meetings and elections (ASV V: 5r). Most items itemized in the 1630s were listed again in 1670, but more wealth was invested on a few valuable pieces: 2 gold chains of large pearls, an image of Holy Christ with gold and pearls, an image of la Limpia (Our Lady of Purity), a silver crown and fastener, 4 señores (images of Jesus?), 2 banners - 1 with crosses, processional garb, a golden image of the Holy True Cross, a green cross for Holy Thursday, a silver cross, more cloaks, and a sheet to cover the images (ASV V: 3r-4r). In 1678, extra components were added to an image of the Virgin (ASV V: 4v).

Even though autos de visitas were conducted in 1689, 1726 and 1799, no inventories were produced. But scribes continued to track the flow of money, including the loss of any items, whether by theft or sale. Between 1672 and 1705, earnings were greatly reduced (average: 96 pesos/year; range: 28-251 pesos) and overspending was common (average: 147 pesos/year; range: 74-219 pesos). Expenses were usually twice as much as the year’s earnings. Lay leaders who consistently accrued little could not help but surpass their yearly budgets.

The bishop’s emissaries examined previous years’ accounting practices as a whole, which highlights financial patterns. In the first case (1683-1689), a yearly average
of 72 pesos was overspent, whereas a century later (1784-1799), the deficit fell to 50 pesos. In the first period of 7 years (1683-1688), cabildos disbursed more than twice as much as they acquired (232% or 885/381). A century later, over a span of 16 years (1784-1799), the difference was less pronounced (171% or 1910/1115), but the trend still landed the cofradía firmly in the red.

Returning to the case of Antonio de Lisama – he failed to manage confraternal wealth as well as his father Joseph de Lisama. An inventory completed at the end of 1705 revealed a loss of 5 items: objects of gold and silver and some wine (ASV VII: 4r-v). These were among the most practical or secular in nature, useful as currency for furthering one’s personal status in the community. Unlike the handkerchief stolen in 1638, they had value on the open market. Despite the unresolved controversy, Antonio de Lisama was reelected in 1711 (ASV VII: 5v). He was never formally accused of theft, at least not on paper, but as the acting mayordomo, the loss clearly happened under his watch. Mayordomos were the first and final individuals to consult if anything was to be borrowed, transferred or sold (ASV IV: Ord. 16, 18, 1605). Perhaps an outsider stole the property, as with the handkerchief (ASV II: 93r), the new mayordomo could not resist the temptation, or another member absconded with the items, with or without his knowledge. Any scenario signaled that de Lisama was a poor caretaker. With so few incidents recorded, it seems that most cabildo members acted ethically or at least discreetly.

The following notice reveals the dire financial straits in which the cofradía’s leadership found itself in 1747, as well as before and after. The solution proposed by local priest Dr. Joseph Javier de Tembra y Símanes was to legitimately sell a few items and then use the revenue for the cofradía’s annual festival. Expensive feast-day masses and
processions remained the priorities; confraternal ordinances could be violated in their honor. The justification provided by the witnessing priest was also telling: why not sanction what Spanish lay leaders had already been doing? Apparently, a series of items had been appropriated piece by piece, quite gradually.

In the following notification, I, the said Priest, confirm that I have been shown the jewels of gold, pearls, and precious stones, which this confraternity possesses for the adornment of the Image of Saint Helen. This was done by the past chief steward. I certify them to be complete and cavales(?) just as they were received. But I advise that, with all the brethren, that they were now much fewer than they were in the old Inventories. Because passing as they passed from hand to hand, among poor people, without the security and care that is required with minitua of jewels of value and estimation, they have been lost and deteriorated, as has been seen. Because of this, in order to prevent the total loss of them, which could for this cause occur in the future, and heeding to that which is for the adornment of the said Image, they are not [no longer] necessary. Everyone was in agreement. The most precious and least necessary were sold, and with the proceeds, an annual festival of the said confraternity was endowed, so that it could never fail nor decline. To this end, I order that they be remitted, with all care and security to the patron Dr. Joseph de Aguilar, the Mayor, who oversees the silversmiths of Puebla, so that they can be evaluated by him or by persons with expertise in this area. They are to be sold at the best prices that are possible, and when I realize that they have been sold, in order to have the proceeds at [our] disposal that which is suitable. Thus, I provide this order and sign, with the said Brethren – Dr. Joseph Javier de Tembra y Símanes (ASV VIII: 6v)

After an explanation of how the cofradía could cleverly climb its way out of its desperate financial situation, there was a brief summation of what actually happened: “Gold and pearls were taken to the city of Puebla to the Patron Judge Bredon and other subjects of the faculty [of Law?]...400 pesos” (ASV VIII: 8v). Ideally, the cabildo was awarded a fair price for the jewels by wealthy Puebla residents, who valued them for their ritual function or their beauty alone.

The priest saw Spanish lay leaders and caretakers, such as sacristans, as gente pobre (poor people) who should never have been entrusted with items of such value. The officials were Spaniards, but the priest used a label usually reserved for native peoples,
who even co-opted it in legal documents when it served their purposes. Ironically, the cabildo probably turned over the majority of the proceeds to local priests, like the one who authorized this sale. The cost of just one religious festival would have absorbed most of the funds gained through this sacrifice. But if the cabildo managed to preserve some of the profit, then the sale was an appropriate tradeoff for violating their ancient policies (ASV I: Ord. 18, 1575; IV: Ord. 31, 1605). Perhaps the priest was right - this is what had always been done, it just had never been written about before.

Even if a cabildo spent more than it earned in its year of office, residual funds from previous years were supposed to be available to make up some of the difference. In 1809, the last year of record-keeping, there was no record of cargo and descargo. But the meager amount of 21 pesos was listed as the final alcanze (ASV VIII). What a humble end for an organization with such an auspicious beginning! Why did earning and spending start so strong under the Franciscans, change so drastically but then stabilize under the secular clergy, and then decline in the late colonial era? Except for a growth spurt in the 1680s-1690s, new memberships and alms never rivaled those of the first generation. Most dues and alms may have come in the form of goods or services, such as wax, corn, complimentary masses, or manual labor. These gifts would largely offset the monetary earning and spending that would have otherwise occurred. By 1700, a growing multi-ethnic population may have channeled their resources into new cofradías, or there may not have been enough Spanish families to enrich the cofradía like before.

Ecclesiastic authorities likely began discouraging lay leaders from overspending early on, but they did so in earnest in the late colonial era. The mayordomo and sometimes the diputados were responsible for all confraternal possessions, such as
furniture and books, which were to be shown to ecclesiastic authorities whenever asked (ASV VIII: 33v, 1760). In 1765, Puebla’s bishop, Favian y Fuero, represented by priest and notary Rodriguez, proclaimed an edict to all parish priests in the region. He demanded a record of all events and funds, with books examined through autos de visita. Whenever possible, economy was to prevail, such as reducing masses from 3 to 2 (Libro de Cordilleras, 1765-1790: 3v, 5r). Cofradías were targeted in 1791 with an edict forbidding the “formation of any new confraternities, brotherhoods or congregations” (Libro Segundo de Cordilleras, 1791-: 5v). The Bourbon Reforms had left their mark.

Late colonial parishioners could no longer finance the sizeable obligations assigned to them by ecclesiastic authorities nor honor their own promises. In 1762, the naturales of the town of Santa Maria de la Asunción Tecamachalco, under the jurisdiction of Tepeaca, were represented by Don Joaquin Antonio Guerrero y Tagle in an appeal of their collective tithe. Through a lawyer, they petitioned the court to prevent their diezmos from exceeding a manageable amount (AGN Haciendas, Tenientes…1762). No resolution to the matter was ever provided. But this example attests to a long-term economic downturn, perhaps due to a combination of a desperate Church and State and fewer residents to shoulder their heavy load.

This chapter illuminates the Holy True Cross’ internal workings. It focuses on the ideal and real behaviors of lay leaders in elections, fundraising, care-taking, and resource allocation. My research represents the first systematic study of confraternal elections and finances. In the next chapter, I investigate Spanish lay leaders’ attempts to marginalize and micro-manage the positions and actions of their female counterparts and native brethren. This exploration entails an analysis of relevant ordinances from the 1605
constitution, contrasted with ecclesiastic documentation of the roles played, and autonomy exercised, by native men as well as women.

Footnotes

#1: In the presence of Franciscan friar Baltasar Maldonado, padre guardián of the convento, the 1605 constitution was signed by 30 members. It was then sent to Don Diego Romano, the bishop of Tlaxcala, and ratified in Puebla on April 14th, 1605. A license of foundation was then ceded by Lord Bishop Don Antonio de Morales, also from the bishopric. Amendments were then added as several ordinances proved to be unsatisfactory. The alcalde was the mayor or justice of the peace, a town or municipal official. The notables were likely nobles or local heads of office.

#2: The inspector was otherwise known as the visitador general, who was a treasurer, purveyor, or an emissary of the bishop of Tlaxcala, later under the bishopric of Puebla.

#3: Santiago, or Santiago Alseseca, was a small settlement subject to Tecamachalco.

#4: Due to the Franciscans’ vow of poverty, the funds, often offset by meals provided by cofrades, were not intended to enrich the clergy. After the friars’ basic needs had been met, they could channel any extra funds into charitable works, maintaining the church and its possessions, or paying their dues or taxes through the bishop or archbishop.

#5: The privilege of wearing insignias in processions initiated the only known conflict for this organization, which culminated in a 1605 edict that is presented in the next chapter.
Primary Sources Consulted

Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, Mexico; Groups: *Indios* and *Haciendas*

16th-18th century corporate documents pertaining to Tecamachalco

AGN, Haciendas, Tenientes 3, Vol. 13, Exp. 4, Fojas 191-195

Newberry Library, Chicago; Ayer folio oCD 3656 1977.M47

The Parish Archive of Tecamachalco, Puebla, Mexico

Group: *Disciplinar*; Books I-VIII of Arch-Confraternity of the Holy True Cross

1575 and 1605 charters; election records, accounts, inventories of property, and

*autos de visita* (ecclesiastic reviews), various years between 1575 and 1809

*Cordilleras y Edictos* (Mountain Ranges and Edicts)

Bishops’ edicts relating to lay leadership, spending and records, 1765-1810

*Libros de Bautizmos* (Books of Baptisms)

*Gente de razón* (*españoles* and *mestizos*) and *indios*, 1641-1740
VII - Gender and Ethnic Management, Marginalization and Mobilization:

Rituals of Rule and Rebellion in the Holy True Cross

Colonial subjects and citizens are commonly divided into categories of insiders and outsiders, based on their gender and ethnicity, and by extension, class (Ortner 1974: 68; Stoler 1995: 31). As the Holy True Cross’ dominant and most vocal contingency, Spanish lay leaders attempted to micro-manage and marginalize the positions and actions of native brethren and all women. By framing women as “non-men” and indigenous peoples as “non-Spaniards,” Spanish lay leaders seemed to target the groups as forasteros (foreigners), “other” or “abnormal” in order to justify the circumscription of their membership privileges. Spaniards’ efforts appear to have met with some success, at least in the short-term and on paper; histories are usually recorded by the victors.

The Spaniards’ agenda of “keeping people in their place” was eventually met with the concerns of native cofrades, who sought their own room to move within the hierarchal but malleable structure of cofradías. In Tecamachalco and New Spain as a whole (O’Hara 2010: 159), Spanish priests and lay leaders slowly came to the realization that they were not the only social segments in possession of what Pierre Bourdieu (1998: 104) would have called symbolic capital.

I present a comparative analysis of ordinances and documentation of the spiritual roles and autonomy exercised by a minority of the cofradía’s female and native members. I begin with the scant evidence that defines and acknowledges women’s roles. What were the standards set for cofradas? To what extent did women meet or exceed them?
This chapter primarily targets indios cofrades, the frequent subjects of confraternal financial reports, the 1605 charters, bishops’ edicts, and the Anales de Tecamachalco. A series of ecclesiastic hearings and decisions attests to the agency of a group of indigenous members no longer content to accept the terms offered to them by Spanish lay leaders. Anthony Giddens (1984) saw agency as the key to reconstructing the cultural or social histories of subaltern groups. So too did Marshall Sahlins (1995: 198): “Deprived thus of agency and culture, their history is reduced to a classic meaninglessness: they lived and they suffered – and then they died.” My analysis of a series of events and interactions among cofrades (native), leaders (Spanish) and supervisors (friars) sets the stage for subsequent chapters, which detail the rise and fall of minor neighborhood cofradías founded by mostly native, casta and female lay leaders.

“No Woman of Any Quality”: Integrating and Isolating Second-Class Cofradas

In certain colonial encounters, the social barrier of gender may have paralleled that of ethnicity. Class and age were at play in men’s annual contests of prestige and power, but sex and marital status were used in order to draw distinctions among cofrades and cofradas. There were wives of male brethren (37%), mothers (2.5%), daughters (7.5%), sisters and other relatives (5.5%), widows (2.5%), and lone women (45%). It is tempting to over-emphasize cooperation and consensus-building within the operation of cofradías. But cofradías would have reflected and perhaps even intensified the already hierarchical nature of the societies in which they were founded, and colonial Mexican society was certainly stratified on many levels.
Women’s numerical representation was not negligible (28%), but they were essentially overlooked by the cofradía’s authorities and record-keepers. Examining 8 books for any information on the micro-management of native and female members, or recognition of their unique contributions, I found that only 10% of entries concerned women. Spanish men saw themselves as the Holy True Cross’ core or true members, so they mentioned themselves frequently. When indios cofrades became problematic in certain respects, the juxtaposition of Spanish and native men took center stage (1605). Women’s experiences, actions and agendas, regardless of ethnicity, age or marital status, remained largely invisible. Perhaps women never insisted on securing more privileges than the basic ones that had been afforded to them at the brotherhood’s inception.

Women would have been entirely aware of the circumscription of their roles within male-dominated cofradías, even if they knew of no viable alternatives or avenues for recourse. No woman could claim ignorance of the expectations shaping her confraternal membership and participation. Her cumulative experiences, what Bourdieu (1987: 156) termed *habitus*, and the ideals communicated to her as policy, sanctioned by professional and lay representatives of the Church, served to reinforce her marginal position. When lay officials read the constitution aloud on each May 3rd, they ensured that the rules would be embodied by everyone gathered within the ceremonial precinct. Absence from the public reading or violation of the ordinances were to be penalized by expulsion, unless offending members surrendered candle wax as due penance.

Among the 35 ordinances of the 1575 charter, the female presence was noted in only 2 policies that dealt with very basic membership procedures. Female membership and participation were not controversial, at least not yet. The dues of the wives of current
members were to be no more than one pound of wax (ASV I: 12v, Ord. 7), which was less than the set fee for unmarried women. The discount acknowledged the bonds of marriage and the familial character of cofradías. In a male-centric cofradía, Spanish lay leaders saw cofrades’ wives honorary members rather than full-fledged participants.

Women were permitted to enlist unaccompanied by husbands or other male relatives, which indicates that there was some gender parity in terms of how piety and fellowship were perceived. Moreover, the cofradía’s bottom line was at play; it was a missed opportunity to discourage any potential members. The brotherhood was largely supported by members’ initial and long-term annual dues, alms for special acquisitions, voluntary service, sponsorship of masses, and purchase of exclusive processional roles.

The only other ordinance that appeared to incorporate women actually did the opposite. All blood brethren were to be buried in an equal manner (ASV I: 14r, Ord. 24, 1575). No reference to sex or ethnicity was made, but a 1605 amendment reveals that only Spanish males were eligible for this order. Thus the ordinance did not integrate women; it neglected or disqualified them from the privilege of a proper Christian burial. Nevertheless, my membership analysis indicates that over time, women and native peoples were admitted as sisters and brothers of blood and light. A “good death” was assured for those who could pay and gain acceptance.

While the first charter and donation receipts attest to what women could do, the amendments emphasized their limitations. Women’s differential status was referenced in only 3 of 40 ordinances, only 2 more than in 1575. Thus, in the eyes of the 1605 cabildo, women’s roles and movements remained fairly inconsequential matters. Alternatively,
the nature and scope of female membership and participation “went without saying”; there was little need to reiterate women’s position to them.

In 1605, scribe Pedro de Beristain imparted gender and ethnic proscriptions that somehow escaped his notice or prioritization in 1575. What had happened to attract so much negative attention? Women were first addressed in a long ordinance: “the order in which the brethren are to proceed within the procession” of Holy Thursday (ASV IV: iii r, Ord. 3). The number and detail of policies that dealt with this annual procession indicate that the council, and the penitential brethren whom they represented, considered it to be on par with that of the Cross (May 3rd). Officials safeguarded the ancient protocol of the procession, upholding the tradition as it had long been practiced in Spain. Most attention was dedicated to the juxtaposition or relative positioning, costuming and roles of elected officials, Spanish and native brethren, and the processional orders of blood and light. The management of ethnic boundaries was dogmatized here and elsewhere.

Female participants merited only a brief mention (10% of the ordinance). Women followed the singers:

…And in the same way, the Spanish women [mujeres españolas] shall go behind the said image [Our Lady], for their devotion they were [admitted] in the said procession, without permitting them to go in front. Nor are they to go along the sides of the penitents. (ASV IV: iii r, Ord. 3)

Penitents were male Spaniards and presumably blood brethren. Mujer translates to woman and wife. Did the scribe mean the blood brothers’ wives or all Spanish women who were eligible to participate? I would assume that the former group was described. In baptismal and matrimonial records, mujer and esposa denoted wife or spouse. Throughout the confraternal records, mujeres was used in contexts that suggest women in general, but also ones that clearly signify wives only.
Women were forbidden from preceding, intermingling with or standing amongst men, whether their husbands, fathers, brothers, or just their fellow members. Due to the familial atmosphere of cofradías, it likely seemed natural to march alongside spouses. But the hierarchical structure of most confraternal activities, especially processions, meant that order prevailed. There was a set place for the priest, officials, singers, brethren of blood and light, women, and native penitents. Penitents were instructed to hide their identities: “…And all shall go with their faces covered and without their necks [showing], with much devotion and silence, without carrying another particular symbol by which they might be recognized” (ASV IV: iii r, Ord. 3). Any couples marching together would have risked revealing their identities or individualities to spectators.

Had certain women ever attempt to “pair up” with their husbands? Much like a director’s instructions to actors in a play, the ordinance provides a striking visual of the cultural geography of the Holy Thursday procession. The scribe may have merely recorded the chief steward’s plan for the event or adopted a standard formula. The ordinance might not reflect any past or current dilemmas initiated by female interference.

The cabildo constructed impermeable boundaries between the ‘natural’ abilities and freedoms of men and women. Ordinance #7 from 1605 is a detailed and prohibitive rewording or reworking of ordinance #7 from 1575. The beginning was identical, inviting women into the cofradía’s ranks, but the conclusion was anything but welcoming.

As to the admittance of women into the confraternity…And if there is some single woman who wishes to enlist as a member in this confraternity, she shall give as alms for her entrance three pesos before she is seated in the book. And those who are [already] seated or who are [the] wives [mujeres] of certain members, they shall pay two pesos, not conceding to anyone [of them] to be acknowledged [annotated or vouched for] publicly nor are they to be seated as those of blood (ASV IV: iii v, Ord. 7, 1605).
Besides drawing distinctions between single and married women, as well as between prospective and current members, the scribe alleges that women are, at best, members with limited privileges, or, at worst, honorary members or members in name only. The policy reminded women that they were politically invisible. In brotherhoods, women were not permitted to attend meetings or participate in elections, whether as observers, voters or candidates. Women’s sacred duties, particularly alms collection and donation, could overlap with those of their male counterparts. Regardless of their calidad (ethnicity; footnote #1), women were summarily excluded from official confraternal business. There was no need to state this directly in either charter. Catholic notions about female spiritual immaturity automatically disqualified women from being entrusted with the burdensome responsibilities of Spanish men. In the 18th century, women had to form their own sisterhoods in order to attain the highest levels of lay leadership.

The ordinance reflects the lack material on women, including any details surrounding their individual enlistments. There was almost always more information provided for males than females, except for when marital status was concerned. This problem, whether one of a lack of female activism or representation, is not unique to the cofradía or to Tecamachalco: “There is very little evidence of a strong female role in Spanish confraternities or in any position of religious leadership outside convents. Spanish confraternities were male-dominated organizations” (Von Germeten 2006: 44).

The cofradía was founded by and for male Spaniards, which may explain why mixed-ethnicity cofradífas welcomed, or at least memorialized, a greater proportion of female members. Was the female presence strategically minimized? Women accounted for 28% of members, even though Von Germeten (2006: 46) estimated them to constitute
a numerical(165,640),(246,657): “Women, especially poorer women, dominated the membership lists, although not as leaders, of almost every one of the hundreds of confraternity record books available in parish and diocesan archives.” There may be more women than those seen on paper. Larger colonial processes may be at play; Spanish lay leaders and scribes likely saw women as inactive or indivisible from the husbands, fathers, siblings, or sons.

My view that female memberships were discouraged, downplayed or subsumed under those of their male counterparts is supported by the cofradía’s form of collective worship, which built upon Medieval European confraternal heritage. In flagellant groups, penitents collectively shed blood with whips. Funds were repetitively invested in whips and robes, enabling more members to partake over time. This ritual sacrifice was to be performed in secret or within the public pageantry of a procession, but individual participants were to remain anonymous (ASV IV: iii r, Ord. 3, 1605; Weigle 1976: 59).

The 16th and 17th century rise of flagellant cofradías in Spain presented logistical obstacles to female religiosity (Flynn 1989: 135). Men practiced corporal penitence at night in darkened rooms, which resigned women to pray alone at home. Men continued to capitalize on the corporate qualities of cofradías. In Bologna, Italy, circa 1500, a group of disenfranchised women protested the conversion of their cofradía from one centered on prayer and songs to one dedicated to flagellation. They united and staged a public resistance that shamed the men and the town of Bologna into allowing them to create a subsidiary or auxiliary groups (Terpstra 1995: 130-132).

In the 16th century, flagellant cofradías arrived in New Spain, incorporating Spaniards, Nahuas and Afro-Mexicans. Despite the public display of self-flagellation on Holy Thursday and other holy days, the rite was sometimes surrounded by secrecy or
euphemisms within charters (Lavrin 2002: 28-29). Overly vivid descriptions could offend religious authorities and any women present. A monthly mass involving flagellation was an unsatisfactory proposal for the bishop who ratified the cofradía’s 1605 charter: “…in these six masses, there shall be light, and a Holy Cross + of May, which are blood…” (ASV IV: vi v, Ord. 25). The scribe did not clarify whether only cofrades de luz could attend the 6 masses of light or if only the cofrades de sangre were welcomed at the 12 masses of blood. But crossing out light and blood indicates that the cabildo suggested something untoward or a matter that was better left unstated or for another occasion.

Lay leaders employed the 7th ordinance to prohibit all women from pursuing the order of blood, which entitled members to flagellant processions. The 3rd ordinance’s protagonists were Spanish blood brothers; women could not join them (ASV IV: iii r, Ord. 3, 1605). Female and native members likely understood that they were prevented from emulating the blood brothers. Perhaps women were seen as ritual pollutants or in need of being shielded from a public, painful bodily act that was immodest for females. Even in 18th and 19th-century New Mexico, the female auxiliary groups of flagellant brotherhoods were eventually prevented from flagellant processions “when it was felt that men would suffer for the women” (Weigle 1976: 145). Women were seen as naturally unsuited for the most corporal form of penitence. Men, who remained the only true blood brothers, were not to be distracted by women’s earthly weaknesses.

Women were not universally banned as penitents. In one Afro-Mexican cofradía, “women of African descent walked in flagellant processions (although we do not know whether they actively disciplined themselves) and acted boldly and dressed flamboyantly in confraternity funerals” (Von Germeten 2006: 46). Local Spaniards would have never
accommodated seemingly sacrilegious behaviors. There is no evidence that local cofradas questioned male authority in any systematic, demonstrative or even surreptitious way.

While the 1605 charter disqualified anyone who was not a male Spaniard from the order of blood, lay leaders had been more tolerant in the preceding 15 years. The first 2 blood brothers were a Spaniard and a mestizo (1591). The first indigenous blood brother joined with his spouse (1593). A clarification of membership dues and types reveals that “indios de sangre” were accommodated early on (ASV I: 24v, 1576). Native men paid only 3 pesos to become blood brothers but Spaniards paid 5 pesos. *Naturales principales* paid 2 pesos for basic membership (ASV I: 43v, 1579). Gender and marital status were not specified, but Spanish lay leaders clearly evaluated townspeople based on their social standing. Prestige and wealth, rather than ethnicity and gender only, influenced who could afford the monetary and time commitments associated with the order of blood.

At least 5 women, all members’ wives, 4 of whom were married to Spaniards, qualified as blood sisters (11% of 45 blood brethren). There was no mention of women’s individual qualities or intervening lay leaders rendering this impossibility a reality. The first blood sister was the native wife of a Spaniard who joined with her; he was not a blood brother (1596). Perhaps she was a charitable noblewoman or her husband’s reputation prevailed. A couple of unstated ethnicity became blood brethren in 1632, followed by 2 Spanish couples in 1632 and another in 1635. Women’s confraternal fates were tied to their husbands’ social standings. Perhaps an individual’s status could secure a couple’s position or they were rewarded for joint economic and spiritual leadership. There should be more blood sisters but there were no 1643-1669 membership lists.
Among the more numerous female light bearers, there was more variation. There were 15 wives - 7 married to blood brothers, 4 to brethren of light, and 4 to cofrades (1594-1632). Two women married to blood brethren were employed by a chief steward, as were the husbands. A mother, related to a chief steward, joined the order with her daughter and son. Two widows and 3 single women, including an indigenous maid, qualified alone. The penitential order appears to have been a relatively inclusive social club, but one that still revolved around the cofradía’s male elite.

In 1675, women turned their attention to insignia paths centered on the Virgin. There was less expense and fanfare with female inscriptions, except for 23 women who joined together in 1736 (two-thirds of all women dedicated to insignia paths). Women represented 13% of all penitents (blood, light and insignia paths). While an obvious minority, women represented only 28% of the membership (if all were counted). There was a smaller pool of female candidates to choose from, so women were not excessively filtered out of the most public forms of collective worship. Unlike men, women do not appear to have used their own goods or services to purchase processional positions.

Cofradas’ unfettered participation and movement were threatening enough to warrant restrictions. Women who overstepped a spiritual, spatial and gendered boundary were warned that it could result in an unceremonious, even violent act:

And that the women are not to enter the Maundy [lavatorio]. And consider that no woman, of whatever condition [calidad] she may be, shall enter the resting place of the Maundy, of the entrance doors. And if any official learns of this, [then] he can throw her out. (ASV IV: vii v, Ord. 31, 1605; footnote #2).

The ordinance may reflect exaggeration, adopted in order to cement the salient point. But Spanish lay leaders may have been fully prepared to physically remove any woman who dared to tread where she did not belong. The lavatorio, where holy water
was housed, was often associated with Holy Thursday, hence the disproportionate concern. The sanctity of the space and its contents prompted a policy that equated all women with ritual or spiritual pollution. When Spanish men summarily excluded women from self-flagellation (Ord. 7) and the Maundy (Ord. 31), misogynous notions were at play: women were spiritually immature in comparison to men, as indigenous peoples were in comparison to Spaniards; women’s chastity would be in danger if they entered enclosed spaces where men gathered together, even if the men were engaged in worship.

Were women impeded from interfacing with other ritual objects? Women would never have been entrusted with keys to the confraternal coffer or the sacristy where the sacred images, processional attire, candle wax and jewels were housed. But as artisans, alms donors and collectors, women came into direct and regular, although not necessarily unsupervised or unregulated, contact with the ritual paraphernalia and funds.

In New Spain, “female religious leadership reached a peak in 17th-century confraternities” (Von Germeten 2006: 45). In Tecamachalco, this occurred later, at least in terms of the rise of sisterhoods. In male-dominated cofradías, unattached and married women could gain some semblance of social acceptance and symbolic kinship through fellowship and shared tasks. Women’s services may have been varied and significant, but local scribes did not present them with much regularity or fanfare.

The main exception was Mariana Rendon, the wife of mayordomo Joseph de Lisama and mother of mayordomo Antonio de Lisama. Her donation of an image of Jesus of Nazareth earned her the highest distinction received by a woman in a cofradía – mayordoma (ASV VII: 3v, 1705). The honorary title would not have been conferred without the intervention of her husband, a veteran chief steward. When Spanish, native
and casta women founded sisterhoods in the 18th-century, they finally earned the privilege to be addressed as mayordomas and not in name only. But priests’ invocations of the husbands’ names and permission attest to the ideal of the female leader being tempered by a patriarchal reality that was firmly entrenched in colonial Mexican society.

The most active female participants in Tecamachalco were hermanas (sisters) or cofradas, female variants of male terms. In the Holy True Cross, only ‘mayordoma’ Mariana Rendon and a lay woman, a hermana de la tercera orden, were emphasized. In a flagellant cofradía, politically and numerically dominated by Spanish men, minimizing or neglecting female spiritual needs, participation, service, and leadership was acceptable and expected. Spanish cofradías’ patriarchy impeded women, especially poor ones who could not make pious donations, from taking an active role (Von Germeten 2006: 41, 44).

Native and casta women drew on religious traditions that were more inviting towards women. In pre-contact Mesoamerica, the Congo and Angola, women privately and publicly demonstrated their devotion as well as other spiritual and social gifts in connection to their deities and communities (Burkhart 1997: 39; Von Germeten 2006: 44-45). But Susan Deeds (1997: 258) argues that there was a clear gender hierarchy within pre-Columbian “political and ritual functions.” In the early colonial period, native men served as catechists, sacristans and confraternal officials, but women’s “participation in Spanish-sanctioned ritual activities and community decision-making was minimal” (Ibid: 259). Moreover, we can detect few female or native voices because “non-literate people were represented almost totally by outsiders in the written record” (Ibid: 255-256).

Were native hermanas more active than their Spanish sisters? In the 1590s, there were 3 indias for every 2 españolas, but among the males, there were 2 Spaniards for
each indio cofrade. But numerical representation is not equivalent to activism. In New Spain’s gender and race-based hierarchy, “a gender ethic that considered all women to be naturally lacking in moral fiber and potentially unruly dictated an even lower status for Indian women” (Deeds 1997: 271). Various indias cofradas were married to Spanish brethren, but they were not specifically enjoined in the 1605 charter, unlike Spanish wives, women or indios cofradas in general.

When individual women were mentioned, it was often in the context of collecting or giving alms. Like men, women surrendered money, candle wax and other goods, which could be used or sold by lay leaders (ASV II: 79v, 1630). Ethnicity and most other biographical details, such as surname, place of residence, the donation amount, and whether she gave alone, with her spouse or as part of a group, were rarely provided.

Male officials and members were the default alms collectors. Deputies Vicente Martin and Salvador García begged for alms from churchgoers in cavita before or after Sunday mass, garnering up to 14 pesos in a single day (ASV III: 99v, 1620, 1624). An ‘Indian’ was directed to collect alms with the confraternal cup, each Saturday in the market, from his fellow indios cofradas (ASV IV: v v, Ord. 18, 1605). Except for when performed by lay leaders, alms collection was paid work; a native member was given 3 reales for begging for alms in primarily indigenous Santa Clara (ASV II: 98r, 1641).

Early on, Spanish lay leaders entrusted a woman with a task previously assigned to men (ASV I: 9r, 1575). The woman dispatched to the Saturday market by the 1576 cabildo focused solely on candle wax, so her role may have been seen as informal or temporary (ASV I: 28r). Mexico City’s Nahua women adhered to gendered geographic patterns that were likely at play in Tecamachalco: “Women unofficially collected or
directed the collection on the local municipal level; male collectors who were named on licenses ranged further afield throughout the regions of central Mexico” (Osowski 2006: 158). In the Holy True Cross, female alms collector were confined to the *tianguiz*; native men collected there but also throughout the town and its dependencies. Diputados were strategically stationed to capitalize on the sacred space (church) and gathering (mass).

Many, and mostly, native women from throughout the agricultural region visited the market, buying and selling wares and socializing with one another (Sousa 1997: 212). *Tianguiz* was always named in connection with alms, indigenous peoples and Saturdays. The woman was an india sent among her equals. A council of sound managers knew that native women were most likely to donate to one of their own. A female alms collector does not indicate that gender parity existed within a patriarchal hierarchical brotherhood. But native women were among the most numerous and generous supporters of cofradías.

Women donated independently and collectively, publicly and anonymously. At least one woman in the market, a member’s wife, donated candle wax (ASV I: 27v, 1576). The scribe recognized the woman, not her husband, as the donor. She was most likely seen as an honorary member. In the same entry, a couple dedicated their funds to *Nuestra Señora del Clerigo Campo*, who watches over Catholic priests and missions.

Indigenous men and women made corporate gifts. As individuals, their gifting power was dismissed as negligible (ASV, IV: v v, Ord. 18, 36, 1605). In 1624, “*una india Fermuni*” sacrificed 2 tomines. En masse, a real impact could be made. Even with few resources, the poor could still express their piety and partnership within the cofradía by banding together. A native group requested and pooled alms until they collected 26
pesos, enough for 1½ feast days (1576). Scribes did not record whether donor groups resided on the same estate or barrio, or if donors united from around the region.

In addition to being memorialized in the book for posterity, donations were probably announced at confraternal gatherings, with donors praised by friars, lay leaders and some members. Gifts were eventually forgotten, but first they inspired others to follow suit or the same group to organize another alms campaign. Individuals were not identified, but native women were clearly among the donors. Even if women did not sacrifice part of their own earnings or inheritances, their community and even households would be elevated, albeit temporarily, through this concerted effort.

An official’s wife paid 4 pesos to choral director Andres Rodriguez on her estate (ASV II: 98r, 1641). Then a council member sought reimbursement for her payment. Why did she pay instead of her husband? Perhaps the woman sponsored a mass in honor of a deceased relative or the dedication of a sacred image or chapel on her property. But she did so for the glory of the cofradía or it would be inappropriate to compensate her.

Scribes kept little documentation of female roles and contributions. Women became members, pledged as sisters of blood and light, dedicated themselves to insignia paths revolving around the Virgin Mary, collected and donated alms, sponsored masses for deceased loved ones, and were the beneficiaries of funerary rites. Other than the market alms collector (1576), the official’s wife who paid the singer (1641), and chief stewardess Mariana Rendon (1705), female members remain largely invisible. Women likely served on feast days through church décor and meal preparation for priests and participants. But scribes never stated, “The women, as a group, did this. We, the council, are grateful for their service to the confraternity, for they are also its members.”
“For the Indians Who Help in the Things of the Confraternity”: Indios Oficiales

While gender dynamics were downplayed in the first charter, ethnicity was absent. The purpose and relative position of indigenous peoples were not presented in specific terms. Ethnicity was invoked in an instruction to carry white wax candles in processions in the way of the Spaniards (ASV I: 12v, Ord. 4, 1575). Only the final ordinance came close to incorporating native townspeople. Scribe Pedro de Beristain noted that singers were to perform in the Holy Thursday procession and in members’ masses (ASV I: 15r, Ord. 35, 1575). Sex, ethnicity and membership status were overlooked. But the use of Nahuatl in pay receipts and cultural convention indicates that most, if not all, singers were native noblemen (Haskett 1991: 118).

Perhaps ethnic hierarchies were not of immediate concern to the 1575 cabildo. Spanish friars and lay leaders’ priorities, perhaps working in concert, appear to account for the disregard of indigenous members in 1575. The officials of a cofradía founded by and for male Spaniards were unlikely to address ‘non-men’ and ‘non-Spaniards,’ at least not in their most formal document. Ethnicity might be important, but the topic did not belong in the charter, whether due to redundancy (stated elsewhere) or inappropriateness (unlikely to be approved). New Spain’s ecclesiastic authorities intended cofradías to augment spiritual and social welfare, not act as political entities, even though they were almost always tied to occupational, residential and/or ethnic communities.

Confraternal charters followed a standard formula and were subject to critical inspection by the bishop. Scribes were well versed in what was expected of them. When they were not, any scribal error was remedied through additional amendments or by crossing out the offending words, as seen with various policies from the 1605 charter.
When compared to native or Afro-Mexican cofradías, those dominated by Spanish men were the most exclusive; some almost operated as closed communities (Lavrin 2002: 32). Spanish influence on cofradías, at least urban ones, “peaked in the late 16th and early 17th centuries” (Von Germeten 2006: 15, 44). All 27 founders were Spanish men; anyone else who was present was not counted (ASV I: 6v, 1575). Female and native members quickly joined the founders. On March 5th, 1575, 2 months before the charter was ratified (May 5th), the scribe presented an act of foundation and requested a license of formation, itemizing the categories of people who wished to enlist:

Spaniards and Indians, blood brethren, men and women pay for their entrance into the confraternity. Everyone shall participate from this point forward in all of the indulgences and pardons of the confraternity, giving a sung mass for all of the members. (ASV I: 6r, 1575)

Ethnicity mattered in the 1590s membership lists. But later on, it was traced infrequently and it was never annotated in the election records. The 1590s data attest to native men and women being relatively numerous, in comparison to Spanish women. In 1575, the sodality was identified as a “blood brotherhood” (ASV I: 6v); in 1605, it was “a Spanish brotherhood founded within a Spanish town” (ASV IV: ix v, Ord. 22). In 1677, the Illustrious Doctor Don Manuel Hernandez, bishop of Puebla, referred to the Holy True Cross as a “confraternity of Spaniards, founded in the Parish Church” (ASV V: 17r), which was untrue. But in the 18th century, scribes did not identify the cofradía as one “of Spaniards,” nor the ethnicities of members and insignia path followers (ASV VI: 1694). Ethnicity only took center stage in 1605, revealing a disproportionate concern about indios cofrades. In the document’s aftermath, which lasted throughout the 17th century, ethnicity remained meaningful to lay leaders or at least scribes, but only where labor, alms, processions, and insignias were concerned.
Then ethnicity appeared to lose importance once again, with scribes no longer identifying artisans, laborers or singers in terms of their race. Von Germeten (2006: 196) observed that “later Spanish-led confraternities chose to employ more subtle distinctions than the racial labels assigned to members.” By banning those of “scandalous habits,” rather than people of any specific “state, class, age, sex or condition,” lay leaders gave the appearance of greater inclusivity (Ibid: 196). I also noted a similar shift in 18th and 19th-century local confraternal and baptismal records, despite propaganda and litigation over limpieza de sangre (racial purity) reaching their highest levels (Martínez 2008: 123).

Men and women prevented from attaining prestige and power as lay leaders or even peers were still presented with various alternatives. The first recourse was to conform to what Antonio Gramsci (1971) would call hegemonic pressures and accept their inferior and conditional statuses within the cofradía. Through habitus, people unknowingly cement their subordinate positions within the existing social structure by drawing on their own experiences, behaviors and choices (Bourdieu 1987: 156). The praxis framework fits well with what transpired within the Holy True Cross. Female and native cofrades served in the capacities for which they had already been recognized, welcomed or at least tolerated. Individuals could endeavor to meet or even surpass the expectations and limitations placed on them by the Spanish cabildo. Cooperation and imitation implied consent. Beyond institutionalizing discrimination through policy (1605 charter), members’ practices (in rituals and service) reinforced confraternal hierarchies.

Amos Megged (1996: 149), who examined confraternal records from Chiapas, views the Maya who joined and served in cofradías as being accommodated but also alienated by colonial authorities, Spaniards, and even one another:
Religious life…was gradually becoming a substitute for the unattainable political independence that Indian supreme lords had sought since the 1540s. If political autonomy and cultural homogeneity were seriously impaired, there was still room for freedom in the realm of religion.

In central Mexico, Christianized Indians were also presented with unique opportunities but also restrictions that complicated their ritual and social prerogatives.

If the experiences of marginalization persisted or intensified, then one could object while still working within the system. Native groups could appeal to local religious hierarchies for greater parity with Spanish male penitents. A few brave wayward members might even attempt to circumvent the policies that confined or denigrated them.

But pursuing a counter-hegemonic strategy was risky; resistance to confraternal authority invited the severe penalties of fines, expulsion or even excommunication. The disenfranchised could voluntarily leave in order to join another confraternity, or unite with other townspeople to form their own rival brotherhood or sisterhood.

Inspired by Michel Foucault, Ann Laura Stoler (1995: 82) argued that certain social groups and behaviors become normalized, others demonized, when leaders communicate cultural ideals. When leaders exercise power through what James C. Scott (1990: 55) called *public transcripts* (flattering self-portraits), they expect at least the appearance of unanimous consent from their followers. When Spanish lay leaders told all women and native men where to walk and what to wear and carry within processions, they expected the matter to be resolved. Punishing any resisters, especially publicly, would impart a lasting example to all observers – existing and potential members.

I argue and will demonstrate here that, at some point, all of these options were exercised. There is convincing evidence that subaltern groups endeavored to navigate, manipulate and negotiate restrictions placed on them by their supposedly benevolent lay
leaders. Creative questioning of authority happened throughout New Spain: “the efforts by subordinated peoples to retain certain elements of autochthonous culture were universal” (Deeds 1997: 256). Cofrades acted, as individuals or as a collective, in direct reaction to long-standing, sanctioned discrimination, which was institutionalized through polemic discourse contained within the 1605 charter. Because it was read aloud on each May 3rd to all members who were gathered, the yearly reminder reinforced the members’ internalization of their lesser statuses. The reading clearly communicated to the attendees: “This is who you are and who you are not. This is what you can do, and what you cannot do. You have two options: conform or leave”.

In order to contrast ideal and real behaviors, namely confraternal rhetoric and practices regarding the treatment of indios cofrades, I present a comparative analysis of ordinances from the 1605 charter and accounting data (receipts for alms and labor). I begin with the evidence on indigenous members’ varied confraternal service, whether framed as forced, voluntary and/or compensated by lay officials. Indigenous members’ services are presented as integral to the cofradía. Lay leaders exercised their sense of authority, autonomy, economy, and fairness when crafting a policy on native labor.

And if for any personal service concerning the matters of this confraternity, there was a need for some Indians, then the chief and deputy stewards are to pay them for their work. [The cabildo] can force the said Indians who are members to assist in it. And [if] in this they [are] impeded [by] the governor, the mayors, or other officials of the said town of Tecamachalco, the penalty will be of one pound of wax from each one towards the said confraternity, and only the said penalty. The said Indian members shall assist in that which the said Spanish officials order them, in matters of the said confraternity, paying them according to what is said of their work. (ASV IV: v v, Ord. 18, 1605)

The wording and philosophy are strikingly awkward and untenable. After the work was assessed, lay leaders, who could oblige members to serve, would pay. The
council seems to be flexing its muscles, for the benefit of Indians but also for secular authorities who thought to interfere. But their ecclesiastic supervisors would have none of it. An amendment softened the delivery, emphasizing that native members’ work be both paid and voluntary, inspired only by the Christian example of their Spanish brethren.

And as to the contents of the eighteenth ordinance, in which the Indians, being brethren of the said confraternity can be compelled to assist in the necessary matters of it the confraternity, paying them for their work what is their due, making a gift in moderation, without requiring wasteful spending. [Brethren of] light, petition and entrust this to the governor and mayor and notables, do not impede them, instead, before, inspire them to assist in the necessary matters of the said confraternity since all are its brethren. (ASV IV: ix v, Ord. 39, amendment to Ord. 18, 1605)

Did the scribe enjoin secular officials as well as Indians in “all are its brethren”? A governor was the only local authority identified in the membership lists. If men seated on the municipal council were cofrads, lay leaders would not argue with them about the services of their indigenous constituents. Spanish lay leaders solicited the cooperation of their secular counterparts but expected conformity from indigenous members.

Key tasks, such as announcing council meeting and elections were annual:

And concerning giving notice of the elections - there shall be a member with the hand bell, who with his cloak, the tolling of the bell shall be heard throughout the whole town. This task will be performed by an Indian, who will be paid for his work, and everyone shall be obligated, upon hearing it, to attend the court of the council that is to be found in the town… (ASV IV: vi v, Ord. 26, 1605)

The man was first identified as a member and then as an Indian, but we do not know whether the man inherited or competed for this paid role on May 3rd.

Choral directors, singers and musicians were compensated for performing in the major processions and masses of the year. The men were often identified by name (Lucas del Miguel, Juan Mereses, Gaspar Sebastián, Salvador del Gil), as “Indian singers,” or simply as “singers” or “Indians” (ASV I: 29v, 1577; ASV II: 83v, 1632). Tobias was paid
1 peso for his “song for the procession and Holy Cross of May” (ASV II: 24v, 25v, 1605-1606). Musicians sometimes included guitar players and violinists, but there was no evidence of female performers (ASV II: 96v, 98v, 1641). Singers could be paid for the whole year, but paying for individual occasions was more common (ASV II: 91v, 1637).

In 1638, choir master Andres Rodriguez replaced Francisco Rodriguez; both continued to serve as lead singers (ASV II: 92v). A century later, there was another choir master named Antonio Rodriguez (ASV VII: 73r, 1733). The shared name may reflect a family trade in which sons took over from their fathers, but Rodriguez was a common surname. Each man officiated as maestro de capilla for over a decade. In 1640, choir master Don Francisco Rodriguez and Mateo Juarez affirmed that “masters that we are of this chapel” received 12 pesos for the “music of the chapel” during Holy Week and the day of the Cross (ASV II: 95v.). According to Robert Haskett (1991: 118), “the posts of maestro de capilla (choir leader) and cantor (singer) were honorary positions in much of central New Spain and were commonly filled by members of the Indian nobility who had been selected by curates, maestros or other cantores.” Don Francisco’s honorary title of don indicates nobility and that he was on par with other lay leaders (ASV II: 95r).

Candle-makers were usually referred to as “Indians who made [or worked with] the wax” (ASV II 69r, 1627). They were also addressed as candeleros (candle-makers), Indian candle-makers, or even “the officials of the wax.” Candles used in masses and carried by brethren of light in processions were so prized that lay leaders likely treated candle-makers as valuable assets. Candle-makers were mentioned so often because wax was replenished as it was used. Indigenous workers were rewarded for preparing candle wax (1-2 pesos) and for the wax itself (58 pesos in 1625). The hefty sum expended on the
material, rather than the workers, still paled beside the 92 pesos spent that year on wine for the Maundy, enjoyed by only male members (ASV II: 62v, 1625; footnote #2).

Scribes identified the people who prepared meals, presumably for priests on holy days, or who made powder to adorn processional routes as the officials of their respective fields (ASV II: 89r, 1635). Like wax, food and powder were tied to public rituals, which may justify assigning distinctive occupational titles to the skilled laborers or artisans. We might imagine women performing any of these duties, but sex was not unspecified.

Indios cofrades played key roles in members’ Christian burials, the main reason for joining a cofradía. According to Megged (1996: 148), indigenous laypeople were “considered more capable of performing these offices than were many of their parish priests.” Cofrades indios and españoles may have tended only to their own groups.

Native laborers were employed for the benefit of holy days, masses, processions, and the upkeep and decoration of the main church. Scribes obscured duties: 4 reales “for the Indians who help in the things of the confraternity” or 6 reales to the “Indians who serve in the confraternity” (ASV II: 63v, 86r, 1625, 1633). The ritual item or holy day was sometimes specified: “Indians who helped me to place the lamp,” “Indians who helped me on the day of the Cross,” “Indians on Holy Thursday,” and “penitential Indians during Holy Week” (ASV II: 89r, 1635; ASV V: 54r, 60r, 1692-1693). Mayordomos wrote in the book in the first person and paid workers 1-2 pesos 4 reales. Crafting fiesta fireworks earned skilled Indian laborers 2-3 pesos (ASV, II: 56r, 65v, 1620, 1625).

Various individuals assisted during rituals and decoration of the town church for special occasions. Many accounting entries described native brethren who draped the church for Holy Week or the festival of the Holy Cross: “And the day and Vespers of the
festival of the Holy Cross, which was given to Indians for the items that they made… and the nails to drape the church and the fabric, and two youngsters who helped” (ASV II: 96r, 1640). Decades later, the workers were referred to as “Indians who hung the arches on the day of the festival” (ASV V: 54r, 62r, 64v, 1692-1699). Decorators were paid 4 reales-1 peso to acquire and affix pins or nails for hanging colored ribbons in order to elevate the church to its most beautiful state. A picture reprint from the 1950s, given to me by a resident, indicates that the ancient tradition continued into the 20th century.

The “Indian sacristans who helped in the altar” and the “brethren who guarded the altar-pieces” were paid 1 peso (ASV, II: 82v, 1631). This work placed native members in close contact with ritual specialists, spaces and paraphernalia. Sacristans, who directed “lesser functionaries,” were supervised by priests and fiscales (Haskett 1991: 119). There was no mention of sex, but almost all workers were labeled indios. Spanish lay leaders clearly considered their native brethren to be best suited for these duties and positions. Painters were paid 3 reales-4 pesos to decorate and repair the church and sacred images, which lay leaders had appropriated as their own (ASV II: 35v, 83v, 1612, 1632).

Only a century later, the religious and social climates of the 18th-century led the bishop of Puebla to see Indians as poor stewards of ritual paraphernalia. Ecclesiastic authorities now associated the Christian ritual calendar with Spaniards only: “in the holy days, which are not of the Indians” (Cordilleras y Edictos, 1765-1790: 23r, 1765). Even native ritual specialists were untrustworthy: “it has been recognized that the conduct of Indian sacristans and topiles [fiscales’ assistants] has been found to be particularly lacking” (Ibid: 10r, 1766). “Ecclesiastic persons” were told to bring sacred oils directly to their parishes, rather than permit Indian lay officials to have unsupervised access to ritual
Native sacristans were ready and willing but not able, at least not according to bishops. Puebla’s bishop, Favian y Fuero, forbade Indians from creating or even touching sacred objects: “The simplicity of our poor Indians, to make mistakes is especially the circumstance of this group of all castes” (Ibid: 99r, 1772). This attitude appears to render all native sacristans obsolete. Accusing indigenous artisans of artistic errors may explain why so much of New Spain’s religious artwork was whitewashed in the late colonial period. These works have been partially restored in Mexico’s 16th-century churches.

Lay leaders paid native brethren to make insignias, but prevented them from carrying them in processions (ASV I: vii v, Ord. 28, 1605). Laborers were usually referred to as indios. Annual expense reports indicate that native workers, usually men, and one in particular – Baltasar, were paid to fashion insignias. Baltasar’s long-term roles as an artisan and member suggest that he was well known by the lay leaders who dispatched him on multiple occasions. In 1604, Baltasar was paid 7 reales to craft insignias of the Passion (ASV II: 23v). In 1620, Baltasar was paid 9 tomines for “helping in the confraternity with some pots” and for repairing some broken items (ASV II: 50r, 54r). In 1625, he and Pedro were paid 4 reales for Easter and decorating the church for the day of the Cross (ASV II: 65r). That same year, the chief steward wrote, “I gave Baltasar, an Indian who serves in the confraternity, four reales for the rent of some candles” (ASV II: 114v). Apparently, Baltasar could and did do anything and everything.

Scribes no longer differentiated between españoles and indios in 18th-century membership lists and financial reports. When compensating singers, candle-makers, altar
guardians, and sacristans, scribes no longer wrote “I paid the Indians;” they focused on the labor itself and occupational titles (ASV VII: 65r, 1731; ASV VIII: 63r, 1775).

Perhaps this change occurred because so many laborers and members’ families were of mixed descent, or lax record-keeping is to blame. Pagination stopped around 1700 in the 5th and 6th books. But in comparison to Franciscans, secular priests, especially Antonio Benitez Coronel, exercised a hands-on approach to the records. They wrote in the first person and verified information, rather than only signing for masses (ASV V: 16v).

“For Being Indecent and Incompetent”: Accommodating and Alienating Indios Cofrades

Tecamachalco’s Spanish lay leaders, Christianized Indians and their religious supervisors had much in common with men and women from various eras, settlements, ethnic backgrounds and economic means. They all appropriated saints, religious images, structures, and celebrations for their own purposes. Their chief goal appears to be continuing or reinventing a sense of community identity. Through cogent symbols and rituals, groups express their ethos in direct opposition to rival, even dominant, groups.

Sponsors of religious processions and fiestas seek and achieve social cohesion and control (Brandes 1988: 169). In 16th-century Xochimilco, compadrazgo and Christian festivals reintegrated Indian farmers. Marking the ritual calendar promoted reciprocity, interdependence and social solidarity within and among communities. This corporate adjustment may have actually cemented the local and regional identities shared by native communities before the Conquest (Cabrera Vargas and Stephan-Otto Parrodi 1999: 10). In Tlayacapan, Morelos, contemporary fiestas, like cofradías and compadrazgo, are
effective vehicles of ritual kinship within and beyond the town, linking individuals, households and barrios into parish communities and citizens (Ingham 1986: 100).

On other occasions, conflict is unavoidable, if not openly invited, due to the nature of fiesta planners. In the Chamula festival of Games, Tzotzil Maya integrate a complex web of interrelated religious symbols and cultural critique, emphasizing their Indian ethnicity and historical ethnic conflicts (Gossen 1986: 227). While adoring the Sun-Christ, Tzotzil engaged in self-appraisal and an ethnic battle with the imagined worlds of mestizos and other perceived outsiders (Ibid: 248). The struggle between “local and official religion” continued in 20th-century Tzintzuntzan. Residents withdrew from the 1978 Corpus Christi fiesta in protest of their parish priest forming a fiesta planning committee without their input (Brandes 1988: 182). In another scheduled event, local celebrants expressed their autonomy by proceeding without the priest (Ibid: 183).

The examples employed in my analysis revolve around processional protocol. Inter-ethnic processions were micro-managed. The obvious oversight of ethnic matters in the founding document must have facilitated at least one awkward interethnic interaction because it was hyper-corrected in the amendments. In 1605, native members’ processional attire, placement and movements were of great concern to lay leaders. But in 1575, indios cofrades were not formally co-opted into either of the cofradía’s primary processions - Holy Thursday and the day of the Holy Cross (May 3rd).

In a 1576 amendment, an additional penitential procession and mass integrated Indians: “The Indians celebrate the festival of our Lady of Tears, Light of the Nativity” (ASV I: 26r). Only one year after the cofradía’s founding, indios cofrades were assigned their own procession, in which they could carry torches. A local Indian brotherhood
known as Our Lady of the Nativity was founded in 1581, but the 1576 procession clearly predates this confraternity of the same or similar devotion (Lady, Nativity). A mass was to be held in the monesterio, on September 14th, the other day of the Cross: “Inform the others, to all of the members, [there shall be a] procession in the patio, taking out the image in front, passing by the portals, and all the ordinances” (ASV I: 26r-v, 1576).

Indigenous participants were instructed to contribute wax to be used in the mass and procession. The scribe listed other confraternal masses held that year, including one sponsored by “an Indian named Miguel” (ASV I: 27r, 1576). Clearly, indigenous members constituted an active presence in the cofradía, even at the very beginning.

Who requested the solemn celebration? There is no direct evidence that native members or Franciscan friars pressured Spanish lay leaders to generate more inclusive ritual opportunities. But I can think of no other reason why the festival was added to the ritual calendar. The festival of the Virgin appears to be a strategic concession by lay leaders – a holy day just for the Indians, so that they would not interfere in the others. Perhaps the event was framed as complementary to the Spaniards’ two key festivals, but it was clearly minor. This was the only ceremony in which Indians were instructed to assemble. In the financial reports and the 1605 charter, the September mass was simply mentioned amongst the others. Perhaps the procession was demoted when it became part of the cofradía’s ritual calendar, or lay leaders may have been discontinued it. As an Indian celebration, it was less worthy of being memorialized within the records.

The last phrase, “and all the ordinances,” was the scribe’s attempt to add the policy to the charter, sanctioning all ordinances as true and complete. Seven signatures at the bottom further established it as an ordinance. Between 1575 and 1605, only this 1576
entry and a clarification of membership dues by sex, marital status, ethnicity, and
processional order were heralded as ordinances. The unanticipated issues of indigenous
peoples’ participation in processions, further membership diversification and
stratification, had to be addressed immediately. But these concerns were not originally at
the forefront of lay leaders’ minds or they would have made their way into the original
charter. Nor were they weighty enough to require a new constitution, at least not yet.

In 1605, the most lengthy and detailed ordinances indicate that annual processions
went far beyond expressions of collective fellowship. Local friars obliged cofrades to
attend all processions or they risked “hunger and sterility” for themselves and the entire
town (ASV IV: iii v, Ord. 13, 1605). Processions were at once religious, social,
economic, and political rituals. The multiple, varied and evolving meanings invested in
these events included tremendous sanctity, sociability, expense, and public display. At a
minimum, annual processions appear to have echoed the existing social structure of
colonial Tecamachalco, which was already highly racialized and gendered.

The timing, purpose, ritual, and expenses of processions were emphasized in the
original charter. But in 1605, the 6 ordinances addressing processions revolved around
maintaining confraternal hierarchies and ethnic boundaries (Ord. 3, 12, 17-18, 24, 28). A
change in approach is not altogether surprising. Long-term dominance “can be sustained
only by continuous efforts at reinforcement, maintenance, and adjustment” (Scott 1990:
45). Only the segments relevant to the positions, roles and ritual attire of Spanish and
native members are featured here. The policy that prevented women from intermingling
with men situated Spanish blood brethren at the heart of the Holy Thursday procession:

Order in how the brethren are to go in the procession… And that the brethren
members who went to make penitence on Holy Thursday, going confessing and
gathering those who would wish, due to their greater devotion, and wearing in the procession white robes and hoods, condoning them [to bear] insignias of the five wounds of Jesus Christ, dressed and their whips in the hands in the manner that they shed blood from their backs in remembrance of that which Our Master and Redeemer Jesus Christ shed to save the human race ~ and torches carried by the brethren of Light, except the whips… And take heed that in it there are Indian penitential brethren, they shall go in front, at the beginning of the procession, without inserting themselves or returning with the Spanish penitents who are there. And in a row behind, after them the singers… the Spanish women/wives shall go behind the said image [Our Lady]… And in the middle of the procession, no person can nor has walked except those who were directing and governing the said procession, and carrying the insignias of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary, standard and torches of wax, and one of the deputies…. (ASV IV: iii, Ord. 3)

The policy was sufficient to establish processional protocol, but a few key points were clarified and reiterated emphatically in subsequent ordinances. Some attention was directed at insignias, the primary bone of contention between Spanish and indigenous members. Ethnicity was invoked 3 times but it soon rose in importance. The 3rd ordinance listed the brethren of blood and light, native members, Spanish women, and officials. But the scribe did not state the ethnicity of the blood brethren, although all were Spaniards. This oversight was remedied in the 12th ordinance, which was crafted to enforce all members’ attendance at holy days, masses, vespers and processions. It targeted Spanish members, whether brethren of blood or light, as the key participants of processions.

…Before dawn in the procession, so that in it, the Spanish members remove from their customary place, their insignias of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ our Redeemer and that of the Virgin Mary his mother. [With a] banner and torches of wax, and for this all the brethren, those of blood just as those of light, shall come with their white robes and hoods, and their swords in the sash. (ASV IV: Ord. 12)

The “white robes and hoods” attest that only male Spaniards were eligible for full participation in processions. Robes and insignias were detailed in another policy:

And as to the robes that exist… twenty white and black robes with all their trimmings for brethren of blood and of light, and insignias of the five wounds of Jesus Christ to give to the members. (ASV IV: vi r, Ord. 24)
Blood penitents wore white robes and carried whips; the brethren of light wore black robes and carried torches. In a single expense record from 1604, tunic color and ethnicity were linked: 8 pesos for “black tunics that shall be for the Indians in order to carry their insignias on Holy Friday…” (ASV III: 53v). But by the 1590s, there were españoles and indios, women as well as men among the cofrades de sangre and de luz.

“Swords in the sash” was a symbol charged with maleness, Spaniards and conquistadores. At this time, carrying a sword was a privilege restricted to Spanish gentlemen. In 1592, a local man petitioned for and was granted an exception to the rule:

A license was given to Don Juan Jerson [Gerson], noble Indian of Tecamachalco, in order to ride a horse with a saddle, wear Spanish clothing, and carry a sword and dagger, in the places and times that are permitted” (AGN, Indios, Vol. 6, Exp. 99, Foja 24v, 1592).

Whichever Juan Gerson was rewarded with a license to carry a sword, Franciscan friars and municipal officials saw him as a trustworthy asset. Don Juan Gerson may be related to veteran Governor Tomás Gerson, a deputy of Our Lady (Celestino Solís and Reyes García 1992: 77, item 395, 1577; 99, item 552, 1588). The famed amate paintings in the sotocoro (under the choir balcony) of the ex-convento are attributed to a native artist named Juan Gerson (Ibid: 44, item 161, 1561; 45, item 166, 1562). After a 1582 earthquake destroyed Xochicalco’s temple, Juan Gerson attended a meeting to set up signal warnings for future earthquakes (Ibid: 88, item 476). In 1585, guardián Francisco Goyti and Governor Tomás Gerson authorized Juan Gerson to replace the reprehended and suspended sacristan who oversaw the chapel of Our Lady (Ibid: 93, item 504).

Penitents who wore swords in their sashes in the Procession of the Resurrection were clearly Spaniards, unless they were among the few indigenous noblemen who were granted conditional or revocable waivers. In 1557, padre guardián Toral, who went on to
become the fray provincial (1559) and bishop (1561), saw fit to withdraw a license to carry a sword from scribe Juan Baptista, who was granted this privilege by the viceroy (Ibid: 39, item 133). Baptista violated sanctity and safety of the churchyard by pulling out his sword, but he did not enter the church. The blow to Juan Baptista’s ambition was only temporary; in 1565, he was promoted to alcalde teniente, even though he was accused of falsifying documents when acting as a scribe (Ibid.: 49, item 198).

While the scribe wrote, “all the brethren,” he meant the Spanish brethren of blood and light, a fraction of the membership. Indigenous and female members were enjoined in the 3rd ordinance, even though their movements were restricted. But they and lay officials were all overlooked in the 12th ordinance. The omissions suggest that public rituals were mostly about Spanish penitents parading insignias of the Passion throughout the streets of Tecamachalco. Such groups of men “made a physical connection to the suffering of Christ and displayed them to their town, inviting the entire community to experience the Passion” (Von Germeten 2006: 31-32). Flagellant processions were an ancient pious tradition transplanted from Medieval and early modern Spain. Long and deep connections to male Spaniards as the political, economic and moral leaders of communities left little to no opportunity for women and indigenous residents to take part.

The strongest statements against native involvement in marches and elections indicate that Spanish lay leaders believed indios cofrades to be dangerous interlopers, or at least inferior creatures. The cabildo believed that giving Indians free reign in the march would transform the event into a crowd or mob. At the very least, incorporating ‘Indians’ would set a precedent; it would lead them to seek more and greater privileges.

…And let it be known that the Indians shall not to be admitted into the council in order to vote. And consider that in regard to, in this confraternity, there are seated
as members some native Indians, that these enjoy this only due to the grace and indulgences of the said confraternity. To whom we demand, we reserve for being indecent and incompetent people that they cannot be present in the meetings and councils in order to vote on any matter. Nor shall they be given any office concerned with the said confraternity in order to carry insignias, litters, standards [banners], staffs of government, torches of wax nor any other thing in the procession, which is made by the brethren of the said confraternity in this town, preserving that which until now has been practice and custom... (ASV IV: v r, Ord. 17-18, 1605)

‘Indians’ were feminized and infantilized whenever spirituality was concerned.

Despite a serious attempt by some friars, a native priesthood was soon discounted as impossible, unsustainable and undesirable. Spanish priests and settlers did not recognize indigenous peoples as Spaniards’ spiritual, intellectual or moral equals: “the priests (like other Europeans) saw all native people as weak, passive, and submissive by nature,” in much the same way as they saw women (Burkhart 2001: 99). As padrinos, indigenous peoples served as spiritual guides for the next generation. Tecamachalco’s indios could serve as sacristans, paid artisans, singers, alms collectors, and join, as well as found and lead cofradías. A Spanish flagellant cofradía, whose leaders were hyper-aware of ethnic and gender hierarchies, was not the best option for indigenous men and women.

Indians, and concerning if they made insignias, the Indians go in front of the others. And consider that if from now on the native Indians of this town of Tecamachalco made or wanted to make images of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ Our Lord and of the Virgin Mary his mother, and attempt to take them out in the procession of the morning of Easter Sunday, which until now they have not done because this procession and ancient devotion, is of the Spanish members. And it is understood that when the said insignias were made, and they [the Indians] wanted to set out in the said procession, the said Indians have to go in front of our banner. And that, between the flag to our insignias of Jesus Christ resurrected, and the Virgin mother his sacred mother, no other insignia can interject. And less [do] the said Indians have to be made to want to pair up with the devotion and antiquity of this procession, which with our insignias we have always followed, in the manner of carrying them as until now in the most recent [procession]. And ensure that the said procession shall be fulfilled, and preserve that which until now has been done, so that in no form nor way the said Indians pair up with us
with their insignias at our side. Nor are they to occupy a better place than us for being indecent people. (ASV IV: vii r, Ord. 28, 1605)

The phrase “indecent and incompetent people” was crossed out the first time (Ord. 17-18), but “indecent people” passed the final inspection of the 1605 charter (Ord. 28). The sheer length of the ordinance and the entire document may have led the scribe’s statement to be overlooked by the bishop or his representative. Perhaps the inspector agreed with lay leaders’ assessment of Indians, even if they were active Christians.

The concluding statement serves as a reminder that Indians were now strangers or foreigners in what used to be their own towns: “Authorizing those of it [ordinances] by his [bishop’s] order, the rest of the confraternities that there are in the said town of Spaniards” (ASV IV: ix v, 1605). Spanish residents and other non-indios remained a numerical minority for at least another century. To colonial authorities, the reducción (resettlement) and indoctrination of the regional population, and an agricultural economy dominated by Spanish landowners, had transformed the altepetl of Tecamachalco into a pueblo de españoles, with all the institutions and customs that this entailed.

Ritual performances often serve as instruments of political control, shaping the behaviors of both observers and participants (Taylor 1996: 273). In the Holy True Cross and colonial Tecamachalco as a whole, Spanish men were the self-appointed ideal, the default Christian leaders of their households, lay societies and communities. Policies adopted by the 1605 cabildo merely echoed or reinforced the hierarchal status quo. Officials and ideas from the dominant culture (Spaniards) were legitimized by the subordinate masses’ attendance (at the march) and implied cooperation (by actively participating or not interfering).
Any participant within, or witness to, a public display of power is still free to leave the event with a unique interpretation, informed by his or her own experiences. Scott (1990: 45) argued that “relations of domination are, at the same time, relations of resistance,” and that we should look for the subordinates’ *hidden transcripts*, which hide behind or within the official or dominants’ *public transcript*. African and mulata women in early 18th-century Mexico City, Toluca, Aguascalientes, Valladolid, and Zacatecas carried images of a saintly African woman symbolically linked to John the Baptist:

If the purpose of processions was to be seen and to even conquer urban public spaces, processions carrying Saint Efigenia made a strong statement regarding the important and large presence of women of African heritage in towns throughout New Spain. (Von Germeten 2006: 20)

The Afro-Mexican women who accompanied their male brethren did not directly challenge male or Spanish authority. Instead, they expressed their devotion and perhaps a sense of entitlement to ritual celebrations, paraphernalia, spaces, and leadership.

Writing about a group of Mexico City Nahuas who marched on Assumption Day in 1569, Louise M. Burkhart explored the plural motivations behind the celebration of their patron saint. Conflict erupted between the Nahuas and their Franciscan friars on one side, and secular clergy on the other. Local native identity was injected into the march:

Were the Assumption day marchers motivated more by respect for the saints or by respect for themselves? I suggest that the worship of the community saint was so conflated with collective identity that this might not have been a meaningful distinction. For colonial Nahuas, a procession was a statement equally of politics as of piety. (Burkhart 1998: 376)

Burkhart’s observation is well suited to the rhetoric and practices of the Holy True Cross’ Spanish leadership and membership, as well as the reactions of indios cofrades who sought to join or even rival their Spanish brethren in processions. Modern-day congregants and neighbors who engage in processions cooperate but also compete.
Racially-inspired disagreements surrounding ritual roles and paraphernalia, which arose between Spanish and indigenous residents, began before the cofradía was founded:

[In 1572] the Spaniards bought for the first time the canopy of the sacrament. They were envious because the native lords [tlahtoque] also went supporting [the canopy] in their arms. They [the Spaniards] wish that [the business of] carrying the canopy in the procession would only correspond to Spaniards. (Celestino Solís and Reyes García 1992: 66, item 318)

The resolution to the dispute was not recorded. But the matter resurfaced 15 years later in a nearby agricultural community subject to Tecamachalco. In 1587, there was a threat and failed attempt, presumably by Spaniards, to destroy the templo (church) of San Pablo. But a racial incident still ensued. After indigenous townspeople completed their first procession of the Holy Eucharist there, angered Spaniards forcibly relieved the tlahtoque, “the people who were gathered,” of their canopy (Ibid: 98, item 541, 1587).

The scenario of the sacramental canopies (1572, 1587) is reminiscent of the later saga of the altar-piece (1584-1586, 1608). In this case, there is clear evidence of inter-ethnic competition and dialogue. The same pattern of events emerges: first, indigenous Christians do something, and then, Spaniards attempt to better, suppress or dislocate them entirely. The native penitents may not have intended to offend their Spanish neighbors through public acts of Christian piety and charity. But an affront to their position was the only way in which local Spaniards could interpret the Indians’ collective sacrifice.

Dramatic events lend themselves to creative story-telling and bias. The source for this series of inter-ethnic interactions, the Anales de Tecamachalco, is a religious and social history as well as a political tool in the hands of Christianized Indian nobility. In its pages, local caciques alternatively played the roles of victors and victims in their accounts of encounters with Spanish outsiders or newcomers. The 1605 charter furthered
Spanish lay leaders’ xenophobic agenda. It presents spiritual and moral ideals but it is also a highly self-conscious political document. Through the longest and most detailed ordinances, Spanish men who served as lay leaders attempted to insulate themselves from requests and interference from interloping indigenous peoples, secular and ecclesiastic authorities, and all women in general. At this early stage, Afro-Mexicans and other castas were ignored, although mestizos were among the Holy True Cross’ members.

The cofradía’s processions were certainly pious and visually appealing. But they were also divisive instruments, emphasizing and reinforcing differential status within a multi-cultural community. In 18th-century Mexico City, before the Bourbon Reforms, processions may have served more as social-leveling mechanisms:

Public ritual made individuals of different social status brothers of the same social standing, identified by tunics and banners, all in the service of Christ, the Virgin his mother, and the saints. They participated together in the public life of the viceroyalty… Splendor, after all, belonged to those who could pay… Public ritual provided the more dominant groups with the opportunity to demonstrate their authority and status… smaller urban brotherhoods and rural Indian or mestizo groups could just manage the burning of devotional lights. Furthermore, only those individuals who shared the major expenses of worship and association were regarded as genuine members of the community. (García Ayluardo 78, 81)

Perhaps the spirit of brotherly cooperation within and among urban cofradías was due to greater oversight by secular and ecclesiastic authorities, when compared to peripheral rural settlements. Tecamachalco’s Spaniards may have felt free to manipulate their native brethren, even though their efforts were challenged by Indians, Franciscan friars and the secular clergy. Yet, even within better supervised Mexico City, differential access to resources still reiterated the existing economic and racial hierarchies.

Tecamachalco’s native residents sometimes went beyond questioning Spaniards; they resisted or avoided ritual obligations assigned to them by the friars. In 1563, Juan
Varón, guardián of the convento, ordered the Indians to celebrate the festival of Santa María Nativitas (Celestino Solís and Reyes García 1992: 47, item 185). But they refused, either directly or through fleeing. This appears to be the same fiesta that Spanish lay leaders incorporated in 1576, so Indians must have eventually embraced it. Perhaps they were absent due to their work obligations; unsympathetic Spanish landowners may have impeded Indians from attending. Various reports of idolatries also surfaced in 1563, which were dealt with by the juez gobernador (Ibid: 48, item 188). In 1581, one young man purposefully violated sacred art: “On the day of November 2nd, the painted niches of the images of the temple were burned… they were burned by the boy Blas, son of the deceased Zacarías de Chávez. Later he fled” (Ibid: 87, item 471). Scribe(s) rarely provided postscript to such matters, but this appears to be an isolated incident.

Some of the problems and alleged heresy may have stemmed from indigenous people being unaware of what was expected of them or simply being overly fond of their new religious supervisors and structures. In 1580, “peace began [now that the Indians] no longer kissed the priests, now that they no longer sat at the altar” (Ibid: 83, item 442). This entry indicates that, before this time, Franciscans and their native wards, failed to respect the physical and spiritual boundaries that separated them. While not troublesome to most locals, it may have been to visiting ecclesiastic judges and some Spaniards.

Almost two centuries after the 1605 charter, most Spanish ecclesiastic authorities underestimated or dismissed Indians’ spiritual authenticity and capabilities. In 1790, Puebla’s bishop, Salvador Bienpica y Sotomayor, called for the continued instruction of indigenous peoples in the “mysteries of the Faith, and in the matters of cleanliness and civility, of which they are not entirely incapable” (Cordilleras y Edictos, 1790-1793: 4).
The bishopric’s native peoples were seen as astute enough to prevail in business deals and litigation: “the Indians are no longer so easily cheated in their pacts, deals or complaints” (Ibid, 1765-1790: 80r, 1770). But ‘Indians’ were dirty and crude.

Late colonial bishops’ edicts reveal that Spanish religious professionals were even more likely than Spanish lay leaders to classify Indians as problematic or even a separate species. The “miserable Indians” who sought confession wasted priests’ time because they first needed to be examined in Christian Doctrine and refused to learn castellano (Ibid: 74v, 1770). The predicament was partly blamed on lax priests, vicars, justices, and mayors who had not learned native languages or employed interpreters. Native languages were primarily associated with resistance, idolatry and trickery:

The clergy’s ongoing obsession with… idolatry reveals not only its efforts to frighten the native population into relinquishing their old rituals, but its gradual and often subtle adaptation of notions of [racial but also sexual] impurity [from the Spanish Inquisition] to the colonial context. (Martínez 2006: 212)

Indians were suspected of hiding malicious secrets from Spaniards, rather than excused for their ignorance or cultural customs (Cordilleras: 78r, 1770). Bishop Favian y Fuero, after examining reports of parishioner counts, bemoaned the “lack of instruction among the Indians… many fail to comply with the Church” (Ibid: 90r, 1772).

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Indians were still framed as lost, confused, unclean, unfortunate, wretched creatures, full of inaction, indolence, sin, and even malice (O-Hara 2010: 185). These descriptors were all employed in bishops’ edicts from Puebla. Bishop Victoriano Lopez Gonzalo likely saw great human suffering after leaving the comfortable Spanish city of Puebla de los Angeles for a tour of his rural parishes. He lamented that the inept Indians lacked reason or the wherewithal to contribute to “political life,” speech or “human civility,” the very qualifications “that signal a Soul.” Indians’ lack of personal
hygiene and disorganized houses facilitated the spread of epidemics in their communities (Cordilleras, 1765-1790: 99r-v, 1772). Indigenous parents abandoned their children to play in the sun and dirt, amongst all the little animals. Their country huts were “indecent, dirty, and full of all types of creatures, as if they were irrational, and, not on a few occasions, [they showed] less care than these very beasts” (Ibid: 99v. 1772). At best, the ‘Indians’ were perpetual children; at worst, they were ignorant and dangerous beasts.

Native Responses: Acceptance, Petition, Compromise, and Defection

In due course, there was a decisive response to the ethnic restrictions. At least 3 social segments (disenfranchised native members, local Franciscan friars and centralized ecclesiastic authorities) decided that they could no longer tolerate the systematic discrimination carried out in the name of the Holy Cross and the Virgin Mary. I draw on scholarship on symbols, rituals and power in order to contextualize the aftermath of Spanish lay leaders’ attempts to limit the visibility and activism of their native brethren and all non-members in processions. It appears that some Franciscan friars, members of the secular clergy and indigenous townspeople saw processions quite differently than the cofradía’s officials: they were community-wide and they belonged to everyone.

Amidst other business that pertained mostly to masses, the saga of the processional insignias was spread across nearly 30 pages in the 3rd book of Cordilleras y Edictos. Ecclesiastic edicts were sent from the bishop of Puebla to parishes in and near the bishopric’s mountain ranges. Most of the aftermath to the xenophobic policies was presented outside of official confraternal records. To do otherwise would be tantamount
to lay leaders airing their dirty laundry. But Spanish lay leaders would not have the only or final say on the issue of indigenous brethren bearing insignias within processions.

As early as 1607, a group of indios cofrades pleaded with the local Franciscans and their superiors for permission to participate in the Procession of the Resurrection. Native petitioners considered the ancient procession to be one of españoles and naturales. If the request was not granted, another solution had been proposed; they would unite to form a new cofradía. Disenfranchised native members, and their sympathetic ecclesiastic supervisors, remained vocal and persistent throughout the process. Faced with lay leaders’ intolerance and firm resolve, native brethren from still had numbers on their side. With so many indios cofrades backed by local and centralized ecclesiastic authorities, Spanish lay leaders could lose their key advantage.

The primary goal of the indigenous members’ petition and the subsequent hearing was securing the right to wear insignias in festivals and processions, just like the Spaniards. The padre guardián and convento president of the convento, friar Diego de Pabes, and the provisor and vicario general, Agustin Juarez de Peredo, presided over the matter, hearing and considering testimony from the interested parties. In front of the local priests and other witness, the Spanish brethren, represented by the chief and deputy stewards, defended their position. The leaders of the “confraternity of the Holy True Cross of the Spaniards, which was founded in the convent of the town of Tecamachalco” responded that they did not want the naturales to carry the confraternity’s insignias and images. The basis for their position is unknown. Had Indians acted inappropriately in ritual activities before, just as Indians had with Santiago and his horse (Taylor 1996: 274)? Or was it the request to join the Spaniards that was simply out of the question?
With their request rejected by Spanish lay leaders, “the Indians stated that they want to found a new confraternity” (Cordilleras: 11r). It is not clear if the petitioners truly meant to follow through with their request or threat. But in the face of adversity, they were evidently standing their ground, pushing for a positive, or at least a conclusive, outcome. Instead, a compromise was enforced by ecclesiastic authorities: “I order to all of the brethren members of blood and light… that I give a license to the natives so that they may set out in the processions of Holy Thursday and Friday” (Ibid: 15v-16r).

What did the order actually accomplish? As early as 1604, indios cofrades wore black robes and carried their own insignias in the Holy Friday procession (ASV II: 53v). Moreover, they already marched in the Holy Thursday procession, although they were directed to march in front, staying clear of the Spaniards and their insignias (ASV IV: iii r, Ord. 3, 1605). Would native members join the Spanish brethren of blood and light, or would a newly founded cofradía now form part of the march? The agreement was not entered into voluntarily, so any animosity between Spanish and native members may have persisted or even intensified. This would not be the end of the matter.

In 1630, friars proposed to remedy the exclusion of indigenous members from processional privileges. Complainants may have focused on serving as blood penitents, bearing insignias and/or the order in which penitents would march. But the entry, found among that year’s possessions, leaves much to the imagination: “Indians with the Spaniards – sentence as to the dispute that they had with regard to the processions of the confraternity” (ASV II: 79r, 1630). The scribe appears to state that the final outcome was that indigenous penitents would be permitted to join their Spanish brethren. This ecclesiastic decision was noted in the cofradía’s book, likely in response to an edict.
A year later, lay officials issued a “command that the brethren attend the procession” or pay 2 pesos as penance (ASV II: 81v, 1631). The only other portions of the books to require attendance at religious festivities were charters, which revealed candle wax as proper penance. Perhaps Spanish blood brethren refused to participate when indios cofrades were permitted to march and the policy was reinstituted to convince them otherwise. The act occurred under leaders Salvador García and Melchor de Melo.

In 1646, the vicar, Antonio Benitez Coronel, the most prolific of any priest to write in the books, added a new chapter to the dispute. This secular clergyman extended the right to all brethren, including native cofrades, to wear tunics and bear insignias in the Procession of the Resurrection, which began and ended at the Parish Church (Cordilleras: 28r). If there were any dissenters, there would be due diligence, which likely meant fines, expulsion from the confraternity, or even excommunication. It appeared that the secular clergy was able to bring a measure of peace where the Franciscan friars had not been able to for the previous four decades or more. This was the last word on the prolonged dispute.

When priests authorized the indigenous petitioners to march with the Spaniards, as well as granted them a license to form their own confraternity, they were not acting in ignorance or violation of ecclesiastic protocol or colonial racial hierarchies:

While disagreements about who should have access to confraternal wealth most often touched off conflicts that were expressed in racially explicit terms, ecclesiastic authorities did not always uphold conservative and racially exclusive constitutions or favor Spaniards in their decisions. Religious authorities defended petitioners of the group that had been traditionally associated with a particular confraternity, regardless of race. People who were ostensibly lower in the racial hierarchy did not always lose cases to Spaniards. (Germeten 2006: 197)

The Holy True Cross’ indios cofrades were not its founders. But they were the town’s largest and oldest demographic, which may partly explain their ability to convince
local ecclesiastic authorities. The main reason for the indios cofrades’ success was that they followed appropriate channels of protest. They petitioned and waited, rather than rebelling by forcing their way into the procession with their own insignias. Like so many other indigenous communities transformed by colonial rule (Kellogg 1995; Lockhart 1992), the indios cofrades learned to use the Spanish legal system against Spaniards.

The ecclesiastic authorities who decided on the indios cofrades’ fates did not really revolutionize the local ritual landscape. Indians had participated in processions for some time. Popoloca founders of other cofradías were already visible and active in various solemn celebrations in Tecamachalco and its subject towns (Celestino Solís and Reyes García 1992: 58, item 256, 1569; 75, item 389, 1576; 82, item 435, 1579; 93, 505, 1585; 101, item 570, 1589). Local marches revolved around a hospital, which indigenous men and women bankrolled and served. Indigenous penitents also marched when praying for relief from epidemics (cocolitzli), dedicating new chapels, welcoming the viceroy or bishop, and satisfying ecclesiastic edicts (because they were ordered to do so).

There was even a flagellant procession composed of indigenous penitents in 1557: And on Saturday in the afternoon, it started out and came back through the streets, in which they marched in procession with the whip… they made a procession, beating themselves with whips… (Ibid: 36, item 118; footnote #3)

The practice was not mentioned again until 1581: “Here in this year, on Sunday in the morning, a procession was made in the streets… a procession of whips,” followed by a mass that was attended by local nobles (Ibid: 86, Item 469). The 16th-century flagellant penitents are Popolocas, not Spaniards. The Anales’ scribes clearly identified Spaniards whenever writing about them. While the penitents’ ethnic status is easy enough to infer, their confraternal membership remains unknown.
Did Spanish lay leaders forget, devalue and/or obscure that the local tradition of religious festivals reflected ethnic coexistence? Perhaps they simply could not tolerate Indians rivaling them in their processions and never questioned their own positions on these matters. According to Scott (1990: 49), “the members of dominant groups, one supposes, learn the knack of acting with authority and self-assurance in the course of socialization,” just as other groups learn to obey and/or operate beneath the radar of the powerful. Scott (1990:58) would see the “authorized gathering” of the Spaniards’ flagellant procession as a “parade that celebrated and dramatized their rule.”

Ruling groups seek occasions “to make a spectacle of themselves in a manner largely of their own choosing” (Scott 1990: 58). It is almost as though the procession’s penitents, the actors, constituted its primary audience. Confraternal officials squelched any challenges to their authority and higher social standing. In modern-day Spain, penitents from rival parishes still occasionally come to blows, even with saints’ images in tow, when they feel that their group’s time and space are being violated.

Within decades of the final decision, in favor of the indios cofrades, scribes discontinued the practice of memorializing members’ ethnicities. The missing 1643-1669 membership lists obscure the transitional years, but ethnicity was still traced for many confraternal laborers and members in the 1630s. Furthermore, the exclusive processional orders of blood and light, symbolically but inconsistently linked to españoles and indios, disappeared in 1675. They were replaced by various insignia paths, which provided more opportunities for members of varied ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. Through the exchange of monies, goods and services, men and women presented their piety, charity and generosity, rather than their ethnicity or sex, as their spiritual capital.
At the Easter Sunday mass, a new chapter was added to the saga of the insignias:

Most of the brethren of the confraternity of the Holy Cross gathered to determine the distribution of the insignias of the procession that takes place in the afternoon, and they asked me to authorize and administer a council… in the said meeting forty brethren, on my count, were determined to join the confraternity for the insignia of the bell (ASV V: 20r, 1680).

The author appears to be the chief steward, rather than a priest or scribe. He pledged additional ritual paraphernalia, so that even more members could be accommodated in the procession. The decision was sanctioned by the signatures of the 27 members of the voting council. The mass pledging attests that, in 1680, prospective members and processional penitents encountered a more welcoming atmosphere than that received by indios cofrades for the first few generations of the cofradía’s lifetime.

In the early 20th century, the hearts and minds of Tecamachalco’s residents continued to be targeted through public celebrations with heavy religious or moral overtones. In her study, “The Construction of the Patriotic Festival in Tecamachalco Puebla, 1900-1946”, Mary Kay Vaughan (1994: 213) applied the concept of hegemonic social control (Gramsci 1971) and Judith Friedlander’s (1975: 114) emphasis on the interplay of internal and external hierarchies within village fiestas. This time, the State, rather than the Church and Spanish lay leaders, attempted to win support for the local education program ( Vaughan 1994: 214). Ayuntamientos (municipal councils), schoolteachers and agrarian authorities exercised their local power, emphasized the legitimacy of the state and national regimes, and reinforced a patriarchal and classist social system. According to Vaughan, they did all this by sanctioning holidays (Mother’s Day), public spectacles and popular symbols of male aggression (team sports in school).
Under Porfirio Díaz, and the various Mexican presidents who followed, patriotic festivals imitated and resembled colonial religious fiestas through their “use of processions, music, fireworks, and appropriation of space for didactic purposes. The patriotic heroes had the aura of saints” (Vaughan 1994: 219). Much like Hueyapan’s “Indians” in the 1970s (Friedlander 1975: 128), many of Tecamachalco’s residents were assigned the “forced identity” of “manufactured Indian-ness,” leaving them with little option but to watch, listen to, and obey their municipal leaders.

Some of Tecamachalco’s 17th-century indigenous inhabitants were not as easily compartmentalized as their 20th-century descendants. Indios cofrades could not be convinced to simply watch, listen and obey, regardless of the 1605 charter or the enormity and uncertainty of the ensuing legal battle with the powerful Spaniards. The ‘Indians’ were willing to join their Spanish brethren in processions, demonstrating their acceptance of Christian saints, rites, penitence, and giving. But they could not be tricked into symbolizing the acceptance of their marginality and inferiority by marching ahead of the Spaniards or without the Spaniards’ most prestigious insignias and white robes.

Indios cofrades appears to have accepted the authority and hierarchy of the Catholic Church, but not those of their Spanish lay leaders. If they could not match Spaniards within the Procession of the Resurrection, one of the most public confraternal activities, then they would defect. This strategy would empower indigenous men to form their own brotherhoods, elect their own lay leaders, acquire their own robes and insignias, finance their own ritual celebrations, and secure themselves a place in processions.

Within and among the many heterogeneous and hierarchal communities of New Spain, the restriction of devotional practices to “delimited social and spatial domains,”
and the “spontaneous organization of local confraternities” are forms of autonomous political action (Tavárez 2006: 135). I view the status concerns and racial intolerance of Spanish lay leaders, combined with the ambition and perseverance of disenfranchised native members, as pivotal steps leading to the formation of new, alternative cofradías.

As Marshall Sahlins (1995: 251) so eloquently remarked, “the logic of any given response to a historical situation is never the only one possible and rarely the only one available.” Other local cofradías, including new ones, continued to incorporate Spaniards and other ethnic groups. But confraternal charters no longer furthered racially-motivated agendas to the same extent or with such transparency. How did barrio, casta and female groups capitalize on the trails blazed and lessons learned by Spanish and native brethren?

The institutionalization of separating and ranking individuals based on their perceived ethnicity was used to associate certain social segments with more or less spiritual maturity. The leaders of a few other local cofradías followed suit, even designating “separate but equal” orders of españoles and indios. Ethnic and gender stratification were never stressed more in local confraternal records than in the 1605 charter. The most divisive discourse was crossed out, perhaps seen as too inflammatory by a scribe, supervising priest and/or council member, whether a contemporary or someone living in a later, more tolerant, culturally sensitive or politically savvy era. The interplay of ethnic and gender conflict, reconciliation and coexistence was just beginning.
Footnotes

#1: *Calidad* translates to quality or condition, a state of being simultaneously denoting ethnicity and class. This sort of rhetoric was adopted throughout Latin America by the 18th century, through the *sistema de castas*, a racially-determined social hierarchy.

#2: When brethren celebrated the Eucharist on Holy Thursday, they drank wine in memory of blood that was shed by Jesus for their sins (ASV II: 43r, 70 pesos, 1614). Only men imbibed; the Maundy was off-limits to women (ASV IV: vii v, Ord. 31, 1605).

#3: The entry continued, describing the *macehulatin* (indigenous commoners) who erected their houses in Tecamachalco due to Christian doctrine being established there (Celestino Solís and Reyes García 1992: 36, entry 118, 1557).

Primary Sources

Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, D.F.

Documental Group: *Indios*, 16th-century petitions pertaining to Tecamachalco, Puebla

Parish Archive of Tecamachalco, Puebla

Documental Group: *Disciplinar*

*Asociaciones*; Arch-Confraternity of the Holy True Cross, I-VIII

1575 and 1605 constitutions, financial reports and membership lists (1575-1809)

*Cordilleras y Edictos* (Mountain Ranges and Edicts), I-III

Late 18th-century edicts sent to frontier parish priests throughout the bishopric of Puebla
Top Left: *Acerín* (colored sand) adorned the 2001 Holy Friday processional route near the parish church.

Top Right: The head priest read scripture at one of the first Stations of the Cross.

Bottom: Three images carried in procession.
In the Holy Friday procession, the townspeople, visitors, clergymen, actors, and images approached the Ex-Convento.
The 2001 Holy Friday procession, which began at the parish church, ended at the Ex-Convento. Note the tree branches that were attached to the church façade in order to represent the Crucifixion of Christ on the Cross.
VIII - Ethnic Coexistence and Factionalism in the
Communal Quest for Salvation, Legitimacy and Autonomy

Prioritizing and Sidestepping Ethnicity: Negotiating the Spanish and Indian Republics

Parish-wide sodalities were distinguished by their lay leaders: Capitanes (Arch-Confraternity of the Holy Eucharist), Sargentos (Confraternity of the Blessed Souls of Purgatory), and other criollos (Confraternity of Our Lady of Mercy/Brotherhood of Our Lady of Charity), and dual cabildos of españoles and naturales (Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulcher of Calvary). This chapter entails a comparative analysis of ethnic management in 4 parish-wide, Spanish-dominated sodalities that emerged (Holy Sepulcher of Calvary) or reemerged (Holy Eucharist, Blessed Souls of Purgatory, and Our Lady of Mercy) in the 18th century. These major and minor devotional groups either obscured ethnicity (Holy Eucharist, Blessed Souls, and Our Lady of Mercy) or highlighted ethnicity (Holy Sepulcher of Calvary), which echoed but also reinvented longstanding policies and practices. Two groups were among Tecamachalco’s oldest, most popular and universal (Holy Eucharist, Blessed Souls). The absence of founding and early records requires creative reconstruction of interactions across barrios and other social segments.

Confraternal longevity, activism and wealth attest to the ingenuity, malleability and resiliency of cofradías, lay leaders and ecclesiastic supervisors. Any contradictions, weaknesses or failures were financial or with respect to sharing fellowship, renown and power among ethnic groups, classes, genders, and barrios. Before and after a long period of privation of ecclesiastic property and personnel, intensive supervision of lay religiosity and extensive confraternal decline throughout New Spain (1750-1780), Tecamachalco’s
parishioners continued to collectively craft creative solutions to the problems of a “good death,” honoring the saints, social responsibility, civic pride, and ethnic diversity. Late colonial lay leaders faced a highly saturated confraternal scene, limited resources and a hyper-vigilant ecclesiastic hierarchy. If surviving groups planned to weather widespread confraternal closures and consolidations, then at least the appearance of frugality as well as ethnically-inclusive fellowship and partnerships may have been required.

*The Arch-Confraternity of the Holy Eucharist:*

*Inclusive Membership, Exclusive Leadership*

In acknowledgment of its antiquity and universality I begin with the Holy Eucharist. Usually a settlement’s first cofradía (Taylor 1996: 302), it was a cohort of the Holy True Cross (1575) and likely the parish’s first sodality unless predated by the Popolocas’ San Francisco (1563). It began as one of three cofradías de españoles but all residents were eligible enlistees. Holy Eucharist sodalities welcomed all adults in a parish or town, at least ideally. In nearby Huiciltepec, located in the district of Tecali, Puebla, a 1793 description of surviving sodalities reflected the membership breadth of these groups: “there is one general [cofradía] dedicated to the Santíssimo, in which all the barrios participate” (Ibid: 303). Tecamachalco’s Holy Eucharist cofradía would have also integrated all barrios as well as the surrounding farms and hamlets.

Much of a parish’s ritual calendar would have been incomplete without the funds and volunteers of Holy Eucharist sodalities. Lay leaders and members sponsored the weekly Thursday mass that was dedicated to the Host. They were also entrusted with supplying the requisite candle wax and wine for these *Misas de Renovación* (Ibid: 303).
All or most of Corpus Christi (in June), Holy Week and the parish’s patron-saint day were undertaken by the brethren.

Three books reveal elections (1742-1787, 1818), finances (1742-1806, 1818-1820) and the rededicated sodality’s new foundation in the parish church. The elevation of the cofradía to archicofradía status in 1742 was a delayed reaction to a 1711 edict dispatched throughout New Spain and Peru. Tecamachalco’s copy was sent from Pedro de Nogales Dávila of the Order of Alcántara to all “churches in their territories, the main churches, and the head towns of the places, and parishes of our diocese.” The clergy sought lay assistance in the following excerpt:

The sacred horror… repeated profane sacrileges that the enemies have implanted in the temples, breaking the images of the Saints of the Most Holy Mary and Our Lord Christ… See to it, in the manner that is possible, that in the religious devotions, you make amends to the same Christ Our Sacramental Lord. That in all of the cities, towns, and places of my kingdoms and dominions, each year, on the very Sunday of the day of the Conception of the Most Blessed Mary, there shall be a festival to make amends to the Holy Eucharist, in order to manifest the repentances, and the sorrow over the offenses, and insults, which were committed due to the barbarity of the said enemies. And this festival shall be held in the main church of every place, in which the Holy Eucharist is made evident, with a solemn mass of this most sovereign mystery… with a sermon to this effect.

(Archicofradía del Santísimo Sacramento, Book I: 1r, 1711 bishop’s edict, copy)

The edict reflects proper protocol in late colonial confraternal devotions: bringing everyone together and back in good standing with the Church. Distinctions among parishioners and cofradías went unstated; cofradías were not the topic per se.

Lamentations over real or imagined assaults to Church property and rituals were followed by an urgent call to action. If lay leaders followed the letter of the edict, then the Holy Eucharist would involve the widest circle of parishioners in solemn worship at least once a year in the most centralized location. Just as they had, or should have, always done,
Holy Eucharist leaders and members were entrusted with the parishes’ principal celebrations, responsibilities that they had held for over two centuries.

The Holy Eucharist was naturally and purposefully the most inclusive parish sodality, but its leadership became decidedly exclusive and monopolistic (91% reelection rate). Between 1742 and 1806, a span of 65 years, only 6 leaders, 3 who were Capitánes, emerged: Capitán Francisco Xavier de la Huerta (1742-1746: 5 years), Capitán Juan Ponce de Villegas (1747-1764: 18 years), Christobal Julian y Navarro (appointed in 1761 when Ponce de Villegas was absent), Capitán Diego Mantecon Villegas (1765-1767, 1769-1780, 1783-1785: 18 years), Francisco Joseph de Larrasquito (1768-1772: 5 years), and Pedro Fernando de la Vega (1787-1806: 20 years). Perhaps only a small network of elite criollo military officers was wealthy or influential enough to bankroll devotions and secure the community’s trust. By contrast, the name of the last recorded mayordomo, Manuel Niño, suggests that he was indigenous. Members’ collective or relative social statuses are obscured by an absence of ordinances and membership lists.

Two men underwrote each other’s confraternal domination. After winning but missing the 1765 election, the untitled Larrasquito was replaced by Capitán Mantecon. Larrasquito won again in 1768 when customary supervisor Bachiller Manuel Joseph Rodríguez de Abourra, who oversaw all barrio groups, was absent. Larrasquito and Mantecon shared the mayordomía until 1772, when Br. Manuel identified Mantecon as Larrasquito’s substitute. Thereafter Mantecon served alone until at least 1785. Larrasquito was likely too sick, old and/or poor to preside alone and the pair’s combined resources and skills were deemed beneficial by the voters. Br. Manuel de Olmedo noted that Mantecon was “informally elected” in 1780, whether due to unanimous support or a
lack of other candidates. The other entries were described only as elections or re-elections, held on the grounds of the parish church and supervised by a parish priest.

Gains and losses were products of long-term efforts by officers, members and priests. Rededication to the Holy Eucharist began modestly in 1742 with only seven masses and Br. Juan Joseph Ochoa Barrera donating “the parish church’s old and needless possessions to the Arch-confraternity” (ASS I: 2v, 1742). There were more donations than purchases in the limited 1748 inventory. Most start-up funds were probably invested in parish-wide masses, not ritual items. After 1744 annual accounts reveal twelve monthly masses (2 pesos each) being held in honor of the “renewal of the Most Holy Eucharist” (ASS I: 15r, 1748). Monthly sermons and communion were sponsored but probably not many processions and feasts. The two main festivals were the “infraoctava [June 16th, 6 pesos] and the eighth day of the Most Divine Lord [5 pesos],” also referred to as the “Octava de Corpus [Christi]” (ASS I: 3v, 1742). The parish’s patron-saint day sermon and procession cost 18 pesos, for an annual expense of 60 pesos.

A rise in masses to an annual average of 41 between 1749 and 1752 may represent funerals rather than any attempt to fund the entire ritual calendar. But the anomaly immediately preceded the 1753 inspection by Bishop Cisamo of Puebla. Additional masses might showcase activism but also overextension and overspending by veteran lay leader Capitán Huerta and his fellow members. For more than a half-century (1753-1806) there were usually only 14 masses per year (12 monthly and 2 festivals). In some years a mass of remembrance was held on an estate for Licenciado Domingo del Moral, likely a deceased parish priest (ASS I: 40r, 1759).
Account irregularities are attributable to criollo mayordomos and/or priests.

Reversal of the order of cargo (annual average: 285 pesos) and descargo (399) and perhaps their contents until 1771 prevents a systematic analysis. In his 1776 inspection of the “parish of Holy Mary of Tecamachalco” the Bishop of Puebla warned this group and others against “wasting on extras” (ASS I: 76r). A 1796 edict was more specific: “a bishop’s prelate from this bishopric prohibits all use of gunpowder, in firecrackers, wheels, litters, and other fireworks” (ASS II: 32v). This ban was universal, unlikely to have been initiated by any one group’s excesses.

After the escape from closure and these warnings, there were balanced books and even significant profit. Annual revenue skyrocketed four-fold, perhaps as the wealth of other cofradíás was appropriated. Joseph Ignacio Montero, the leader of the Cofradía del Rosario de los Ricos and la Señora del Rosario, reclaimed a silver lamp from the Holy True Cross in 1805. Despite a return to overspending by 200% (1801-1806) and missing records (1807-1817) the sodality endured until 1820. The financial turnaround is inexplicable without alms or property records. There was only one known property; a man failed to pay 6 pesos for an annual house rental (ASS I: 17v, 1746).

Throughout New Spain the Holy Eucharist was often the last cofradía standing. Small, poor and overly-localized groups were dissolved and absorbed into its ranks: “when several cofradíás of Tlajomulco (Jalisco) were in decline in the 1770’s, the bishop decided to combine them into one for the Señor Sacramentado” (Taylor 1996: 303). This process appears to have taken place in Tecamachalco; the Holy Eucharist may have absorbed disenfranchised lay leaders and members. In 1776 the Bishop of Puebla ordered the barrio brotherhoods and sisterhoods to close, followed by the insolvent Holy Name of
Jesus, the first parish-wide and Popoloca group to disband (1779). Seven sodalities with parish-wide or “general membership” survived the turn of the 19th century. The pivotal rituals and widening membership of the castas’ Our Lady of the Rosary (1668-1823) and the Most Blessed Eucharist (circa 1560-1820) may be what led the two groups to endure even longer than the Spaniards’ Holy True Cross (1575-1809) and the Blessed Souls of Purgatory (?-1808), Our Lady of Mercy (?-1803), the Popoloca-dominated Nativity of Our Lady (1581-1803), and the ethnically-segmented Holy Sepulcher of Calvary (1718-).

*The Confraternity of the Blessed Souls of Purgatory: More Criollo Officers*

Like the Holy True Cross and the Holy Eucharist, the least documented cofradía was initiated by Spaniards but supposed to incorporate everyone. Taylor (1996: 303) asserted that: “communities with several cofradíás often had one dedicated to the Souls in Purgatory…which enrolled all or most members of the community and sponsored weekly masses and special feast days – [particularly] All Souls’ Day (November 2nd).” Fray Agustín de Vetancurt identified the Blessed Souls of Purgatory as a cofradía de españoles in existence by the end of the 17th century. Members who sought “good deaths” for themselves, their ancestors and/or their descendants would have been attracted by the Blessed Souls’ religious imagery and weekly fellowship.

Confraternal development and human dynamics are obscured. “Pages of a book” sent to Tepeaca for inspection never returned, despite a 1781 bishop’s edict banning the removal of confraternal records from the parish. The book cover reads 1627 but that date likely corresponds to the 1627 inspection of the Nativity of Our Lady’s 1581 ordinances, found in the same book.
Ten pages of disorganized documents relate to a land mortgage in 1791. Sargento Don Manuel Alcantero Espinosa, a criollo military officer, was the cofradía’s mayordomo when he petitioned teniente Don Pedro Manuel Cavallero, an army captain and Tepeaca’s alcalde mayor, regarding a plot of land worth 100 pesos: “Regarding a mortgage [of land located]… with Don Manuel García to the west, Don José Orea on the southern road, Francisco Luna in the center, and Ignacio Ramírez to the North.” With the local Audiencia Real or Público (royal or public court) no longer in existence, criollo military men like Cavallero decided proceedings for the “Hacienda y Guerra de Orden de Virrey” (Commerce and War by the Order of the Viceroy). The doctrina’s ecclesiastic judge and vicar, Don Manuel de Olmedo, was present to witness or support the petition signed by Capitán Cavallero, Manuel Velasquez and José Ruiz. It is not clear if the lands in question were bought, sold, rented, lost, or appropriated by confraternal agents.

What the petition does show is that criollo military men monopolized late colonial public and lay religious offices, particularly in major cofradías entrusted with parish-wide and weekly events. Like cofradías de naturales, cofradías de españoles also had access to corporate land. The cofradía’s closure in 1808 or later is equally enigmatic. Its escape from the Bishop of Puebla’s 1776 closure edict is further evidence that this “cofradía de la parroquía” was indeed a parish-wide sodality that welcomed a wide range of members, as long as they could pay and serve others. But the lack of arch-confraternal status suggests that the Blessed Souls was younger, smaller and less far-reaching than the Holy Eucharist and the Holy True Cross. Nevertheless all evidence points to the Blessed Souls and the two archicofradías relying on influential Spanish men’s guidance, connections and financial aid in order to survive into the 19th century.
The Confraternity of Our Lady of Mercy: When Class Trumped Ethnicity

In his 1726 visita, Illustrious Lord Dr. Don Juan Antonio de Lardizabal y Elorra, the Bishop of Puebla, “newly founded” the “former Brotherhood of Our Lady of Charity” as the Confraternity of Our Lady of Mercy. Members pledged their devotion to the “Important and Famed Image of [Our Lady of] Charity.” Until 1729 the statue’s head was “in a bad state” and stored in a woman’s house for repairs. The image was then restored to the Calvary or parish church. A petition to continue and expand devotion to the Virgin Mary was signed by nine men, including parish priest Br. Joseph Blanco de Vega. This minor devotional group, based in the parish church and the church of Calvary, incorporated the entire parish rather than a specific barrio. This may explain the petitioners’ success in the “act of elevation from brotherhood to confraternity.” The promoted group endured until 1803 thanks in part to priestly support, measured spending as well as corporate holdings of land, magueys and fifty sheep.

Six ratified ordinances say something about class but not ethnicity or gender. Dues (2 reales) and annual fees (1 real) helped with expenses (Ord. 1-2, 1726). There was a bi-monthly sung mass with 2 reales paid to singers (Ord. 6). Such small amounts suggest collective poverty and/or the cofrades’ divided loyalties to various cofradías, each with their own associated fees. There was no mention of sponsoring titular or parish-wide festivals or processions. At this time no set fee differences for poor or rich, español or natural, and married or single were revealed.

Confraternal policies for a “good death” reproduced colonial hierarchies or at least lay leaders’ perceptions about members’ financial and service obligations to the cofradía and/or community: “When a brother dies, the members shall carry the banner,
bell, and twelve wax candles, with a mass of oration for six reales. If the brother is poor, then there shall be six candles, the shroud, banner, and bell. When a lawyer [or someone important] dies, all of the brethren shall carry his corpse to the cemetery with a shroud, six candles, banner, and bell” (Cofradía de Nuestra Señora de la Misericordia, Ord. 3-4 of the 1726 Constitution, 5r). Everyone was entitled to a mass and the same ritual paraphernalia. But the members’ procession to the cemetery was noted only in the example of the *abogado*. The discrepancy over the number or candles may represent an error or two sets of candles reserved for poor and affluent members.

Electoral records reveal little about ethnicity and confraternal business. A mayordomo and two diputados were to be elected each year and their names recorded in the book “in the presence of the priest” (Ord. 5). But only the chief stewards were memorialized. Reelection occurred in 47% of the cases, which was less than in most Spanish-dominated groups. Joseph Quintero enjoyed the longest reign, serving thirteen terms between 1770 and 1800.

Once again the 1750s surfaced as the only period in which ethnicity was recorded. Parish priest Br. Nicolas Joseph Tembra de Roman identified four men as españoles vecinos. Three of the men served before and/or again but ethnicity was noted only between 1752 and 1758. Br. Nicolas referred to Juan Losano (1756, 1749-1751) as an “español natural y vecino” in order to emphasize his localness. This was one of only a handful of cases when español and natural were ever paired. Two men named Luna (1729, 1769) and two named de la Cruz (1746, 1784) may represent indigenous elites, although the cacique label was not used. Only 15% of mayordomos were known españoles but most carried one or two names linked to local Spaniards through
contemporaneous baptismal records. Unlike the criollo military men of the Holy
Eucharist and the Blessed Souls of Purgatory, none of Our Lady of Mercy’s mayordomos
carried titles of nobility or occupation, suggesting that elites were not present. However
parish priests who doubled as notaries varied in the type and detail of information that
they provided. The absence of membership lists prevents me from stating anything more
about class, gender or ethnicity.

Mayordomos oversaw a “plot of large and small magueys” bequeathed by “an
Indian named Antonio de la Cruz of the barrio of San Sebastián.” In 1739 the deceased’s
brothers testified to the transfer of land and plants to the “Confraternity of Our Lady of
Charity located in the Calvary of this Town.” Note that notary-priests alternated between
referring to two sodalities (Brotherhood and Confraternity), names (Charity and Mercy)
and churches (Calvary and parish), as if the change that lay leaders sought in 1726 was
incomplete. The land transfer was witnessed by parish priest Br. Juan Joseph de Ochoa
and authorized by Br. Francisco García Cansino, a lieutenant and “Commissioner of the
Sub-Delegation of the Apostolic and Royal Court” (CNSM I: 16r-17r, 1739). The
property’s location within a native-dominated barrio suggests that the landowner and
other Popolocas were considered to be integral cofrades in Our Lady of Mercy.

By 1755, 50 sheep, to be rented or sold for revenue, had been acquired. In
response to the reported mismanagement of sheep by a Spaniard from San Andrés
Chalchicomula, the Bishop of Puebla, Victoriano Lopez Gonzalo of the Ancient College
of San Pablo, noted in his 1776 parish inspection that “the fifty sheep belong to the
Brotherhood of Our Lady of Charity.” Veteran lay leader Joseph Quintero defeated the
wayward shepherd in the “Royal Justice of the Town of San Augustín del Palmar” and
the Audiencia of Tepeaca: “Diligences in favor of the Confraternity of Our Lady of the Charity against Diego Gomez Gragada for the collection of their interests.” The decision was signed by the Bishop of Puebla and parish priest Br. Manuel de Olmedo (CNSM II: 52r, 1776). The español who “did not finish his work in providing the sheep” was then placed in prison, likely until he repaid his debt to the cofradía. Bishop Lopez Gonzalo also admonished lay leaders to provide a “meal to the prisoners” on Easter Sunday and to “avoid superfluous spending.” By spending an annual maximum of 142 pesos and leaving no accounts of processions and festivals, lay leaders left no proof that they deserved this blanket statement.

Our Lady of Charity or Mercy is another confraternal success story, relatively speaking. Inventories (1739, 1745 and 1758) and bishop’s inspections (1735, 1745, 1753 and 1776) attest to steady growth after 1750, balanced books after 1770, and even prosperity in the 1780s. Modest earnings (annual average of 53 pesos) and expenditures (74 pesos/year) were more in keeping with Popoloca, female or barrio groups than larger Spanish-led sodalities. Until 1803 relative success was enjoyed due to property acquisitions, avoiding excesses and incorporating españoles and naturales from the entire parish, despite the lay leaders’ Calvario base. Some late colonial clergymen described individuals primarily in terms of ethnicity. But in the constitution, lay leaders framed individual poverty or wealth as more meaningful criteria than ethnicity.

*The Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulcher of Calvary: Elusive Ethnic Coexistence*

Little had changed after a century of confraternal foundations. Lay leaders and clergymen still attempted to introduce novel solutions to the parish’s evolving ethnic
diversity. Groups and individuals who sought salvation but also legitimacy and autonomy elaborated and interfered with local experiments. My analysis of the Holy Sepulcher centers on fourteen ordinances (1718) and four amendments (1719). The Holy True Cross’ Spaniards took three decades to overrule their charter (1575-1605). But one year was enough time for the Holy Sepulcher’s españoles and naturales to acknowledge that their policies could not stand. The pretense of ethnic parallelism was no match for the realities of ecclesiastic law and the ethnic factionalism of members.

In the “chapel of Calvary” a multiethnic gathering of forty-two hermanos and twenty-six hermanas was presented to the Bishop of Puebla in 1718. A petition for a license to elect officials was signed by seven men, including parish priest Br. Francisco García (Cansino). Joseph Blanco de la Vega, the parish’s head priest and doctrina’s ecclesiastic judge, approved the April 2nd titular festival as well as the list of officials and members, beginning with a carpenter. As in the earlier barrio confraternity of San Sebastián, naturales were listed separately from the “españoles vecinos y labradores,” in a contrast of urban and rural residents. Attending dignitaries included the regidor and alcaldes mayores. Primary placement of the carpenter and town council members suggests a strong Popoloca influence on the text and presence at the founding ceremony.

Founders proposed an ethnicity-based approach to public worship even before listing the ordinances: “Half of the procession of locals and half of Spaniards, each one on their own side, the right taken up by the Spaniards and the left - the locals” (Hermandad del Santo Sepulcro del Calvario, Book I: 3v, 1718). This processional orchestration was highly reminiscent of the 1605 ordinances of the Holy True Cross. But this time the authors were not necessarily Spaniards who saw themselves as spiritually
superior to all indios cofrades; it may have been Popolocas seeking fellowship and parity with their Spanish neighbors.

The founding brethren united in order to hear and approve the constitution:

Being together and congregated all of the Spanish residents and farmers, of the Illustrious Governor, the Mayors and the rest of the officials of the Common Republic and the Locals… in order to establish the confraternity for Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Sepulcher. (HSSC I: 5r, 1718)

Indigenous officials were introduced rather formally but also awkwardly and after the Spaniards. It is notable that españoles and naturales were still consistently applied and contrasted by lay leaders in confraternal founding documents. This dominant dualism persisted for at least two centuries despite the fact that priests acknowledged the presence and prominence of criollos and castas in contemporaneous membership (1575-1800) and baptismal entries (1640-1740).

The two groups’ relative resources, statuses and placement in rituals were material facts, mentioned in eleven ordinances (79%). Women and castas were never identified as lay leaders or processional penitents. Membership dues were higher for españoles (2 reales) than naturales (1 real). Dual fee schedules were customary in mixed cofradías. Even in the absence of ethnic diversity Popoloca lay leaders polarized elites and commoners. Each member paid a monthly fee for masses and other expenses (½ real or 6 reales/year; Ord. 1). Everyone was entitled to a “good death” (Ord. 4) and summoned to attend “a sung mass to the Holy Sepulcher in his Calvary” on the first Friday of every month (Ord. 2). But only Spaniards contributed to remunerating singers at general and sung masses (4 pesos) and the Holy Friday procession (Ord. 3). The Holy Week festivities included a Holy Friday sermon and Easter Sunday mass (12 pesos; Ord. 5). Assumptions about the “poor wretches” must be what excused indigenous brethren
from sponsoring confraternal rituals. But the “free ride” served to exclude native men from claiming a major role in public celebrations, which only justified racial hierarchies.

Six ordinances (43%) revolved around processional protocol. On Holy Friday “those members who perpetuate in the procession, the Spaniards and the locals, shall wear tunics. If they do not, then the Spaniard must pay four pounds of candle wax and the local – one pound” (Ord. 9). In this example Spaniards were portrayed as accessing four times more wealth than Popolocas. There was no consideration of native elites, perhaps because they represented only 1% of the parish in the 17th century. In the Holy True Cross Spaniards rented white tunics and insignias while indios cofrades wore black. A lack of inventories obscures whether the Holy Sepulcher’s tunic rentals were identical in color or corresponded to two insignia paths.

Marchers were diverted into two paths based on their ethnicities: “The Brotherhood of the Path of Death admits locals. They are not to be impeded. The Path of the Centurion is for the Spaniards” (Ord. 12-13). Leading with “brotherhood” suggests that the paths represented segregated but parallel and cooperative brotherhoods, at least ideally, which is supported by the maintenance of dual cabildos. In the Holy True Cross, the Order of Blood was designated for Spanish men and the Order of Light for Indians, but indigenous as well as mestizo men and even women joined both processional orders. A lack of membership lists prevents me from claiming that the Holy Sepulcher’s two ethnicity-based paths endured.

The insignia paths followed a set order on Holy Friday. Españoles and naturales were featured equally, or so it was meant to appear to some participants and spectators: “The locals shall carry the Lord in the first half of the procession and the Spaniards – the
second. Marchers shall stop and pray at the Holy Cross [center of atrium] and the [corner] shrines at the parish church” (Ord. 14). A procession of images, bells, banners, and insignias might begin and end at the parish church, stopping at the church of Calvary. But the opposite was more likely: travelling to and from the parish church back to Our Lord of the Holy Sepulcher’s home base of Calvary.

Partitioning the procession was a performance of equality and duality. Like the penitents of Centurion and Death, both sets of officers would play pivotal roles in the march. But the order in which penitents led symbolized a pervasive hierarchy. Locating naturales before españoles at the start might have seemed to defer to the Indians. But in the Holy True Cross the procession’s coveted position was the rear, off-limits to indios cofrades and women. The naturales of the Holy Sepulcher might have overlooked the former association. At the culmination Spaniards were the first to enter the atrium and escort Our Lord of the Holy Sepulcher to his place of rest. Therefore the Spanish brethren were not only “first when last,” but also “first when first.”

Even in death the Spanish and Indian Republics were “separate and equal” or unequal. A familiar staging direction was adopted: “the Spaniards shall march to the right and the locals to the left” (Ord. 11). Each deceased member was entitled to a sung requiem mass with response. Two pesos were paid “for deceased Spaniards and eight candles [or vigils] for the locals, bells and banner [in a procession of] six Spaniards, six locals” (Ord. 4). Funerals were supposed to be ethnically-integrated yet distinct and compartmentalized. Did officers only pay for Spaniards but donate candles to Indians? Awkward wording distorts the founders’ agenda and rationale.
In Tula’s Holy Sacrament, ethnicity and privileges were conflated: “If a Spaniard, upon his death a vigil, mass, and a sung response will be celebrated for him. If a local man, only a vigil and a response will be sung” (Schwaller 1989: 242, Ord. 11, 1570). Schwaller (1989: 218) equated the duality to “you get what you pay for”: the Spaniards’ dues (3 pesos per couple) were much higher than those of the locals’ (1 peso), who would be Nahuas and Otomís. Extra funds could be channeled into the friar’s sermon, singers and candles for the mass. But this may also be just another means to institutionalize racial hierarchies. Spaniards’ ceremonies took place inside the church but Nahuas congregated in the atrium at the altar of the Immaculate Conception (Ibid: 218), perhaps because the capilla abierta (open chapel) was better suited to their larger numbers.

In the Holy Sepulcher, election of parallel officials cemented the ethnic arrangement: “There shall be an election of two chief stewards, one Spanish, one local, with two sets of deputies, who will officiate without intervention from one another.” (Ord. 6) The dyadic council’s election and a mass with sermon (6 pesos) occurred on Easter Monday. The “no intervention” clause was made in anticipation of, or in response to, disagreements between councils. Two sets of membership lists and accounts were to be maintained: “Each chief steward shall keep a record of the brethren in the book, and earnings” (Ord. 7). Separate accounts meant that the españoles and naturales would be made to answer to the Bishop of Puebla for their own cargo and descargo. But their ritual items may have been shared. Missing records impede a systematic comparison of memberships, annual accounts and elections, which would have been invaluable.

Alms brought a greater leadership role to Spaniards but favored no one: “On Holy Friday the Spanish chief steward shall gather alms, to be divided equally between his
council and that of the locals for expenses. Alms shall be removed from the Maundy and split between the chief stewards on Holy Friday” (Ord. 8, 10). Perhaps Spaniards did not trust Indians with alms or saw themselves as most likely to attract large donations on a feast day. Native men and women may have collected alms informally on other occasions, as they did in the Holy True Cross. The main points were that the councils received an equal share and administered the funds autonomously.

The reviewed charter was copied, altered and read out loud at a new ceremony in 1718: “The Spaniards gathered with the officials of the Common Republic and the Locals.” Once again Spanish inhabitants were contrasted with politicians and the Popolocas. Three notable exceptions or additions were proposed by the Bishop of Puebla, parish priests and/or the actual cofounders.

As expected, processional protocol surfaced first. Potential penitents fulfilled their tunic quota in order to qualify for the procession. Spaniards were portrayed as much wealthier or more resourceful than indigenous men: “The Spaniards perpetuated in the procession shall each give two men and his own person in tunics. If not he must pay a penalty of four pounds of candle wax. Locals shall give one” (HSSC I: 7v, amendment to Ord. 9, 1718).

The “have more, give more” ethos was reminiscent of the noblesse oblige expressed by caciques principales to the “little commoners” in the Holy Name of Jesus. Added responsibility was likely interpreted as a privilege; the stewards, priest, and one’s fellow brethren and neighbors would have known who contributed or owed certain amounts to the hermandad. Thus male penitents, especially Spaniards, cultivated their
reputations by paying to march on Holy Friday. In error or lack of interest, the notary did not even frame Indians as penitents, only as potential fine payers.

Two amendments concerned council members’ duties and contact. Now diputados were the ones to collect the alms that mayordomos divided equally: “The deputies shall ask for alms in the Maundy” (HSSC I: 7v, amendment to Ord. 10). The deputies’ ethnicities were overlooked but Spanish and native officers were likely involved. Substituting junior officers ensured that the Spanish chief steward could not handle funds without accountability. There was no evidence of transferring money in front of a parish priest, as opposed to the Popoloca examples.

The policy of “officiating without intervention from one another” was overruled. The two camps were ordered to partner and confer with one another: “The Spanish and local officials shall meet” (HSSC I: 8r, amendment to Ord. 11 but pertains to Ord. 6). The Bishop of Puebla was not fooled by an attempt to mask the maintenance of separate Spanish and Indian Republics with feigned ethnic parallelism. He wanted more cooperation. But an economy of words left the new rule open to interpretation. Meeting frequency and purpose went unstated. Did meetings take place on an annual or regular basis? Were elections multiethnic or did only Spaniards vote for Spaniards? The phrase “juntos y congregados” was omitted despite its earlier use in the charter. Therefore lay leaders could claim ignorance and still meet only with their own groups. Despite these ambiguities 19 men signed in support of ratifying the amended ordinances.

With all matters settled “collective” devotion could begin. But lay leaders returned to the drawing board within a year, abandoning their peculiar notions of fellowship (first and last, left and right, Death and Centurion):
There shall be two processions on Holy Friday, the first for the locals, the second for the Spaniards, without intervention from one another. There shall be paths of the bell, banner, Holy Cross, Blessed Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, Saint John [the Baptist], and the Guide/Script [Guión] of Our Lady. (HSSC I: 9r, 1719)

Just as Holy Eucharist sodalities dominated Corpus Christi, Holy Friday was the domain of both the Holy True Cross and the Holy Sepulcher of Calvary. Separate processions and insignia paths allowed more people to be seen and situated into a hierarchy. By spatially and temporally following native marchers, Spaniards had bested their opening act. In comparison to previous ordinances, 32 men’s signatures provided a powerful sanction.

Was the hermandad ever truly united? We see the appearance of parity amidst repeated concerted efforts to legitimize and unfetter one’s own group from the other. Spanish and native lay leaders failed to cooperate fully almost immediately, which may have invited an ecclesiastic overhaul of the hermandad’s binary structure. Joseph Blanco de la Vega (1723) and Francisco (García) Cansino (1725), parish priests and Inquisitorial judges present at the founding, were “elected” in the “Chapel of the Holy Burial of Our Lord Jesus Christ” (HSSC I: 2r). These so-called mayordomos may have been more like patrons who donated their services and supplies. Electoral or fiscal irregularities would justify dismissing laymen but no accusations were made. Priests’ elections-interventions may have soothed tensions over status differences, preventing Spaniards and Indians from defecting to coordinate separate devotions. But due to no records of enlistments, offshoot brotherhoods or closure edicts, the final outcome remains a mystery.

Brethren chose to prioritize profane concerns - ethnic solidarity, competition or conflict - over their collective sacred mission. The hermandad’s charter attests to long-term patterns that promoted but also thwarted sodalities; Spaniards accommodated
Indians partially or marginally and they consistently disregarded the presence and worth of women and castas. The amendments betray ecclesiastic authorities’ persistent concerns about lay leaders’ creative attempts to mix business, politics and social-engineering, particularly ethnic factionalism, with popular religion.

**Conclusion**

Españoles and naturales were presented with various solutions to the same problem: parish-wide (rather than barrio-confined) collective worship (rather than group-specific). The motivations for pursuing a path of ethnic coexistence or factionalism are elusive. It is noteworthy that ethnic inclusivity and exclusivity were cultivated simultaneously, often by the same sodality. Cofradías surviving into the 18th century should have been amongst the most welcoming in the parish. Otherwise they would invite unwanted scrutiny and repercussions from ecclesiastic authorities. Yet parish priests were the ones to record lay leaders’ ethnicities. Added priestly vigilance and pressure may have led lay leaders to subsume or accentuate ethnic policies. With only one true constitution (Holy Sepulcher of Calvary), two rededication acts (Our Lady of Mercy and Holy Eucharist) and a petition (Blessed Souls of Purgatory), much was left unsaid.
Documents Consulted from the Parish Archive of Tecamachalco, Puebla

Documental Group: Disciplinar (parishioner education); Subset: Asociaciones

Arch-Confraternity of the Holy Eucharist: bishop’s edict, rededication act, electoral and financial records (2 books, 1742-1820, stored with barrio sisterhoods)

Confraternity of the Blessed Souls of Purgatory: legal proceedings regarding land tenure (10 pages, 1791-1808)

Confraternity of Our Lady of Mercy/Brotherhood of Our Lady of Charity: rededication act, abbreviated constitution, electoral and financial records (2 books, 1726-1803)

Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulcher of Calvary: act of foundation, constitution (1718) and ratified amendments (1718-1719), Box #3, 1689-1775, stored with the barrio groups
IX - The Cultural Geography of Popoloca Catholicism:

Barrios, Capillas and Cofradías

Late-17th century parishioner counts and sacramental and confraternal records tell a story of demographic growth, barrio differentiation, and widespread intermarriage in the parish of Tecamachalco. In contrast to previous and subsequent generations, local scribes and priests began to categorize ethnic groups and accentuate place of residence in novel ways. Ethnic coexistence and barrio competition subsumed or partially supplanted racial and class-based hierarchies. A new cast of bishops, priests, neighbors, lay leaders, and members of abundant interfacing cofradías, as well as royal reforms, played integral parts in this apparent transition. In 1640, Bishop Juan de Palafox y Mendoza removed the Franciscans from 31 parishes in the bishopric of Puebla (Israel 1975: 207). The founders of four cofradías inaugurated during this era (1644-1689) now answered to parish priests.

In this chapter, I pose various questions: What is the cultural geography of the Popolocas’ rituals and social networking? Who were the constituents, proponents and opponents of San Joseph, San Sebastián, and San Nicolás? What functions and operations did cofradías fulfill in an era of few epidemics and stable communities composed of criollos, castas and indios, who no longer required massive conversions or intensive indoctrination? Could corporate identities, whether barrio, ethnic, class, or gender, or all of the above, be expressed cogently and in a lasting way by creating and managing confraternal images, rituals, lands, and chapels? Were indigenous religious practices standardized or inherently variable and local, differing by group, time and space? What events or movements did late colonial cabildos and cofrades witness or even initiate?
I present a comparative analysis of three contemporaneous barrio cofradías led by Popoloca men. In the late-16th century, San Francisco, the Nativity of Our Lady and the Holy Name of Jesus shared similar finances, class dynamics, gender relations, and even the same personnel. A century later, barrio cofradías were also three of a kind. There are key junctures at which barrio groups diverged from their Popoloca altepetl-based predecessors. There is also marked variation in the policies, practices, leaders, and members of San Joseph, San Sebastián and San Nicolás. I compare the cofradías by (1) connecting them through ties to barrios, saints, chapels, and rituals, (2) exploring patterns in the membership data and the range of formal and informal leadership positions for men and women, and (3) relating resource management to barrio identity, Popoloca autonomy, Spanish intervention, and the political economy of the Catholic Church.

**A Tale of Three Barrios: The Historical Geography of Colonial Tecamachalco**

Cultural geographers see town planning, architectural design, open spaces, and other aspects of built environments as embodying cultures’ ideals and everyday realities, social structure and interactions. My exploration of barrios and chapels is inspired by studies on the geographic implications of religious rhetoric, objects and practices, as well as community-level identity formation and negotiation (Acuña 1982; Gerhard 1993; Keith and Pile 1993; Kubler 1972; Licate 1981; Low 1995; McAndrew 1969; Moore 1996; Mundy 1996; Perry 1992; Pescador 1992; Phillips 1993; Rubial García 2006; Tavárez 2006; Trautmann 1984; Vazquez 1968; Yaeger 1996; Yanes Díaz 1994).

Identity assertion through culturally-defined spaces, symbols, rituals, and community clubs may have been just what the Popolocas needed. The fact that the
“fertile Tlaxcala-Atlizco-Tecamachalco triangle” was the south-eastern boundary of the central Mexican “heartland” led J.I. Israel (1975: 45) to comment on Tecamachalco:

“According to Bishop Mota y Escobar, [Tecamachalco’s indigenous hierarchy] had been gravely weakened even by the beginning of the [17th] century… due to heavy Spanish settlement” and caciques’ “loss of privilege.” Spanish presence and activities disrupted the “traditional Indian community” (Ibid: 32). Poor Indians left the cerros (hills) to live amongst the farms’ and pueblo’s abundant non-Indians, not in segregated barrios.

R. Douglas Cope (1994: 32) saw Mexico City (1660-1720) as a “vertically segregated society, divided primarily along class rather than racial lines. The wealthy dwelled upstairs… the poor lived downstairs… Plebeians lived closed to the streets and close to each other.” But ethnically-plural multi-level residences would have been less common in small towns with more land per capita, except for among wealthy criollos.

After conquest, congregación dissolved communities and created artificial ones. Land plots, hills, the royal road, and churches symbolizing pueblos, feature heavily in early colonial maps (appendix). Townships were organized around doctrinas (hierarchies of religious personnel, structures and practices), also known as partidos, beneficiados, parroquias, and curatos, which were associated with cabeceras (Licate 1981: 79).

Tecamachalco, known by these names, consisted of the cabecera’s main church and friary (the ex-convento, then the parish church); several lesser visitas or sujetos, infrequently visited by priests, with their own hermitas hosting small local fiestas (Santiago Alseseca, San Mateo Tlaixpan); and numerous minor capillas located in barrios or haciendas (San Joseph, San Sebastián, San Nicolás, San Juan). After Popolocas and other indigenous groups erected the central churches of their towns, they began to invest
their own resources in barrio chapels. Long-term chapel projects were funded with alms from cofradas and other barrio residents. Local men and women paid for materials and executed the work with their own hands (Grijalva 1985: 156; Torquemada 1986: 217).

John K. Chance (1978: 3), an expert on Oaxaca’s barrios explained that “most cities were founded by the labor of Indian workers, who simultaneously established separate settlements (barrios or arrabales) [suburbs or districts] adjacent to the Spanish towns.” The traza or city center was carefully designed and reserved for Spaniards, with a plaza mayor or zócalo that came alive on fiesta and market days. Tecamachalco’s decentralized regular traza means that “the religious building is substantially separated from the main plaza” (Yanes Díaz 1994: 46-47). It was more common for the main church to face the plaza. The oversight was remedied by erecting the parish church across from the plaza. Zócalos were (and are) usually

flanked by the casas de cabildo (town hall) and other administrative offices, stores, the homes of the most prestigious families, and frequently the church. As the population grew, the city came to be divided into barrios or parishes, each with its own chapel… the Indian barrios were always located on the fringe of the city. (Chance 1978: 3-4)

San Sebastián (west) and San Nicolás (south-east) qualify as peripheral, but the chapel of San Joseph is located a few blocks away from the parish church, zócalo, and palacio municipal, where town meetings and documents are held. Either San Joseph was not an ‘Indian barrio’ or Chance’s model cannot be applied to Tecamachalco.

All 9 cofradías established in the final century of foundations (1644-1743) emerged from barrios. But only 3 groups were dedicated to the patron saint of a barrio: San Joseph, San Sebastián and San Nicolás. Only their lay leaders claimed to have built or rebuilt the barrio chapel. Chance (1989: 171) argues that colonial descriptions of the
functions of barrios “are virtually indistinguishable from accounts of the cofradías. Each barrio had its mayordomo who organized the patron’s annual fiesta. Like the cofradías, barrios also owned property and lent money.” Close and enduring ties to Tecamachalco’s barrios were maintained through the founders, patron saints, processions, chapels, and corporate lands of the cofradías of San Joseph, San Sebastián and San Nicolás. Barrio-centric groups were not spatially exclusive; members if not leaders were parish-wide.

The barrios’ exact origins are unknown, but records of earlier cofradías provide some guidance. Various Popoloca men were named for local communities: Santiago or San José, also known as San Joseph. In 1588 and 1589, scribe Vicente de San José served San Francisco, so the barrio of San Joseph may have been in existence by the 1580s.

In the Holy True Cross, scribes largely ignored geography, neglecting barrios entirely and identifying only a few mayordomos as vecinos of Tecamachalco. But barrio, visita and rancho fiestas had emerged by 1625. The patron saint days of at least 17 localities, including San Agustín, San Andrés, San Diego (del Río or de los Cantores), San Felipe, San Joseph, San Juan, San Lorenzo, San Lucas, San Martín (Tecali), San Mateo (Tlaixpan), San Miguel (Cacaollan), San Sebastián, San Simón (Yehualtepec), Santa Ana, Santa Cruz (Tlacotepec), Santiago (Alseseca), and Todos Santos (Xochitlán), were observed by Spanish, indigenous and mestizo members. But San Nicolás and many other communities were not mentioned. As the population grew, penitents may have come to identify most with the saints, rituals, spaces, and people closest to home.

By the late colonial period, the 3 barrios were highly visible and their constituents were active. But they were never distinct enough to merit their own series of baptismal books, as did Santiago Alseseca in the early 18th century. The cofradía of San Sebastián
was founded in 1686, only a year before the barrio was first named in the Holy Name of Jesus as the home of a member. Other barrios were first mentioned in 1673 (Acatzingo) and 1687 (San Andrés), in the same generation in which two of the barrio cofradías were founded. When the Holy Name of Jesus closed in 1779, the final scribe listed the barrios of San Joseph, San Sebastián and San Nicolás in connection with confraternal lands, a mass enlistment of 104 members (45% of whom resided in barrio San Joseph), and the 18th-century brotherhoods and sisterhoods whose leaders jointly sponsored poor women.

In the Sierra of Oaxaca, barrios appear to be an 18th-century development. Chance (1989: 171) hypothesized that “barrios were introduced by the Dominicans as a means of organizing worship of the saints, then reshaped into cofradías by the secular clergy in the second half of the 18th century.” In Tecamachalco, the process may have begun by the 1580s, well before the 1625 barrio fiestas. There is no evidence to support or refute barrios as the creation of friars as opposed to a universal practice encouraged by encomenderos or colonial officials. At a minimum, the Franciscans and/or parish priests (after 1640) assigned to Tecamachalco would have supervised the erection and dedication of chapels. Local cofradías (1563) appear to predate barrios and it seems most likely that barrios preceded the chapels, unless older churches were appropriated later on.

Parishioner counts reveal the development of barrios within the multi-ethnic parish. The data, the results of bulas (decrees) of padrones (censuses of parishioners attending mass or seeking confession, communion or baptism), are stored with other bishops’ edicts sent to the parish (Edictos y Cordilleras). Each set points to an evolution in cultural geography as well as ethnic diversity. In 1660 and 1668, the residents of all barrios were subsumed under the cabecera, which accounted for 58% (1660) to 60%
(1668) of the parishioners. Perhaps barrios were not yet populous or mobilized enough to be recognized as discrete entities, even though cofradías emerged from them then.

Ethnicity (contrasting españoles/personas de razón with indios) and the urban-rural dichotomy (head town, two native villas, haciendas and ranchos) were the main concerns.

There was greater ethnic coexistence in ‘Indian barrios’ than what I expected. In 1681, the Spanish and casta populations of neighboring settlements remained very low: 0.5% and 1.25% respectively in Tepeji de la Seda; 4% and 6% in Tepeaca; 6% and 8% in Atlixco (Lipsett-Rivera 1999: 89). Indians still constituted strong majorities (86%- 98%) but many more non-indios were attracted to Tecamachalco’s fertile valley. Hundreds of Spaniards attended church. Spaniards and castas constituted 43% in 1660 and 51% in 1668, becoming the new majority. Non-indios were 3, 4 and 20 times less visible in Atlixco, Tepeaca and Tepeji de la Seda respectively. Tecamachalco’s non-indios mostly lived in town (89% in 1660, 86% in 1668), with the remainder on haciendas or ranchos. In 1660, indios were divided almost equally into the cabecera (37%) and estates (36%), while 16% came from Alseseca and 11% from Tlaixpan. In 1668, indios stayed in the native villas (15%, 10%), but many appear to have left the town (33%) for the country (42%). There were 3 indios for every español or casta on agricultural estates, but within the town limits, non-indios were 2 to 3 times more numerous than indios.

Barrios featured prominently in 18th-century enumerations of active parishioners. In both the 1745 and 1768 counts, 22% of locals resided in a confraternal barrio. In 1745, twice as many active parishioners resided in San Joseph as in San Nicolás or San Sebastián. Parishioners from the latter 2 barrios numerically dominated those of San Joseph by 1768; San Joseph’s portion fell from 10.5% to 6%, San Sebastián rose slightly
from 6% to 7.5%, and San Nicolás rose from 5.5% to 9%. The parish included the main pueblo (13% in 1745), the lesser known barrio of Chimalpan (2% in 1745; 3.5% in 1768), Santiago Alseseca (24% to 13%), San Mateo Tlaixpan (13.5% to 9%), and all of the jurisdiction’s haciendas and ranchos (doubling from 26% in 1745 to 52% in 1768).

The inclusion and exclusion of data (race and gender) are puzzling. In 1745, the town and its 4 barrios accounted for 37% of parishioners (falling over 20% in 85 years). There was no separate listing for the pueblo in 1768, just 4 barrios (26%), 2 subject towns (22%), and various estates and ranches (52%, as opposed to 26-28% in 1660, 1668 and 1745). The parish appeared to be increasingly agricultural, perhaps because town and native hamlets experienced a decline, whether in population or church activism, or they were simply overlooked. The censuses are only estimates, likely incomplete. Some overlooked areas may fall within the boundaries of the localities noted on the tables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity and Community</th>
<th>1660</th>
<th>1668</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Españoles/Personas de Razón</td>
<td>1220</td>
<td>1868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Españoles from Haciendas/Ranchos</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Count for Españoles</td>
<td>1405</td>
<td>2183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indios from Haciendas/Ranchos</td>
<td>689</td>
<td>876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indios from Santiago (Alesseca, pueblo)</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indios from San Mateo (Tlaixpan)</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indios from the Cabecera</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Count for Indios</td>
<td>1856</td>
<td>2071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total for Españoles and Indios</td>
<td>3,261</td>
<td>4,254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1745 Community</td>
<td>Parishioners</td>
<td>Confessants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santiago (Alseseca)</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Mateo (Tlaixpan)</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tecamachalco (pueblo)</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrio San Joseph</td>
<td>352</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrio San Nicolás</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrio San Sebastián</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Barrio) Chimalpa(n)</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haciendas and Ranchos</td>
<td>853</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santiago (additional or not Alseseca?)</td>
<td>353</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Mateo (additional or not Tlaixpan?)</td>
<td>224</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,342</strong></td>
<td><strong>57</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1768 Community</th>
<th>Parishioners</th>
<th>Communion with Baptism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barrio San Nicolás</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrio San Sebastián</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrio Chimalpa(n)</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>63+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrio San José (Joseph)</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haciendas and Ranchos</td>
<td>1191 (315 españoles, 876 indios)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santiago (Alseseca)</td>
<td>300</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Mateo (Tlaixpan)</td>
<td>207</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,283</strong></td>
<td><strong>551</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were more barrios in existence than the 4 mentioned in 1745 and 1768. Baptismal records reveal that parishioners came from 25 barrios by 1740. Barrios were
named for ancient tlaxilacalli (a subunit of the pre-Colombian altepetl), a patron saint (the majority, sometimes combined with a Nahuatl place-name), an industry (mill), a landmark (hospital, rivers), the residents’ primary occupation (singers, bakers), or a titled citizen (don or doña), likely an estate owner and employer. Some haciendas and ranchos became barrios, like San Juan (pre-1724). All barrios fell under the jurisdiction of Tecamachalco, but not all were within town limits; San Joseph, San Sebastián, San Nicolás, and Chimalpan (place of raised fields) may be the only internal barrios. Chance (1978: 113) found a trend towards fewer barrios as ethnic homogenization took over in 17th-century Oaxaca. This slow transition could account for the listing of only 4 barrios.

In 1745 and 1768, priests, census takers and/or scribes were unable or unwilling to track ethnicity, except on agricultural estates. In 1768, rural castas were likely counted among the españoles (24%) and/or the indios (76%); no mestizos, mulattoes and Africans were enumerated. Why would they be omitted after two centuries of ethnic mixture in colonial industries and families? The 1768 data for haciendas and ranchos, Santiago Alseseca, and San Mateo Tlaixpan are suspect; they match the 1668 figures exactly.

While Santiago Alseseca and San Mateo Tlaixpan would be almost entirely Popoloca, the ethnic composition of the barrios is unknown. The use of Nahuatl and identification of some leaders and members as naturales, caciques or principales suggest that the 3 cofradías, if not their barrios, were racially mixed but numerically dominated by Popolocas. There were no purely Indian barrios, cofradías or chapels. Most cofrades were Popolocas and barrio residents, but all parishioners were eligible for membership.

My final source on Tecamachalco’s evolving cultural geography is pharmacist Dr. Jorge Espinosa. In his colonial-era home and on spontaneous tours of the countryside,
Don Jorge gave me an insider’s history, identifying 8 barrios in this order: San José, La Villita, San Nicolás, San Antonio, San Juan, San Miguel (Jonetlán, or section 10 of San Sebastián), San Sebastián, and San Martín de Porres. Chimalpan is no longer recognized as a barrio and new barrios could have emerged after Independence. The municipalities are Quecholac (María Magdalena), Yehualtepec (San Simon), Tlacotepec (Santa Cruz), Xochitlán (Todos Santos), Tochtepec (La Asunción), Tlanepantla (Santa Isabel), San Pablo de las Tunas, and Felipe Angeles. The límites or boundaries of the doctrina formed at San Andrés Chalchicomula, Tehuacán, Tepexi de la Seda, Tecali, and Tepeaca.

The juntas auxiliarias (auxiliary units) of San Mateo Tlaixpan and Santiago Alseseca were grouped with 17 rancherías with names in Nahuatl (Cuauhtemoc, San Antonio Tecolco, Xochimilco), of patron saints (San Antonio la Portilla, San Baltazar, San José la Portilla, Santa Rosa, Lomas de Santa Cruz, La Soledad, Purísima de Hidalgo, Veracrucitas), cultural heroes (Cuauhtemoc, Francisco Villa, Romero, Lomas de Romero, Piño Suarez, Purísima de Hidalgo, Ruben Jaramillo), or geographic features (Colonia el Salado, La Laguna). Most rancherías appear on government maps, but few carry the same names or correspond to colonial haciendas’ or ranchos’ boundaries. The Nahuatl place names of the various altepetl and the patron saint names of barrios (except Jonetlán) suggest the former’s antiquity and the latter’s status as a colonial invention.

Neighborhood Protectors: Patron Saints, Celebrations and Chapels

The Brotherhood of Our Patriarch San Joseph (1644-1780)

The 3 main barrios, cofradías and chapels were named after patron saints. Patron saints watched over the hermanos’ barrios, chapels and confraternal lands. Shared
symbols and rituals ensured some continuity. Links among place, the cult of the saints, cofradías, and cultural identity were strong and enduring, even in late colonial Mexico:

The names of sodalities and particular devotions were secondary to their functions as land tenure markers, and as bodies that produced revenue and community identity… ways of viewing religious images – as markers of territory, historical memory, and public declarations of support for the Catholic monarchy – did not perish. (Osowski 2010: 92)

San Joseph’s cofrades referred to him as Our Patriarch. Beginning in 1644, the male and female naturales of the barrio celebrated “Joseph the Worker” on May 1st and his feast on March 19th. As the “patron of the Catholic Church, fathers, carpenters and other manual workers, as well as seekers of a happy death” (Loxton 1996: 50), Joseph was an apt choice on multiple levels. He was the patron saint of the entire Provincia, at least by the late 18th century. As a symbol of fathers, Joseph symbolized not only the Church but also the confraternal ethos of real and fictive kinship. All cofrades were most concerned about a “good death” for themselves and their families. San Joseph’s promise of a “happy death” would have been truly inviting to all prospective cofrades.

As a carpenter, Joseph was the ideal benefactor of this cofradía de naturales. A few leaders and members were identified as oficiales carpinteros (carpenter tradesman), or as maestros de escultor or de entallador (master sculptors, carvers or engravers; CNPSJ I: 20v, 1715; III: 92r, 1748). In 1689, the cofradía’s scribe, writing in Nahuatl, reported that the oficiales carpinteros signed for confraternal funds. Clearly these men were the mayordomo and the diputados but only their professions were acknowledged. Their testimony and appropriation of money was witnessed by the bishop of Puebla and priest Antonio de Bonilla Godinez (CNPSJ I: 4r, 1689). The next year, the oficiales carpinteros signed a statement in Nahuatl that accounted for the labor and wax dedicated
to Holy Monday (CNPSJ I: 8v, 1690). Juan Francisco, the 1690 mayordomo, was a carpenter (CNPSJ I: 27r, 1690). Most of his contemporaries, predecessors and successors may have also been carpenters. As naturales, including carpenters who signed Nahuatl entries, the men were assuredly Popoloca.

There are few data on lay leaders’ and cofrads’ occupations. San Joseph appears to have originated as a trade guild of carpenters and other architectural laborers who sought the protection of their saint. With the exception of San Diego de los Cantores, San Joseph was the only cofradía that revolved around men who shared the same profession and barrio; there was a barrio named Cantores located in nearby Quechula, Puebla. It was reasonable and practical for men with similar occupations to reside in the same barrio with their families. Cofrads who were construction experts would have been invaluable in the cofrads’ rebuilding of their barrio chapel in 1689. Perhaps this is why San Joseph was the first local cofradía known to maintain and use its own chapel.

San Joseph’s 1644 confraternal charter is missing. San Joseph likely had an initial set of ordinances in Nahuatl that were then translated into Spanish. Three policies that appear to be copied or amended ordinances were ratified in 1689 by the “itinerant priest, vicar and ecclesiastic judge of this district,” Br. Nicolás Marin Siliceo. One dealt with the state and function of the barrio chapel; the other two outline mass and festival expenses.

The first policy, perhaps a revised act of foundation, reveals that a barrio chapel already existed and was long in need of repair. In Spanish, the scribe presented the

Brotherhood of the Patriarch Saint Joseph founded in this Parish of San Sebastián of Tecamachalco… We will rebuild a chapel that we possess… We give of ourselves spiritually, all of the locals/natives of the said neighborhood of San Joseph… We concede [resolve] to rebuild a hermitage in which the Holy Sacrament of mass may be celebrated. (CNPSJ I: 1r, 1689)
San Joseph was an *hermandad*, a minor sodality in relation to earlier and/or larger organizations. But Br. Nicolás referred to San Joseph as a cofradía de naturales after stating the fees for masses, processions and fiestas (CNPSJ I: 3r, 1690). Half a century later, priest Diego García Paredes framed San Joseph as a cofradía de naturales (CNPSJ III: 51r, 1738). Locally, natural meant indio and español was paired with vecino. Scribes probably referred to the Popolocas exclusively or at least primarily. Regardless of the year, the core membership would have been barrio naturales.

The chapel of San Joseph was standing and functional by 1689. Cofrades and non-cofrades were likely managing it for at least a generation before the policy was enacted. Perhaps Franciscans or the secular clergy supervised the construction, or it was directed by lay leaders and barrio residents. San Joseph’s founding cofrades may have sponsored and physically participated in the erection of the chapel or it may have already been in existence in 1644. All I know is that lay leaders applied their carpentry and masonry skills in order to repair the chapel, adopt the church as their own for a century. The builders were most likely Popoloca men from the barrio, assisted by others.

Over time, the chapel was put to use in innovative ways. A 3½ page inventory from 1716 reveals that ritual items were stored there (CNPSJ III: 94r, 1716). By 1723, the chapel hosted many people, objects and activities:

The locals of this Town of Tecamahcalco, in the neighborhood of the Blessed Patriarch Saint Joseph, who have erected a Chapel that is frequented often, with a length of 24 varas [66 feet], 8 varas [22 feet] in width with its Sacristy, and a distance from the Parish [church] of four blocks. (CNPSJ I: 31r, 1723)

In the parish inspection of 1726, Puebla’s bishop, Juan Antonio de Landizabal Elorra acknowledged that while “the Confraternity of the Patriarch of San Joseph was founded in the Parish Church, it is presently situated in its Chapel” (CNPSJ III: 23v,
1726). As opposed to other Popoloca and Spanish groups, no false claims were made about San Joseph’s spatial origins. Alternatively referring to the sodality as a cofradía rather than a hermandad suggests that it grew or that the terms were interchangeable.

By the mid-18th century, elections took place in the chapel and were witnessed by secular clergymen. Priest Joseph de Ortega “came by the Chapel” in order to supervise the 1734 election of Miguel Maldonado and perform two masses (CNPSJ III: 44r, 1734). Br. Joseph Xavier de Tembra joined the cabildo and cofrades in the chapel for the 1754 election of Benturas Simeon (CNPSJ IV: 15r, 1754). Elections and council meetings were likely held in a separate space inside the chapel, rather than the church nave or sacristy.

Various events were hosted at the chapel, including monthly sung masses (2 pesos, 24 pesos annually). Masses were sponsored by and for all members, living or dead. It is not known if barrio residents who were not cofrades could attend. Funeral masses (1 peso) also took place in the chapel rather than the parish church. In this era, burial in the town cemetery was more likely than inside a chapel, its courtyard, or the parish church.

Barrio-centric, rather than parish-wide, masses and processions likely began and ended at the chapel. San Joseph’s festival, mass and sermon (8 pesos) are more comparable to those of the Nativity of Our Lady (5-10) and the Holy Name of Jesus (8-12) than those of the Holy True Cross (18-40). Br. Antonio Bonilla de Godinez charged the cabildo 6 pesos for a Lenten mass, sermon and procession. By 1726, cofrades sponsored the Holy Monday and Corpus Christi fiestas, raising annual expenses to at least 50 pesos. This figure matched the Nativity of Our Lady’s annual budget from a century earlier. San Joseph was clearly of limited means but resourceful enough to
sponsor festivities and operate a chapel. Had it survived, the 1644 charter would reveal cofrades’ spatial and symbolic interactions with their barrio chapel and each other.

For revenue, the chapel was rented to outsiders. After 1767, on the 4th day of every month, the cabildo permitted a businessman to hold meetings on the premises: “The room of the chapel of Lord Saint Joseph is relinquished to Joseph Villanueva, an officer [clerk or tradesman] of Sambredero Cattle” (CNPSJ IV: 91r, 1767). The sala was likely the same place that the cofrades employed for elections and council meetings. Villanueva (a common name among local Spaniards) was likely an affluent criollo and rancho or barrio resident. The scribe did not take note of how much was paid, but at least there would be some steady monthly income before the cofradía was dissolved in 1780.

The Confraternity of the Glorious San Sebastián (1686-1774)

Patron saint San Sebastián had less obvious ties to the members of his cofradía, residents of his barrio, and caretakers of his chapel and images. Beginning in 1686, the naturales of the barrio honored San Sebastián on his feast day, January 20th. A third-century Praetorian guardsman who survived arrow wounds until he was ordered clubbed to death by the Emperor whom he had served loyally, Sebastián became the patron saint of archers, athletes and soldiers. The founders’ choice was likely linked to the ‘warrior saint’ being the patron of 17th-century Tecamachalco and its parish church, as well as San Sebastián’s protection against plagues.

As the oldest Christian structure in town (circa 1540-1580) the chapel of San Sebastián was a meaningful and powerful space. The late colonial and modern-day cemetery is located on the edge of the barrio of San Sebastián, which further bolsters the
area’s ritual and spatial significance. A bishop’s edict reveals that the hallowed ground became the preferred Christian burial place due to concerns about epidemics spreading from burial within churches. Besides the oldest chapel and main cemetery, the sodality enjoyed larger membership (at least 1000 inscriptions by the early 18th century) and better record-keeping than other barrio groups. Popoloca founders and Spanish ecclesiastic supervisors referred to the sodality as a cofradía rather than a hermandad, which emphasized its relative size and importance.

Owing to the absence of a Spanish elaboration of the 1686 ordinances, little is known about ritual spaces and activities. The chapel was appropriated by the cofrades and residents of the barrio in 1686, but its builders are unknown. Priests, bishops and inspectors appear to know or care little about local communities’ cultural geography. The 1774 reelection meeting and ceremony of Antonio Valencia, witnessed by Br. Francisco Lopez Cano, took place “in their chapel in one of the neighborhoods,” meaning San Sebastián (CGSS II: 62v, 1744). When the cofradía was dissolved in 1774, the chapel hosted at least 8 general and sung masses each year, including the titular festival on January 20th, Palm Sunday, Holy Week, and Corpus Christi (CGSS II: 129v, 1774).

Louise M. Burkhart and I translated the 1686 Nahuatl act of foundation and ordinances. Note that the scribe wrote in the past tense about events that he had just witnessed or that were reported to him. The text reflects mostly Stage II Nahuatl (Spanish loans) with 1 Stage III example (Spanish-Nahuatl compound: oquimoconfirmar; Lockhart 2001: 123). I marked examples of culture-contact phenomenon with brackets. Late-17th century orthography was extremely erratic in comparison to earlier Nahuatl. The brief founding document deals with masses held at the chapel and ritual paraphernalia.
Here in the altepetl of Tecamachalco, here begin all of the brethren [hermanos] of the glorious [glorioso] San Sebastián so that the confraternity [cofradía] was established. In order that our great priest ruler Don Manuel Fernandez de Santa Cruz, the bishop [obispo] of the city [ciudad] of [Puebla of] the Angels, ceded [oquimoconfirmar] the license in the year of 1689 and that concludes in this year. And in 1690 the one who is chief steward [mayordomo] is Don Francisco de la Cruz y Meneces, the one who wrote there in this book [libro]. Already here it begins to be set in order all of the brethren [hermanos] that follow this page [oja]. [Ord. #1] And also here it is made known as to how the chief steward [mayordomo] assembles all of the brethren [hermanos] when a member [hermano] will die, so that they [the members] will appear so that they bury and shroud the deceased. For this, three pesos will be received by the priest. And this is for the mass [missa], and another one peso for a sung [mass], because through this they received good admonition there at the church, so that they heard the chief steward [mayordomo], the one who was mentioned above. [Ord. #2] And here it is made known that he is the one who purchased eight bells [campanillas] for five pesos. And all of the brethren [hermanos] surrendered alms, each one their own, in order to [re]pay the chief steward [mayordomo] who was mentioned above – five pesos... [Amendments] And some cloth... The names of all of the brethren who entered are written... Today on the day of Tuesday [martes] on the fifth day in the month of February [febrero] in the year of 1692, what was owed was paid to the crippled one Matheo Juan who is a resident [chane] here in the altepetl of Tecamachalco. It was given for San Sebastián; three pesos were given to him [Matheo Juan] for butterflies for his good appearance [in order to beautify an image of San Sebastián] – three pesos. (CGSS I: 1r.-3v., 1686-1692)

Despite a lack of breadth and depth, the ordinances are useful. Over time, local charters were abbreviated to 2 or 3 policies when they once contained as many as 40 policies (the Holy True Cross in 1605). The Popoloca of the Nativity of Our Lady authorized 22 ordinances in 1581 in comparison to only 7 rules in the Holy Name of Jesus in 1595 (15 in Spanish). There are no surviving charters for some later groups.

Every member was entitled to a “good death.” Cofrades attended funeral masses, held at the barrio chapel, and the burials of their peers. Women were not specifically enjoined, but “all of the brethren” implied a female presence. As opposed to the founders of the Holy Name of Jesus, these Popoloca cofrades did not emphasize gender parity
through repetition (hermanos y hermanas) or dual roles (cofrades and señoras who were torch-bearers). Nor were membership types and privileges outlined here or elsewhere.

The mayordomo featured prominently. In the 1595 Nahuatl ordinances from the Holy Name of Jesus, the bishop and four light bearers were as prominent as lay leaders. In the Spanish ordinances of the Holy Name of Jesus (1595) and the Nativity of Our Lady (1581), the mayordomo and the padre guardian were central figures; they administered books, alms and rituals. San Sebastián’s mayordomo was the one who wrote in the book, assembled the members for funerals, spoke to members at mass (whether before, during or after), and was reimbursed for purchasing 8 bells for the cofradía. The bells may have been lent to privileged members to ring in marches, masses or alms campaigns, or they adorned the chapel. The front arched gateway has places reserved for 8 bells.

A 1692 amendment or pay receipt introduced butterflies as religious imagery valued by Popoloca cofrades and residents of San Sebastián. Like flowers, birds, and jade, butterflies represented the beautiful, precious, pure, and holy in Pre-Columbian Mexico (Burkhart 1992: 103). Butterflies, presumable fashioned of paper or cloth, were commissioned to adorn the image of San Sebastián, at least for fiestas and processions. Seventy years later, a scribe itemized papalotes, the Nahuatl word for butterflies, with a Spanish plural in an inventory (CGSS II: 23r, 1762). The cofrades’ affection for and associations with butterflies were powerful and enduring. Even today, colorful bands of streamers featuring birds and butterflies decorate the ceilings and courtyards of local chapels, including San Sebastián. The chapel’s nave and its atrium, which boasts the best views of the ancient altepetl of Tecamachalco atop its massive hill, are still visited and decorated frequently by individuals, families and neighbors.
The Brotherhood of the Glorious San Nicolás of Tolentino (1689-1779)

In 1689, the naturales of the barrio of San Nicolás presented themselves in front of Puebla’s bishop, Manuel Fernandez de Santa Cruz. The naturales, who were “confused and lost,” stated that they wished to establish a cofradía and chapel (HGSN I: ii, 1689). The statement was clearly inserted by an ecclesiastic authority rather than the cofrades. It reflects ideas about the spiritual immaturity of indigenous peoples, mostly seen in 18th-century bishops’ edicts. Perhaps naturales were willing to feign spiritual incompetency in exchange for their very own brotherhood and chapel. By 1690, a license was ceded to the “natives/locals of the neighborhood of San Nicolás” by Juan Francisco de Leiza, an emissary of the bishop’s office, and Br. Francisco Lopez Cano, a parish priest.

A full-fledged charter was not commissioned at the founding. Scribes, leaders and priests had no knowledge of, or interest in, the steps involved in licensing and foundation. After a partially illegible Nahuatl statement about a June 15th procession and election (1692), a priest approved religious services and fees in Spanish without revealing dues (1690), and then the membership lists began in Spanish in no particular order.

After approving the petition to establish the hermandad, Br. Antonio de Bonilla Godinez ratified a few policies on ritual events that revolved around the chapel: a titular festival with sermon and mass (13 pesos), and the mass, sermon and procession of Holy Tuesday (9 pesos; CGSNT I: 2r, 1690). Every two months a priest led a sung mass (2 pesos) for the benefit of all cofrades, living and dead, inside the chapel. Members’ funeral masses (1 peso) were also held in the chapel. There was a minimum annual expense of 46 pesos, without candles or funeral masses.
Barrio inhabitants and founding cofrades pledged to repair an existing chapel: “In the parish of San Nicolás, the locals wish to rebuild a hermitage that we have in the said brotherhood” (CGSNT I: 1r, 1689). Lay leaders and members jointly possessed the chapel, or at least they made this claim. Why was the barrio referred to as a parish when it was subsumed under the parish of Tecamachalco? This oversight may represent scribal error or a concerted effort by the founding members to exaggerate their distinctiveness.

In 1691, priest Br. Blanco de Vega witnessed a motion made by mayordomo Juan Antonio Maldonado and the diputados mayores and menores (major and minor). There was a need for funds in the “confraternity situated and founded in the parish church of this town.” The officials proposed to build a chapel and requested “some place or plot or land,” likely to repair and decorate a chapel, rather than erect a new structure (CGSNT I: 25r, 1691). The petition writer also itemized “the new factory and chapel that we have.” The officials sought permission to “rent out the said piece of land,” using its proceeds to build (or rebuild) the chapel (CGSNT I: 25v, 1691). In 1692, priest Br. Francisco de Silva confused the matter further by claiming that there was a “chapel but no location for it” (CGSNT I: 26r, 1692). The property was finally sold in 1721 to a woman for 14 pesos. The amount would enable the cofrades to renovate a chapel but not erect a new structure.

Other than the parish church, San Nicolás is the only church with a modern-looking façade; it resembles bricks rather than smooth stone. This questionable aesthetic may attest to the chapel’s relative youth or its late colonial stabilization (please view photographs of all of the chapels and processional staging areas at the end of the chapter).

Peripheral in relation to the parish church, the barrio and chapel of San Nicolás are closest to the royal road linking Puebla and Mexico City. San Nicolás was the only
chapel used as a staging area in the 2001 Holy Friday procession. Parishioners watched Jesus’ fall under the colorful banners hung by festival volunteers, some of whom were barrio residents. Colonial processions, one of the few known practices of San Nicolás’ cofradas, took place along a path that originated and terminated at the chapel.

San Nicolás of Tolentino was the least documented of the saints, barrios, chapels, and cofradías. The Italian saint was an Augustinian friar recognized for his 13th-century preaching ministry and miracles at Tolentino. His September 10th feast was celebrated by the barrio’s naturales for less than a century (1689-1779). The changing of the guard and the main mass and procession occurred on June 15th, which was linked to Augustinians.

The following text from 1692 appears to serve as a delayed act of foundation and a few ordinances of the hermandad, whose founders identified it as a cofradía. Poor orthography and preservation made transcription and translation difficult. Late-17th century notaries may not have been held to the same standards as their 16th-century predecessors, nor scribes who were employed in or near Mexico City in any period.

The text shares key similarities with other founding documents. Ordinances from Molina’s model and San Miguel Coyotlan, translated by Barry D. Sell, and the Holy Name of Jesus begin with affirmations (positives) and end with admonitions (negatives). We first learn about what lay leaders and members did in relation to the procession, chapel, elections, and alms; we are left with a warning against anyone who violated the brotherhood’s sacred wealth. As seen in San Sebastián’s 1689 and 1692 texts, late-17th century notaries adopted Spanish loan words and Spanish-Nahuatl compounds (shown in brackets), as well as irregular Nahuatl orthography and grammar. In the case of San Nicolás, we know the name of the notary or at least the person who ratified the 1692 text:
Don Francisco de Arano. In this period, the don was more indicative of a public office than membership among Popoloca elites.

In the altepetl of Tecamachalco on the fifteenth day of the month of June [Junio] in the year of 1692, here in San Nicolás, with the Judge Governor [Juez gobernador] of Acatzingo his majesty [su magestad] still being here, and with all of the officers brethren [hermanos] mayors and Aldermen [alcaldes Rexidores], all of them gave of themselves to the Procession [Procesión], and Don Joachin de Oveda chief steward [mayordomo] of the confraternity [cofradía] of San Nicolás, and with everyone of the Barrio when it is still day [light] they agreed to reserve [dedicate] the fifteenth [of June]. And with good government [bara, council meeting] and election [replacing leaders with new ones]. And so that it [the procession] proceeds emerging from inside the hermitage [hermita] that is San Nicolás, until [hasta que] they [members] come out to meet him [the priest?] on Sunday [domingo] at Vespers [Visperas] with singing. From there it will descend to the station [estación: staging area on the processional circuit] on the road where there is the plot of land [solar] of the deceased Miguel Juarez, which will happen [pasar] only on this day [June 15th]. The church fiscal [Hiscaleteopan of the parish church or chapel?] comes out to greet it [the procession] with it still passing along the road at the station [estación] so that they [the members] come together inside the hermitage [ermita]. And so that care is taken to receive here [at the chapel or its sacristy] the alms, which is the charge of Pedro Olgin [syndico fiscal/diputado]. A portion will be given to the Blessed San Nicolás [the saint’s image or the chapel?], nothing more, so that he/it is cared for. The next day and the day after [or at Vespers] what is ordered shall be carried out. And anyone who violates, who desecrates, who diminishes it [the alms, the image or the ordinances?], there will be testimony given against him and he will surrender alms to the said Blessed San Nicolás. And so, in order to make straight [clarify or correct], to repeat [recite] in front of us all of the officials of the council [oficiales de cabildo] on the said fifteenth day in the month of June [Junio] in the year of 1692 years [años] - Don Franco de Arano [Francisco de Aranda]

The previous text is distinct from most acts and ordinances in that it deals with the events of only one day (June 15th). But noting the location, date, presiding dignitaries, lay leaders, members, and ritual procedures all identify this Nahuatl statement as a founding document, even if it was a few years late (1692 rather than 1689). This Nahuatl text contains many varied Spanish loan words and phrases (su magestad, hasta que, oficiales de cabildo), even verbs (pasar), when Nahuatl equivalents existed. Nevertheless, the notary employed altepetl instead of pueblo when introducing Tecamachalco. As in other
examples of Nahuatl ordinances, the altepetl is mentioned first. But unlike in the San Sebastián text, the barrio (written with a capital B), San Nicolás, is highlighted.

For the first time, the man recognized as the ultimate authority of a foundation or at least the signing of the document was not the bishop but the *juez gobernador* of the decidedly Popoloca villa or barrio of Acatzingo. As seen in the Nativity of Our Lady and the Holy Name of Jesus, Acatzingo was a powerful residential and political base for Popoloca elites involved in lay leadership. The official received an honor similar to the bishop’s, albeit this time in Spanish (*su magestad*). Acatzingo’s chief officer was placed above all other Popoloca officials (*alcaídes Rexidores*) present, the mysterious figure of the priest (him), the chapel guardian (*Hiscalteopan*), and the hermandad’s cabildo. The 1692 council included the chief steward, Don Joachin de Oveda; Pedro Olgin (deputy, treasurer or chapel sacristan?); and perhaps the scribe, de Aranda. All other cofrades were described as “everyone of the barrio” or “they.”

The procession is the true star of the entry. There is a strong emphasis on the chapel, processional circuit, and authority of Popoloca lay leaders from the barrio. The chapel, road and station are each mentioned at least twice, and a property is named in an attempt to provide spatial clues to future lay leaders and fiesta participants. Cabildos of barrio cofradías, like those of the Holy True Cross, established clear directions for fiesta processions. They did so in order to bring honor upon their community and church, and perhaps to avoid conflict with other groups as well. The cabildos of San Joseph and San Sebastián may have also introduced and enacted, but not recorded, similar measures.
Members and Leaders of Barrio Cofradías: Ethnicity, Class, Gender, and Residence

Barrio cofradías were similar in many ways but they also diverged in their composition and lay leadership opportunities. Comparative analysis of the ethnic, class, gender, kinship, and geographic dimensions of membership and leadership is based on membership lists (1686-1762) and electoral results (1689-1779).

San Joseph

San Joseph’s surviving Spanish and Nahuatl membership lists span 67 years (1686-1752), despite the cofradía’s 1644-1780 run. All 790 cofrades were grouped together, regardless of ethnicity, which differed from San Sebastián. On the occasion of the 1689 amendments and the hermandad’s rededication, Bishop of Puebla Manuel Fernandez de Santa Cruz and his chaplain enlisted. Following their sanction, over 80 locals inscribed (1690), the most seen in any year. The only other known Spaniard was priest Br. Thomas Saenz de Morales (1695). Most members would be Popolocas and barrio residents. Ethnicity was never mentioned, even for priests, because it was a given or better left unstated. There were continuous enlistments with peaks in the 1710s and 1730s, which coincided with the growth of the Holy True Cross and rise of sisterhoods. There were more than 1500 members in the generation between 1690 and 1715.

Unlike the records of earlier Popoloca groups, few leaders or members were known caciques or cacicas principales, even though Popoloca elites were present. Only the mayordomos of 1752 (Miguel Juarez) and 1753 (Gaspar Juarez) were recognized as caciques principales and vecinos naturales. But detail on lay leaders’ ethnic, social and residential statuses was typical in this period. In the mid-18th century, priests who
doubled as scribes (Guadalaxara, Tembra, Nagle, Barrera, Torre, and Rodríguez) listed mayordomos’ ethnic, social and/or local status with unprecedented regularity (CPSSJ IV: 6r-38r, 1747-1771). Several officials named de la Cruz (1707, 1710, 1730) suggest the presence of elite Popolocas; de la Cruz was the most common name among Toluca’s late colonial Nahua elites (Pizzigoni 2007). Susan Schroeder (2000: 67-68) discovered that “the officers of higher rank [in one of Mexico City’s 18th-century, barrio-based Nahua cofradías] had surnames like ‘de la Cruz’, ‘Santiago’ ‘Valencia’, or ‘Osorio’” but no Nahuatl surnames. I found these Spanish names in San Joseph but only a few examples of Nahuatl surnames in the earlier Anales and contemporaneous baptismal registers.

Most members’ occupations and residences are unknown. Place of residence was rarely noted (2%). Barrio residents were joined by people from San Sebastián, ranchos, San Miguel Xaltepec and San Andrés Chalchuo (villas), and San Agustín (jurisdiction), but they represent only a fraction of the areas and data. Various leaders and members were carpenters, master engravers or sculptors, and one cofrade owned a store. Popoloca commoners, many of whom may have been artisans, laborers, peasant farmers, or domestics, likely numerically dominated San Joseph’s membership. But elites continued to be politically dominant within Popoloca cofradías for at least two centuries. Osowski (2010: 176) identified “male, female, Spanish, and Nahua tailors and apparel workers as members” of Homo Bono, a confraternal auxiliary of a trade guild based in northern Mexico City. In San Joseph, one tailor (1794) was a cacique from the barrio of San Juan. Local carpenters and tailors may have been joined by elites and Spaniards.

In the second book, a Popoloca nobleman’s petition was introduced before the accounts and elections. In 1698, indio cacique principal Bernabe de Luna, from the
pueblo of San Luis, in the jurisdiction of Santa Cruz Tlacotepeque, requested permission to “pass as a ladino or castellano.” He sought the privileges of riding a horse and carrying a sword in his town and others. Teniente (lieutenant) Joseph de Alcona oversaw the matter, but the outcome was never presented. I saw various petitions like this one in the AGN, albeit from a century earlier, but I never expected to find one in a confraternal book. Associations among native elites, confraternal cabildos and Spanish hegemony are well known and supported here. But it is still extraordinary to find a petition amidst confraternal business. Neither the petitioner nor the teniente were listed as mayordomos of San Joseph. But the petitioner must have been a cofrade in order to justify the presence of this entry; I did not record the names of most members so I cannot be sure. I view this petition as further evidence that San Joseph was directed by Popoloca elites and artisans.

There were at least two kinds of cofrades or levels of privilege. Besides discounts for spouses, widows and children, a dual fee structure was used to contrast the poor (2 or 4 reales) and others, whether elite, wealthy or just not poor (1 peso). In 1705, incoming mayordomo Joseph Alonso secured a 30-year membership, perhaps by donating 30 pesos at one time (CNPSJ II: 25v, 1705). His generosity was rewarded with reelection (1706, 1718-1719). The alms may have bought Alonso’s position and fellow members’ long-term loyalty. In 1706, the inscriptions of his wife, two daughters and 8-year old son were noted, even though they reportedly joined with him in 1705 (CNPSJ II: 32r, 1706). The only other evidence of social differentiation was insignia paths; the order of the bell (1700) and the Holy Cross (1708). Many more options were offered to the españoles and indios of the Holy True Cross, which thrived on socio-economic stratification.
In terms of gender and marital status, barrio hermandades aligned closely with earlier Popoloca cofradías. Men and women were equally represented (52% to 48%), but more people joined alone than with a spouse (60% to 40%). More women enlisted with husbands (40.6%) than men with wives (37.5%). Popoloca sodalities are gender balanced or neutral in comparison to Spanish-led groups. Unlike San Sebastián, San Joseph did not host many widows or single women. Perhaps its notaries were not interested in identifying the marginal; less than 4% of members were listed as members’ offspring.

The only woman of distinction was a diputada who joined with her husband (CNPSJ III: 92r, 1748). The seemingly formal leadership position may only be symbolic, as seen in the Holy True Cross, when Spanish mayordomo Joseph de Lisama named his wife, Mariana Rendon, mayordoma in 1705. Perhaps the deputy conducted confraternal business, like the scribes of the Nativity of Our Lady and the Holy Name of Jesus. There were multiple diputadas, even in a single year, in the “Good Death Society,” a Jesuit-supervised Nahua barrio sodality founded in Mexico City (Schroeder 2000: 62). In the Holy Sacrament, founded in 1570 by the Nahuas of Tula, Hidalgo, a series of “formally constituted diputadas” co-led between 1631 and 1695 (Sell 2000: 336). In Tecamachalco, there was a trend toward greater detail in mid-18th century confraternal record-keeping, so earlier, and even later, diputadas may have been elected but overlooked.

Each year, San Joseph’s members elected a new mayordomo (75%) or reelected the same man (25%). Only mayordomos were memorialized in annual electoral results but there was at least one diputado in the same year as the diputada (1748). There were no known elected scribes. In every year except 1747, when Nicolás Juarez joined indio natural Nicolás de Santiago, there was one mayordomo. This could be one man: Nicolás
Juarez from Santiago. The most terms served by any mayordomo were 4, so reelection did not lead to long leadership monopolies. The only electoral irregularity occurred in 1711 when Francisco de Contreras replaced Andrés Baptista, the actual victor. An illness prevented Baptista from attending the election, making him ineligible for office.

The ethnic composition of San Joseph’s cabildo, while unstated, is easily inferred. Several of San Joseph’s chief stewards led the Nativity of Our Lady; Juan de los Santos (1732 and 1743 in San Joseph) dominated the Nativity for 6 years (1734-1739); Antonio Francisco (1750-1751 in San Joseph) led the Nativity in 1763 and 1764. Two other San Joseph mayordomos served in the Holy Name of Jesus; Joseph de Gracia (1761) led the Holy Name for three years (1755-1757), where he was labeled an indio; Geronimo de los Angeles (1763) was identified as a cacique principal and vecino of Tecamachalco when he headed the Holy Name (1758, 1779). Here is further evidence that San Joseph, while a barrio group, was also a Popoloca hermandad with close ties to its predecessors.

Mayordomos’ ethnicities were only revealed during the generation with the most detailed entries; there was an indio natural (1747) and an indio vecino natural (1755). In some elections, mayordomos were known vecinos (17%), naturales (13%), and vecinos naturales (11%). It was less common to note ethnicity (4%), class (3%) or place of residence (0%), although some men shared the name of Santiago, patron saint of Alseseca, a native hamlet. Most if not all lay leaders were Popoloca, and probably barrio elites or successful artisans. The only known exception was Ildephonso Sanchez, an español and vecino natural of Tecamachalco. The timing is anything but coincidental; Sanchez’s 1756 election immediately followed the 1755 Spanish intervention in a dispute over properties jointly owned by Popoloca lay leaders from the Nativity of Our Lady.
San Sebastián

Details about San Sebastián’s members rivaled lists from the Holy True Cross and the Holy Name of Jesus. Over 1000 members enlisted in the first generation (1686-1720); I analyzed 379 cases (1686-1690, 1722-1762). During the cofradía’s foundation and decline, as many as 35 people joined in one year (1686-1688, 1735, and 1754). Much was written in Nahuatl, at least in the beginning. In Nahuatl, dues ranged from 2 to 4 tomines. In Spanish, the fee was consistently 2 reales, which suggests minimal socio-economic variation. Commoners and elites were not differentiated in the founding text. There were powerful political figures and the destitute, but perhaps no one was seen as rich.

The main criteria for membership were sex, marital status, kin ties, place of residence, and whether one was living, sick or deceased. Many entries reveal family units (62%) and marital status (55%, compared to 56% in San Nicolás and 40% in San Joseph). Cofrades and cofradas enlisted with (54%) or without (46%) spouses, and/or with parents (8%). There were more women (54%) than men. Husbands who escorted wives were common (58% of men). Widows, single women, those enlisting without male relatives, or whose relationships were overlooked, enlisted as often as women joining with husbands (50%). More widows, widowers and single women were recorded than in any other local cofradía. Widows and their children received charity through membership discounts and perhaps other forms of socio-economic support. In the Nahuatl lists, many were classified as sick (cocotzin) or deceased (difunto). Men and women gave alms or benefitted from their families’ or neighbors’ charity, whether before or after their “good death.”

The frequent listing of women before husbands and children led me to anticipate high female status. But there was only one example: a compañera from the barrio of San
Nicolás who joined with her husband (CGSS II: 7v, 1754). There were elected female officers or at least volunteers. This title was identified by Schroeder (2000: 62) in the barrio cofradía of San Sebastián Atzacoalco. In the Good Death Society, there were two compañeras, elected annually, who recruited neighbors, cared for ritual spaces and items, or brought ill, absent and wayward members to the attention of priests. Most were doñas or doncellas. The Nahuas’ if not the Jesuits’ insistence on gender parallelism is evident. Mexico City’s “bureaucracy of [female] offices became all the more elaborate” (Ibid: 64). But there should be far fewer offices, for women and men, in Tecamachalco’s barrio sodalities. A study of all memberships might enable me to identify more offices.

Scribes rarely tracked place of residence, except for in the cofradía of San Sebastián (13%). Residence in the barrio was consistently overlooked as the standard or unstated given for lay leaders and members. Members whose residences are unknown (87% in San Sebastián, 98% in San Joseph and 99% in San Nicolás) may have resided in the confraternal barrio. Inhabitants of opposing barrios merited attention; among cofrades whose communities were documented, 20% lived in San Joseph, 6% in San Nicolás, 10% in other barrios, 48% in the villas (hamlets) of the jurisdiction, and 16% on farms.

There is no evidence of dominant professions in the barrio or cofradía. A maestro, perhaps a teacher, choirmaster, skilled artisan or a tradesman, joined in the founding year (CGSS I: 2r, 1686). The barrio’s gobernador de los naturales enlisted with his wife (CGSS I: 1v, 1692). Lastly, a gañan (peasant farmer) and a mesero (waiter), employed on the hacienda of Licenciado Francisco Domingo de Toral, enlisted with their wives (CGSS II: 15r, 1732). Status ranged from commoner laborers to elite politicians.
Ethnicity was tracked infrequently. One notary, writing in Nahuatl, recognized ethnicity as important. In 1686, españoles and naturales were divided in the membership lists, but this was discontinued by the early 18th century when more Spanish made its way into the records. The transition suggests that Popolocas, as scribes, lay leaders and cofrados, framed españoles as foreign (non-naturales). Priests, who took over confraternal record-keeping, may have insisted on grouping all cofrados together. The overwhelming majority of members appear to be indigenous. But unlike the baptismal records, it was common to avoid socio-ethnic categories and to refer to the Popolocas as naturales. The few examples of individuals whose ethnicities were obvious include the governor and his wife (CGSS I: 1v, 1692), 7 naturales and a criolla (CGSS II: 12r, 1722), and priest Br. Nicolás García Siliceo, who enlisted with 10 individuals of unknown ethnicity (CGSS II: 3r, 1723). The rare instances reflect detail-oriented notaries more than universal policies.

Mayordomos’ ethnicities were mentioned consistently only in the 1750s and 1760s (CGSS II: 76r-89v). In this period (1761-1769), 4 men were vecinos of the barrio of San Sebastián, with one even being the barrio’s governor; Cayetano Martín Juarez, an indio natural and vecino, committed himself to the “devotion of San Martín,” a lifelong financial and spiritual obligation (CGSS II: 114v, 1766). Juarez was the first mayordomo whose ethnicity was noted (1750), likely due to his governorship, but his indio status was overlooked in his reelections (1766, 1769). As a 3-term leader, Juarez held the longest reign. The cabildos of San Sebastián practiced even less reelection (18%) than those of San Joseph (25%). There were no known electoral irregularities. Deputies and scribes were not named. But secondary officials signed elsewhere in the books, usually alongside the mayordomo, in acknowledgement of funds received or surrendered.
Four other mayordomos were described as indio, indio natural (Agustín Calvario in 1751, Domingo Clemente in 1754) or indio natural vecino (Miguel Geronimo in 1755 and 1763). The men were probably all barrio Popolocas, or at least town residents. Notaries varied in the level of detail that they viewed as necessary when reporting electoral results. The only indio who did not receive the insider label of natural and/or vecino was Pedro de San Martín (1752), an *indio personal*, perhaps a Spanish landowner’s man-servant. It may have been a respectable profession within the Popoloca community, but it was one that ruled out native nobility. No caciques, principales, dons, or doñas were acknowledged. De la Cruz and Santiago were the most common last names found amongst the mayordomos. So many de la Cruzes may be linked to native nobility and nepotism, while Santiago may relate to the native villa of Alseseca. Other names (Calvario, San Martín and San Pedro) can be linked to local barrios or hamlets.

When a lone Spaniard was elected in 1756, was it evidence of Spanish intervention? The notary did not state that the man was imposed, so he may have simply convinced the mostly Popoloca members that he was the best candidate for the position. The management skills of español Joseph Ricardo were apparently beneficial because his appointment coincided with a shift in the cofradía’s fiscal practices. But naturales were able to regain power through Ypolito Varnicias the next year. In 1763, the reelection of Miguel Geronimo, a man described as an indio natural and vecino of the barrio, symbolized that Spanish leaders had served their purpose. No longer necessary, criollos may have once again become ineligible as lay leaders. The last memorialized election took place 1772; San Sebastián closed in 1774.
San Nicolás

In 1689, the hermandad’s 30 founding members included the bishop of Puebla de los Angeles, Manuel Fernandez de Santa Cruz, his chaplain, and local priest Br. Antonio de Bonilla Godinez. The 1689 parish inspection explains the men’s presence if not their membership. While the bishop was the ultimate authority involved in the establishment of new cofradías and charters, he did not need to be present at the founding ceremony; minimally, he inspected books and ceded licenses. The bishop inspected Nahuatl charters and membership lists in his 1689 visita.

Only in San Nicolás (when it was founded) and San Joseph (when its mission was rededicated to rebuilding the chapel) did scribes identify the bishop, chaplain and priest as members. Clergymen who joined showed their support of the new sodalities; none had been formed since the first wave (1563-1595). Barrio naturales may have invited the clergymen, reasoning that their presence placed them on equal footing with older groups. Ecclesiastic officials would seize upon the opening provided by the visita. The precedent ensured that priests, as members, could monitor council meetings and even vote. This arrangement would never be tolerated among Spaniards, at least not a century earlier.

In the first decade (1689-1698), over 100 men and women enlisted. The surviving membership lists end in 1727 even though San Nicolás operated until 1779. In the first 40 years, there were 272 enlistments falling equally along gender lines; 54% of men and women joined together as married couples, but only 3% were identified as members’ children and 2% as siblings. Spouses were the basic family unit, so some other ties may have been ignored, especially on the occasion of mass enlistments. Some members were identified as widows, single women, siblings, or deceased, but these were far fewer than
in San Sebastián. No one was identified as sick or destitute, but a widow was permitted to pay her dues 2 years after she joined (1693-1695). Perhaps fewer marginal people were welcomed or notaries, usually writing in Spanish, were less interested in documenting charity towards widows and the poor. Ethnicity was overlooked entirely. Occupations were also seen as irrelevant; there was only one woman in described as a frutera (a fruit-grower and/or seller, 1698). Compared to San Sebastián, place of residence did not matter. Only one doctrina (Santa María Justipeque, 1705) and barrio (San Juan, 1724) were mentioned (1%). Most members probably resided in the barrio of San Nicolás.

There was pronounced socio-economic variation in San Nicolás. Early evidence comes from a couple’s donation of a box used from that point on for storing alms (1691), and from the inscription of 2 sibling doñas (1692). Also in 1692, two members pledged alms and service to the insignia path of the banner, meaning more revenue for the rituals and charity. More cofrades and cofradías, alone and as couples, pursued the orders of the banner (a couple in 1698 and a man in 1717), the bell (a man in 1695 and a man in 1716), the Holy Christ (2 couples in 1702), and the Holy Cross (a man in 1713). A married couple, a woman (1706) and a man (1713) “perpetuated as penitents,” partaking in flagellant processions. There were fewer paths (4 vs. 9) and penitents (6% of members) in San Nicolás than in the Holy True Cross. Except for penitential brethren and sisters, cofradías pursued insignia paths only alongside their husbands. The elaboration of these roles is not surprising in a group whose founding text centered on processions.

San Nicolás’ electoral data (1691-1779) share certain patterns with those of other Popoloca and barrio cofradías. A total of 65 chief stewards were identified. There were no obvious electoral irregularities. Notarios and diputados mayores and menores were not
memorialized in electoral records but they did exist. Reelection was practiced in only 21% of the cases, which is right in line with other Popoloca and barrio cofradías. In the only clear case of nepotism or a leadership dynasty, Miguel Rafael succeeded Diego de los Reyes his deceased father, in 1773, remaining in his post through 1774 only.

Three men were presented as barrio vecinos. The descriptor was applied only in detailed entries (1691-1692) that coincided with the founding documents and longer electoral descriptions (1764, 1769), so many more mayordomos were likely barrio residents. The one clear exception was Miguel Geronimo (1709) of the barrio and cofradía of San Sebastián. San Nicolás mayordomo, Salvador Quintero (1720), also led the Nativity of Our Lady (1725, 1726). Quintero was popular or had no competitors; he received “all of the votes” from his San Nicolás compatriots (CGSNT I: 74r, 1720). San Nicolás mayordomo and vecino natural Antonio Serrano also alternated between San Nicolás (1757, 1768 and 1771) and the Holy Name of Jesus (1762-1764). As in other cofradías, a few men’s names may reflect local barrios (Calvario) or towns (Santiago).

The most common name was Maldonado (14%); there were 4 mayordomos with this name, 3 of whom enjoyed reelection (1692-1770). The years between the terms may signal siblings or fathers and sons, but Maldonado is another common name. Several de la Cruzes may represent native elites. No caciques, cacicas or principales were noted. In addition to 2 cofrada siblings who were doñas (1692), the scribe of the 1692 Nahuatl text was a don, but he may have earned his title by holding a public office. Over time, notaries appear to have become less concerned about class divisions; they no longer contrasted pipiltin and macehualtin. Noble Popolocas may have still dominated lay leadership, albeit not as vociferously as in the Nativity of Our Lady and the Holy Name of Jesus.
Chapels and solares were integral to barrio cofradías’ 17th-century rise and 18th-century fall. My diachronic analysis of the cofradías’ fiscal health is focused on interactions among the key players in the exchange of confraternal funds and lands.

Antonio Rubial García (2006: 46) reminds us of ties among saints, cofradías and solares:

In indigenous communities in Mexico, the cult of the saint lay at the center of social, political and even agricultural life. Pre-Hispanic traditions of communal landholding were integrated into the Catholic concepts of the confraternity, and frequently the distinction between confraternity and community property was blurred completely.

Lay leaders of Popoloca-based groups had access to communal lands and plots donated by dying parishioners. The administration of solares was essential to the groups’ economic plan, especially in relation to the upkeep of the barrio chapel. There was little money coming from elsewhere. Dues were small (2 reales-1 peso). Regular, sung, fiesta, and funeral masses, and the priests, singers and wax-makers contracted for these events, took a constant toll on these groups. How did they fare over the course of a century?

San Joseph

Annual accounts, occasional inventories (1689, 1699, 1716, 1732, 1748, 1751, 1765, and 1780) and ecclesiastic inspections (1689, 1713, 1726, 1735, 1753, and 1776), as well as land transactions and disputes, illuminate the fiscal operations of San Joseph’s final 90 years (1689-1780). Like most local sodalities, San Joseph rarely thrived or experienced long periods without fiscal crises. There were few years of profit (1714, 1725, 1727, 1729, and 1749). Any good years followed bishops’ visits or land donations.
Mayordomos distributed (104 pesos) twice as much as they collected (53). Their earning potential conforms to that of other Popoloca groups, but the degree of overspending was somewhat atypical. Earning (8-226 pesos; low: 1747, high: 1722) and spending ranged wildly (20-353 pesos; low: 1714, high: 1722); most growth occurred in the 1720s, when solares were administered, and the late 1760s, when the chapel sala was rented out. Early on, expenses for masses, processions and fiestas were low (50 pesos), but funerals and candle wax were not included. Officials must have invested heavily in the barrio chapel and ritual items in order to consistently overspend. In 1689, the oficiales carpinteros acknowledged in Nahuatl that they were paid for their service and for candle wax for Holy Monday (CNPSJ I: 3r, 1689). Here is more evidence of paying indigenous lay leaders. But without the 1644 constitution, I cannot be sure if mayordomos were paid positions, as was the case in the Nativity of Our Lady for over two centuries.

As in other Popoloca and Nahua cofradías, corporate lands played a pivotal role in San Joseph’s successes, struggles and failures. A deceased woman’s “lands, plots [located] along the road, near a valley” was the first land acquisition recorded (CNPSJ II: 5r, 1698). A property called Remedios, donated by a priest, was the subject of a petition involving the Gobernador Cacique (CNPSJ I: 27r-v, 1700). This call to “justice,” presented to the alcalde and gobernador, altepetl-wide officials, was meant to secure the land for lay leaders. The petitioners named neighboring estate-owners, likely to situate the solar within the Quechula jurisdiction. The document was read aloud to the assembly and signed, mostly with crosses. No response was recorded, but other solares were noted.

There were 5 more entries concerning properties, all dating to the 1710s or 1730s. In 1712, mayordomo Juan Andrés purchased the chapel’s solar (CNPSSJ I: 25v, 1712). It
was “suitable in capacity and length to the Chapel that in the said plot they [carpenters] had initiated.” The cofrades jointly co-owned the chapel but perhaps not all of the land that it rested upon, at least not until 1712. San Joseph still boasts the most spacious chapel *atrio*, so the 1712 plot may be its front courtyard. Bishop Velasquez, itinerant priest and vicar, Escalona Matamoros, and 3 council members signed in approval.

In 1714, the dying mother of Br. Sebastián de Tapia, a parish priest since 1698, bequeathed her solar (CNPSSJ I: 24v, 1714). The hermandad must have been seen as particularly poor and worthy to attract the generosity of the Spanish woman. After her gift, there were properties at the 4 cardinal points. As seen in the Holy Name of Jesus, it was common to list adjoining properties, to the north, south, east, and west. Popoloca lay leaders also appear to have cultivated symbolic connections to the altepetl’s 4 corners.

Various authorities administered the corporate lands. Mayordomo Matheo Castañeda itemized a single solar among the hermandad’s possessions (CNPSSJ II: 6r, 1730). There should have been at least 4 properties, so Castañeda overlooked them or they had already been sold or even abandoned. In 1732, another solar located in the barrio of San Sebastián was said to belong to the people of Tepeji (de la Seda). The solar was purchased or donated in some sort of exchange. Antonio Francisco, the “*Gobernador actual de los naturales,*” whether of Tepeji or Tecamachalco, oversaw the land transfer to the hermandad (CNPSSJ: 6r, 1732). One or more Antonio Franciscos led San Joseph (1750-1751) and the Nativity of Our Lady (1718-1724, 1763-1764).

Second-term mayordomo Matheo Castañeda took control of a new solar on behalf of the cofradía de naturales (CNPSSJ II: 10r, 1738). He spent only 4 pesos (8%) more than he amassed, which was more than respectable. Castañeda must have been a creative
accountant because Br. Juan Joseph de Ochoa, the *cura beneficiado* who oversaw the 1739 election, accused him of neglecting funds. He had been a poor collector, caretaker and/or record-keeper. Castañeda’s 1738 reelection was sanctioned by priest Diego García Paredes in the chapel, where most confraternal business was conducted since 1716. There was no record of Castañeda resigning from his post or being expelled from the hermandad. Here is further evidence that parish priests examined accounts on a periodic if not an annual basis and uncovered what they saw as Popoloca abuses.

What happened to the lands at the time of the hermandad’s dissolution? They were likely sold to individuals, whether Popolocas, Spaniards or castas, in order to diminish the hermandad’s debts. Alternatively, the solares may have reverted back to their respective communities or they were seized by local agents of the Church or State.

Officials were sometimes circumscribed or impeded by priests or other Spaniards when ritual items or lands were involved. In the 1726 visita, the bishop’s emissary set a limit on how many altar candles could be owned by the brethren at one time (24). This was an attempt to reign in the confraternal spending of relatively poor townspeople.

Since 1716, ritual items were stored in the chapel’s sacristy, locked by the mayordomo and/or fiscal but probably not the secular clergy. Mayordomos may have engaged in quietly and quickly amassing expensive items until they were halted, which appears to have happened in the 1726 visita. By 1723, mayordomos generated and spent much more than in the 1690s, so more ritual acquisitions are likely. The inventory grew between 1689 (1 page), 1699 (1½) and 1716 (2½), fell by 1732, grew again by 1748 (2½), and fell again by 1751 (2) and 1765 (1½). A final inventory was executed in 1780, even though the hermandad was ordered closed in 1776 (CNPSJ IV: 60r, 1780).
Lay leaders and members deserve credit for acting creatively and autonomously. Unaware of the hermandad’s impending closure, 10 cofrades and 1 cofrada pooled 27 pesos and 4½ reales for a canopy, presumably to cover the Sacrament or images carried in processions (CNPSJ IV: 91v, 1764). The brethren appear to have treated alms, ritual items and the chapel (when the 1767 cabildo rented the chapel sala to the cattle baron) as their own, to do with what they would. Chapels may have been treated as community or public centers but a priest’s or bishop’s permission may have been secured in advance.

In a desperate attempt at economic ingenuity, the cabildo petitioned for a license to sell *pulque* for 1 peso, perhaps at fiestas or in the weekly tianguiz (CNPSJ III: 59v, 1775). Through communal landholdings, members accessed the requisite maguey. The eventual response was disheartening: “This Brotherhood is extinguished by his Illustrious Lordship the Bishop, my Lord, in the Inspection that he made of this parish” (CNPSJ IV: 58r, 1776). The pulque matter and all future business were permanently off the table.

The bishop had grown weary of mayordomos’ liberal spending and minimal spiritual return. Various sodalities closed 50 years later, so San Joseph must have been seen as particularly inactive or ineffective. The membership lists (1752) and electoral results (1772) end well before the 1780 inventory. Non-sequential and missing entries prevent me from concluding whether San Joseph’s lay leaders and members conformed by immediately obeying the 1776 order or if they resisted by operating in violation of it.

**San Sebastián**

San Sebastián fared better than San Joseph and the Holy True Cross, even though its lay leaders did not create additional revenue through insignia paths. Perhaps members
could not afford these distinctions, or it was inappropriate to elevate certain individuals in such a public forum. Notaries emphasized widows, single women and laborers, not wealthy elites. The council depended on the meager dues (2-4 tomines/reales) of over 1000 cofrades. A couple donated their dues to the Hospital of Belén instead (1760). How could San Sebastián have ever thrived? There were balanced budgets, or close to it (10% difference) in 29% of the recorded years (1717-1719, 1721-1722, 1725, 1731, 1735, 1756, 1763, and 1766-1767). Even with missing data (1686-1714), a cyclical pattern emerged; all was well until a recession (1740s), followed by a small recovery (1750s), and a final decline (1760s-1770s), despite a few years of balanced budgets.

The relative success story is supported by landholdings and inventories. An entry about solares and maguey was signed by the bishop, a priest, and 3 council members:

In the town of Santa María Asumpción Thecamachalco [sic], a plot of land with the north part bordering the plot of Doña Thomasa de Loctriges de Valencia, and bordering to the west towards [San] Agustín, and to the south with the plot that is being ceded by our Father, and to the east towards the plot of the deceased Don Joseph Jimenez, where the boundaries end, also magueys. (CGSS I: 26r, 1726)

The new property, the priest’s plot and the magueys were invaluable resources. The plants were so important that they were painted on the interior walls of the ex-convento’s nave. In colonial Mexico, magueys were used for ropes, pulque, and as boundary markers. The records of additional solares may have been lost.

In the infrequent inventories, there were few rituals items for a cofradía of this size. A small reserve could be maintained by abstaining from acquiring new and costly pieces. Much of the modest inventory of 1751 was crossed out, presumably by Bishop Cisamo in his 1753 visita. The 1750 (Cayetano Martín Juarez) and 1751 mayordomos (Agustín Calvario), both indios naturales, made personal donations. The mayordomos’
remedy to the losses experienced during their terms was customary in the Holy Name of Jesus, but San Sebastián lay leaders did not ask for forgiveness. Mayordomos may have already been selling ritual items in order to cover the cofradía’s debts, as was practiced by San Francisco’s Popolocas (1591) and the Spaniards of the Holy True Cross (1747).

In 1756, Spaniard Joseph Ricardo, whether elected (by members) or appointed (by priests), showed a miniscule profit after 2 decades of confraternal debt. Ricardo temporarily took the cofradía in a new fiscal direction. His successor, indio natural and barrio vecino Miguel Geronimo, was less resourceful, but Geronimo took little more than he gave. One man’s generosity led to the final fiscal rally (1766-1767). 

*Gobernador del barrio* and 1766 mayordomo Cayetano Martín Juárez pledged himself to the devotion of San Martín. This meant a life-long pledge of his spiritual and financial capacities. In the final year (1774), a mass was still held on the feast day of San Martín. Juárez likely made a large gift so that this would be possible. Without his resources and connections, alms failed to match expenses, which were 200-300% more between 1768 and 1773. The fact that barrio residents saw themselves as distinct enough to elect barrio governors suggests that they recognized localized prerogatives, if not inseverable ties to ancient tlaxilacalli.

San Sebastián’s stewards were at least as resourceful, cautious and effective as those of the Nativity of Our Lady, in a time when and place where there was relatively little to collect and dispense. On average, the annual revenue was more than twice as high as in San Joseph (118 pesos) but the redistribution of funds was more controlled (175). San Sebastián’s ratio of overspending was 1.5 (versus 2 in San Joseph). The most spent in a year (1717) was 410 pesos, when the highest revenue was achieved (388 pesos).
I doubt that 18th-century bishops or priests were naïve enough to expect cofradías to make a profit. They should have been satisfied with the efforts of Popoloca lay leaders. At least no one accused San Sebastián’s officials of paying themselves, owing money to priests or staging opulent fiestas. But in every decade except for the 1710s and 1720s, there were multiple years with no financial data. The notary recorded the headings of cargo and descargo, but no figures were provided (CGSS II). There appear to have been only 4 visitas (1689, 1726, 1735, and 1753). Thus confraternal books and finances were not entirely in order, but local clergymen were not particularly concerned about it.

San Nicolás

Annual accounts (1699-1779, with gaps between 1729 and 1742, and again in the 1760s), occasional inventories (1691, 1703, 1712, 1743, 1748, 1767, 1774, and 1780), inspections (1689, 1712, 1726, 1745, 1753, and 1776), and land reports (1689, 1691, 1692, 1694, 1697, 1720, 1721, 1755, and 1779) facilitate my analysis of the evolving fiscal climate encountered by San Nicolás officials. Annual reports were incomplete and confusing, but 18th-century confraternal record-keeping was not what it was in 1590.

The San Nicolás data are sufficient to liken the barrio cofradía to San Joseph rather than San Sebastián. After some initial successes, the hermandad was plagued by overspending and failure to consistently attract alms in large amounts. Mayordomos spent 2.1 times more than what they collected in a given year, never amassing more than 165 pesos (1717). By contrast, the Holy Sacrament, a Nahua sodality in Amecameca, amassed 1000 pesos in a single year (Osowski 2010: 59). Central Mexican urban cofradías, whose
members paraded saints for confraternal alms, had the potential to fare as well as Spanish groups, even if most of the alms collectors and donors were non-elites (Ibid: 92).

Large revenue was the only path to a balanced budget (1702). Within a year, 105 pesos disappeared in the form of a new banner (GGSNT I: 12v, 1703). This was the first major purchase since 1691, when images of San Nicolás and others, crosses and torches were commissioned by the mayordomo for fiesta processions or masses. A couple gave a lock box for alms (CGSNT I: 84r, 1691). Members pooled 26 pesos for the “new chapel,” even though they had pledged to rebuild an existing structure in 1689 (CGSNT I: 27v, 1694). Another major purchase was wood, whether for the chapel or its images, after the 1712 inventory revealed that it was all gone. In 1717, 40 members donated alms (CGSNT I: 29r, 1717), likely for the chapel. In 1720 land was sold for the benefit of the chapel.

Ethnicity quickly surfaced as a key factor in the political economy of San Nicolás. The Popoloca cofradía had occasional Spanish figureheads and critics. Only 4 leaders were identified as indios (1754-1755 – two men, and 1759), 3 of whom were labeled vecinos naturales. Three españoles vecinos and a lobo (casta) officiated in the mid-18th century, when the electoral records were more elaborate. Fiscal evidence leads me to frame the criollo presence as outside intervention in Popoloca-dominated cofradías, rather than ethnic coexistence; Spanish priests or settlers were named mayordomos only after the initiation of serious crises blamed on Popoloca or mulatto lay leaders.

Spanish leadership (1746: Antonio Ramos; 1747: Nicolás Bernardino) followed the resignation of the 1742 mayordomo, Balthasar Ramos, and his subsequent expulsion from the hermandad. The unfortunate incident involved ritual items reported missing in an inventory. The act of expulsion was signed by priest Joseph Gonzalez de Sayas.
It is not clear if the man stole anything or if he was blamed by his fellow council members because the loss happened under his watch. In 1748, Joachin Muñoz, who succeeded the Spaniards, was identified as a vecino (usually paired with español), but his ethnicity was overlooked. Was San Nicolás returned to Popoloca hands right away? By 1754, indios vecinos naturales were back in office. Antonio Ramos was reelected (1751, 1763) without coinciding crises, so he must have done well in 1746. Ramos was described as a vecino but not an español in 1751 and 1763. These omissions suggest that more Spaniards or castas were present than were documented. For example, Lobo, the last name of 1759 mayordomo Lucas Melchor Lobo, may denote his ethnicity.

In 1756, Antonio de Aranda’s term followed the inability of Popoloca lay leaders to sell a plot that was supposed to bankroll the barrio chapel. The year before, a priest criticized the leaders of various cofradías de naturales for misplacing land titles and nearly ceding Popoloca confraternal lands to Spaniards. In 1755, Juan Balthasar, “Local Indian and Resident of this Town of Thecamachalco [sic], in the neighborhood of San Nicolás,” attempted to sell a plot located inside the barrio’s boundaries. Instead of the anticipated 10 pesos, 4 pesos were surrendered. The mayordomos’ peers considered repossessing the land from the new owner because the monies were intended for the chapel. Faced with a scandal, Balthasar resigned. The 5-page statement was signed by Joseph Antonio Vasquez de Quadra, presumably a criollo lawyer, notary Joachin Antonio Negrette, Br. Joseph Xavier de Tembra, and Diego Calvario. As the signatory on the 1775 accounts, supervising priest, Br. Joseph was fully aware of the year’s shortcomings.

Upon Balthasar’s resignation, Diego Calvario took up his post. Calvario was likely the former diputado mayor, the best candidate (CGSNT III: 1r-3r, 1755). But this
indio vecino natural was also a failure because Spanish resident Antonio de Aranda was appointed in 1756. Other than the solar matter, there was no reason to involve Spaniards; Balthasar and Calvario nearly balanced their budgets, which was rare for any lay leader. After the apparent intrusion, mayordomo Antonio Serrano (1757, 1768, and 1771) was described only as a vecino, so he could have been a Spaniard or a Popoloca.

Ethnicity was documented only in a single generation of electoral records (1746-1763). Spaniards may have served before and after this era. Br. Blanco de Vega attested that Esteban Aranda was elected “canónicamente” when 40 members donated alms (CGSNT I: 52v, 1716). Aranda was a common name among Spanish residents, so priests may have ‘elected’ ethnic outsiders into office. In the 4 years leading up to Aranda’s 2 terms (1716-1717), the wood stores had been depleted (1712), revenue was at its lowest point (1713: 5 pesos), and there was a 2-year gap in the electoral records (1714-1715). If Spaniards had been ‘elected’ in years without financial crises, then my argument would be less persuasive. Still, office-sharing among Popolocas and Spaniards may reflect proper electoral procedures, fair competition and a degree of ethnic coexistence.

It was no easy task to run a brotherhood, especially over the long term. People were poor and everything was expensive. The constant need for candle wax, other supplies and masses could entirely exhaust resources. In 1743, after 14 years with no fiscal or electoral reports, the inventory was pitifully small. Balthasar Ramos (1742) was blamed and punished for the loss. Then the hermanos launched an appeal to “Parish Law” to remove a clergyman. In the 1745 visita, the naturales of the barrio of San Nicolás claimed that they “wished to have a priest, a secular, removed” (CGSNT I: ii, 1745). Crises in management, record-keeping and even priest-lay leader relations were apparent.
By 1748, change was afoot. A 3-page inventory revealed that 30 pounds of wax was purchased and used up in a year. The robust inventory followed the Spaniards’ elections, so ethnic outsiders were likely credited with acquiring new ritual items. Other Spaniards (1751, 1756, and 1763) were incompetent caretakers who made no apologies or donations, unlike the Popolocas. But the occasional reversal of cargo and descargo by late colonial notaries may mean that deficits represent gains. Later smaller inventories (1767, 1773) suggest relative poverty and the sale of ritual items. But families still gave to the hermandad and its hermita; a couple donated cloth for the chapel’s altar (CGSNT III: 38r, 1763). Just as late 16th century Popolocas and Spaniards sacrificed to beautify the ex-convento, the residents of San Nicolás placed great value on their community church.

At the very end, precious little remained. Phelipe Calvario (1779) owed money. Perhaps he ‘borrowed’ items or could not balance the books at the hermandad’s closure. Mayordomos paid for whatever happened under their watch and Calvario was unlucky enough to serve out the final term. He was obligated to make amends for the maguelles, a canopy and 2 torches (CGSNT III: 72r, 1779). The complaint reveals that mayordomos directly oversaw confraternal lands, or at least they were expected to do so, and that they corrected one another or allowed Spaniards to intervene; Calvario was charged with the loss or sale of magueys located on the hermanos’ land. The hermandad was closed in 1779, likely due to bankruptcy. Lay leaders cold no longer convince the bishop of Puebla that they contributed anything spiritually, morally, socially, economically, or politically.
**Harbingers of the End?:**

**Micro-Patriotism, Big Plans, Poor People, and Spanish Interventions**

What did barrio groups do that built upon local confraternal traditions or that was entirely new? In the hearts and mind of 18th-century Popoloca chief stewards and notaries, perhaps elites especially, Tecamachalco retained its altepetl status. But virtually all ecclesiastic authorities and the Spanish lay leaders of the Holy True Cross saw only a pueblo de españoles. The transitions from Popolocan settlement, to Franciscan cabecera and Spanish encomienda, to a parish under the new bishopric of Puebla added something but removed nothing. James Lockhart’s (1992) concept of the ‘micro-patriotic unit’ is particularly useful in this scenario. Each barrio, with its own patron saint, chapel and cofradía, could represent ancient tlaxilacalli to some Popoloca residents, especially to landholding elites who were lay leaders. Barrio cofradías, as socio-economic and political structures, as well as their spaces (chapels), symbols (saints, much like ancestors), and rituals (processions), facilitated a continuation of the Popolocas’ civic pride.

Later brotherhoods and sisterhoods claimed neighborhood and chapel bases rather than fully integrating the entire town or appropriating the parish church. But their leaders could not lay claim to the barrio’s patron saint, building a chapel or a major renovation campaign. Yet San Joseph, San Sebastián and San Nicolás were somewhat secondary spiritual figures and cofradías in relation to the symbols of previous groups, which included the Holy Sacrament, San Francisco (the patron saint of the friars), the Holy True Cross, or an aspect of Jesus (the Holy Name) or the Virgin (the Nativity of Our Lady).

One of the most intriguing aspects of cofradías is their potential to encapsulate a group’s sense of self-consciousness. Schroeder (2000: 45) argues that, in comparison to
Spaniards or criollos, the “Nahuas had a cultivated corporate identity,” and enjoyed a sort of “cultural vitality” through their cofradías, “even toward the end of the 18th century.”

Although leaders were shared across almost all Popoloca and barrio groups, there is no proof of collaboration or competition among barrios. Most conflicts of interest or direct confrontations would be avoided by the practices of barrio and chapel-centric processions, which fell on each group’s feast days and along a specific processional circuit, hosting masses within each chapel’s nave, and storing ritual items inside each chapel’s sacristy. Other than contracting priests and singers, who were likely members already, for specific dates in the ritual calendar, there was little room for tension. But if any group claimed to possess the largest, best maintained or most ornate chapel, courtyard and images, it could invite resentment and further investment in localized religious architecture, paraphernalia and processions. Perhaps this is why funds were constantly channeled into barrio chapels, not because they fell into disrepair.

The officials of barrio groups often identified them as cofradías de naturales. But bishops and priests referred to San Joseph and San Nicolás as hermandades, which denoted smaller size and/or fewer ritual celebrations and paraphernalia. Popoloca lay leaders may have resented and rejected the idea of their sodalities being ‘lesser than.’ At least no one crossed out the words cofradía or hermandad so debate was unlikely. In the 19th century, 4 groups, 2 of which were sisterhoods, were designated hermandades. As cofradías became ubiquitous and cabildos competed for resources and members, smaller or marginal groups became hermandades while early Spanish sodalities adopted the term Archicofradía (ancient and/or prominent). No Nahuatl term for sodalities was developed,
which Schroeder (2000: 49) attributes to the European origin of cofradías. Native men and women recognized confraternities as something altogether new and foreign.

Barrio groups, like earlier Popoloca groups, used Nahuatl in founding documents. They also used Nahuatl in some membership lists and inventories. Schroeder (2000: 74) notes that the “ongoing use of Nahuatl” in confraternal records was tolerated by priests and reflects a “great continuity of indigenous practices… however modified.” Late-17th century Nahuatl texts were so poorly written and disorganized that they would have shamed the early colonial scribes of the Nativity of Our Lady and the Holy Name of Jesus. Continuity, elaboration and adaptation through the use and abuse of Nahuatl reflect a lack of ecclesiastic supervision and Popolocas’ dominance of barrio groups. This was true even in the midst of ethnically-plural barrio residents, chapel visitors and cofrades.

The extent to which Popoloca nobles monopolized barrio leadership remains a mystery. Multiple forms of evidence support class differences, at least in San Joseph, in the setting of dues (2 reales if poor, 4 reales if a couple, 1 peso otherwise), the 1698 petition for a nobleman to pass as a ladino, the 1700 appearance of processional insignia paths, and leadership under 2 caciques principales (both named Juarez, 1752-1753).

The selective use of Nahuatl and emphases on vecino and natural statuses were distinctively Popoloca, self-conscious, and self-reliant practices, if not elitist expressions of autonomy. But some mayordomos were still being called indios or españoles as late as the 1760s. Notaries, priests and/or ecclesiastic protocol prevented Popolocas from presenting themselves as the only true inhabitants of the barrios or the altepetl. But if españoles could be vecinos, only indios could be true naturales. In San Sebastián, the reelection (1750, 1766, 1769) of an indio natural, the governor of the barrio naturales, is
further evidence of barrio sovereignty and Popoloca noblemen rotating between, if not monopolizing, the altepetl’s highest lay religious and secular positions. In San Joseph and San Nicolás, a few mayordomos served in the Nativity of Our Lady and the Holy Name of Jesus, which supports my identification of most barrio lay leaders as elite Popolocas.

San Joseph was the only group with a somewhat defined occupational base. The manual, artistic and inter-personal skills of carpenters placed San Joseph in an even better position than the well-funded Holy true Cross, whose coffer was repetitively depleted to contract indios oficiales, even though they were members. San Joseph’s carpenter mayordomos could oversee meetings and lands, but also erect chapels and craft ritual paraphernalia. As such, they appear to be more self-reliant or self-sufficient, even though they were less successful than those of San Sebastián and the Nativity of Our Lady.

Barrio sodalities’ memberships reflect gender parallelism, at least numerically, as did those of earlier Popoloca groups. Women were recognized as family members but also as individuals. In San Sebastián, notaries noted many widows and single women, perhaps concerned about their marginality. Like Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church, cofradías were to welcome the poor and strangers above all others. The diptutada of San Joseph (1748) and the compañera of San Sebastián (1754) echo the escribanas of the Nativity of Our Lady and the Holy Name of Jesus, as well as the Nahua diputadas of Mexico City (Schroeder 2000: 65) and Tula, Hidalgo (Sell 2000: 336). Schroeder (2000: 73) claims that “native men acting on Spanish policies” displaced women from social and legal circles by the late 17th century. But the late colonial era may have provided more lay religious roles, even if these never matched those of men, at least not in Tecamachalco.
How did barrio sodalities augment and detract from the parish and parishioners’ spiritual, economic and political prosperity? It seems to me that the same pattern surfaced whenever there was a hint of mismanagement or infighting. But this transpired only in cofradías not already directed by Spanish men. “Irregular elections” in Our Lady of the Rosary, the only casta group, instigated outside help. After accusations of fiscal or electoral mismanagement, Spanish residents temporarily took over. Once finances were stabilized, the top position was once again returned to subaltern control. To my eyes, these are cases of Spanish intervention rather than passing preferences (of one or two years) for more charismatic or effective candidates who just happened to be criollos.

Did priests impose lay leaders? Osowski (2010: 77) thinks so: “undoubtedly, the parish priests… customarily selected mayordomos from the indigenous population.” I remain unconvinced. Surviving voting tallies from Tecamachalco’s cofradías reveal that priests did not appoint men in most years, only in emergencies, whether real or imagined.

A dispute arose in 1773 among the Spaniards and Indians of San Bartolomé Naucalpan (Tacuba, northern Mexico City) regarding who would lead the multi-ethnic Confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament. Parish priest Joseph María Ramírez appointed Spaniard Joseph Montes de Oca. Supported by a charter and former governor, the Nahuas argued that they collected more alms and would retain leadership. They petitioned the priest to select a mayordomo from among them instead. The charter, found to be missing, allegedly defended the cofradía’s ‘Indian exclusivity.’ The parish priest sought guidance from the Provisorato de Indios. An official there belittled the origins of native cofradías, reflecting his ignorance and bias. Osowski paraphrased the provisor’s ruling:

There were never the types of ethnic limitations on membership or constitutions that the native officials claimed. Chartered cofradías were Spanish in origin, but
in indigenous communities they grew organically from small devotees who wanted to collect money for the fiestas of saints. Sometimes families created cofradías when one of their deceased relatives left land to a saint. Eventually, the local priest might officially designate a mayordomo after the small devotional groups grew to encompass the entire community. (Osowski 2010: 77-78)

The provisor’s authoritative and generalized response to a specific local issue is puzzling. His claims, while intriguing and perhaps based in half-truths, are untenable. The provisor dismissed all indigenous cofradías as illegitimate, even if some were older, larger and more successful than Spanish groups. The Holy Name of Jesus’ Popoloca founders banned non-Indians in the 1595 ordinances, so such clauses were not out of the question. While some charters cannot be found, they correspond to Spanish (the Holy Sacrament and the Blessed Souls of Purgatory), Popoloca (San Francisco and San Joseph) and ‘blended’ groups. In almost all of these cases, entire books are missing.

This case provides anecdotal evidence of parish priests appointing the heads of indigenous cofradías. It may even suggest that leadership disputes among españoles and indios were common. The Naucalpan dispute was extracted from 4 pages housed at the AGN. Osowski did not consult confraternal records or question the provisor’s assertion. It is not clear if the above quote is the provisor’s view or Osowski’s interpretation.

It is possible that barrio sodalities started out as small unchartered, unlicensed groups who paraded saints for alms or gathered around plots of land. But Tecamachaco’s sodalities boasted 30 or more founders, with hundreds added soon after. San Joseph’s lack of early records (1644-1688) may indicate that it operated under ecclesiastic radar. San Sebastián’s and San Nicolás’ late and irregular ‘constitutions,’ of poor orthography and limited foci, may suggest that the groups were unlicensed. But Popoloca lay leaders
secured permission from the bishop of Puebla (San Sebastián) or the governor of Acatzingo (San Nicolás) within 3 years, so they were quickly incorporated.

The presence and participation of Spanish priests reflects confraternal success and failure. In 1689, a bishop, chaplain and priest became members at the founding ceremony of San Nicolás and the rededication of San Joseph. A cofradía in Querétaro exemplifies the potential penetration of ecclesiastic authorities once they secured membership status. The free mulatto cofrades of the Assumption of the Virgin (1686) adopted a priest for the duration of his lifetime and buried him upon his death (Bristol 2007: 103). He appears to be the most privileged member, a sanctioned and sanctioning supervisor. When carrying the standard in marches, attending meetings, voting and providing ‘necessary correction’ (Ibid: 104), the priest monopolized privileges that Tecamachalco’s cofrades would have been reluctant to surrender. The priest was the ultimate member and leader, with no obvious checks on his authority. Popolocas were not subject to the same events, laws or low expectations as urban mulattoes, who were banned from public assembly (Ibid 98). If appointing patron priests was a widespread practice, it may explain why the cofrades of San Nicolás petitioned for the ‘expulsion’ of a secular clergyman (CGSNT I: ii, 1745). The members requested that the priest, who may have been overreaching or negligent in his duties, leave the barrio hermandad and perhaps the parish as whole.

In Tecamachalco’s barrio sodalities, inviting priests into the confraternal fold was a situationally-rational strategy but it was also a highly risky one. Once priests became directly involved, especially in finances, there could be no autonomy. Priests could editorialize or correct whatever they interpreted as going against royal or ecclesiastic laws or detracting from their own agendas. As early as 1581, perhaps even 1563, Spanish
priests attended Popoloca cabildo meetings. There is no local evidence of cofrades electing priests as confraternal officials. But by accepting priests as members and sizeable donations from clergymen or their relatives, lay leaders communicated that they could not operate the sodalities without help. The priestly presence was a signal of official sanction from the Catholic Church and an avenue for Spanish intervention in subaltern cofradías, which peaked in the mid-18th century. The Bourbon Reforms finally stripped parish priests of the right to supervise confraternal budgets, which led to the erosion of the secular clergy’s status among indigenous peoples (Osowski 2010: 125).

In 1774, Bishop of Puebla Victoriano Lopez Gonzalo launched an unprecedented attack on religious spending. Priests and Spanish towns were immune from ecclesiastic oversight and collective diezmos (tithe), but not the Jesuits or indigenous communities:

> The immunity [is for] the parish of the Spaniards… [This] excludes the parishes of the Indians of the barrios… and that of the locals… they are excluded from the local immunity, and they remain without the enjoyment of asylum [an ecclesiastic privilege], the churches of the regulars [Mendicants] for one, and the other…, just as also all of them, and those who wish hermitages, chapels, oratories, sanctuaries, temples, and other sacred, religious or pious places, profane homes and streets. (Cordilleras 1765-1790: 103r, 1774)

The bishop’s decree was used to draw firm lines among priests and parishioners, secular and regular clergy, Spaniards and Indians, and existing and planned religious projects (as illegitimate). The tone of the entire text is rather ominous, reflective of a desperate bishopric in the midst of crisis. Top ecclesiastic authorities likely feared bankruptcy and riots as concrete evidence of their failures to colonial subjects and the weakened Spanish Crown. Local priests were forced to report the layout of their parishes and expose any offenders of the Faith. The bishop’s true goal was securing the titles and submission of barrio, villa and hacienda naturales. Withholding ecclesiastic immunity
from Indians but not Spaniards put undue strain on Popoloca households, lands and confraternities, placing them at risk. Castas were ignored entirely. What had indigenous Catholics done to merit this hard-line approach? Perhaps they tried to do too much with few resources and too little supervision. But that era was over.

Popoloca structures, lands, spending, rituals and other activities would now have to be accounted for. Under the authority of Pope Clement XIV, Br. Manuel Joseph Rodríguez de Aboura, priest and notary, copied a “decree of obedience.” The official response from the parish of Tecamachalco to the draconian edict enumerated a host of districts and chapels, admitted a lack of supervision, and proposed a plan of action:

The conventual church of our patron San Francisco situated inside the same place of the pueblo [Tecamachalco], and in its annexed barrios there are three chapels, the first named San Sebastián, the second San José, and the third San Nicolás [in what I see as their order of erection]. And in two pueblos of Indians that possess two churches, the one with the title of Santiago Alseseca, and the other that of San Mateo Tlaixpan. And even in the estates of this jurisdiction, various chapels are maintained, with their respective titles, which are, they say, that of Don Manuel Romero [hacienda], with the Title of San Pedro [chapel]; that of Don José de Mesa with that of San José; that of Don Navarro with that of the Assumption; the one that they name Aranguti with that of Santa Clara; that of the Dominican priests with that of San Balthasar; that of Zelis, with that of San José; in the Ranch of San Antonio there is one, under the same Title [San Antonio]; and that of Veli, with the Title of San Francisco. Thus they are these, like the mentioned barrios, and those of the pueblos, all are neighboring [bordering], to the cabecera in such a way that the most distant, is not more than the distance of a league and a half…. It appears that there was none in their convento. We recognize in the courtyards, and cemeteries, asking of the servants, if they know of any delinquencies. If they respond no, if there are any… that took refuge, in the churches and chapels, and go by there to designate them [point them out].

(Cordilleras 1765-1790: 105r-v, 1774)

In addition to 3 barrio chapels, there were 8 hacienda chapels, no longer known to local residents. The priest revealed that Dominicans were still in the area operating a hacienda and chapel, even though Puebla’s bishop, Juan de Palafox y Mendoza, ousted
the local Franciscans in 1640. The Christ-centered church of El Calvario, associated with the mulattoes and later hermandades, was not counted, but neither was the parish church.

On the next page, fábricas were grouped with capillas, suggesting firm ties among trades, guilds and cofradías. When San Nicolás’ naturales petitioned to rent out a solar in order to generate revenue for their chapel, the notary noted “the new factory and chapel that we have” (CGSNT I: 25v, 1691). The factory, mill or shop may have been served in members’ creation and repair of religious art and architecture, as additional revenue for the cofradía, the workplace of many of San Nicolás’ cofrades, or all of the above.

Barrio sodalities set precedents that reached their full culmination in the dissolution of all local brotherhoods and sisterhoods. Anything that Popoloca lay leaders did wrong was a money matter. In the Nativity of Our Lady, paying mayordomos from the profit of confraternal lands, owing money to priests, bankrolling expensive fiestas, and entrusting land titles to corrupt lawyers invited the bishop’s wrath. But there were no signs of direct intervention from the Popolocas’ Spanish neighbors, other than priests scolding the mayordomos in a public and lasting way, until the rise of barrio sodalities.

The decline of New Spain’s indigenous cofradías is evident in their struggles for autonomy through land disputes (O’Hara 2010: 232). But 18th-century Spaniards usually lost cases to Indians when communal land holdings and rural settlements were involved (Osowski 2010: 140). Confraternal decline also relates to the eventual loss of interest in, and dissolution of, “good death societies,” which Brian Larkin (2006: 193) equates with a rise of individual concerns over a collective or corporate identity, at least in urban parishes. In Atenaco del Río, Huauhtla, and Cuauhtitlan, Tacuba, “bitter interethic disputes over cofradía funding” and images emerged in the 1780s and 1790s, due to
mounting fiscal pressures instigated by church construction projects (Osowski 2010: 73, 92). In other words, chapels can partly be blamed for the downfall of the groups who sponsored them. There is certainly evidence for this in late colonial Tecamachalco.

A failing and vulnerable Catholic Church was also to blame. Mexico City’s Church peaked in 1740 after years of epidemics. But by 1771, the bishop and Spanish town council drastically reduced the funding of Holy Week fiestas and processions (Osowski 2010: 172). In 1767, the Jesuits were expelled. One Bourbon reform (circa 1790) banned women from accompanying saints’ images despite Nahua ordinances to the contrary (Ibid: 89). Indigenous men and women and their protectors were under attack.

Tecamachalco’s barrio groups were among the first to be disbanded. In an era of greater female involvement in lay religiosity, San Joseph, San Sebastián and San Nicolás may have already been replaced by barrio sisterhoods. Only groups who could afford to honor their commitments (compensating priests, maintaining a chapel and its contents, burying the dead and sponsoring fiestas) could retain the loyalty of their constituents and curry the dwindling favor of priests and bishops. The use and funding of barrio chapels by later groups (female, casta and Spanish) may have displaced Popolocas. The romance with cofradías had passed through its courtship (late 16th century) and honeymoon phases (17th century). What could groups do in order to attract some prosperity and longevity?
Appendix

On the following pages, photographs provide visual context for the three barrio capillas.

Documents Consulted from the Parish Archive of Tecamachalco, Puebla

Brotherhood of Our Patriarch San Joseph, Books I-IV (II-V; Book I is missing)

Confraternity of the Glorious San Sebastián, Books I-II

Brotherhood of the Glorious San Nicolás de Tolentino, Books I-III

(acts, ordinances, records of members, elections and finances, bishops’ visits, 1644-1780)

*Edictos y Cordilleras* (late-18th century bishops’ edicts copied by parish priests)
**Oye**

Yo soy el Pan de vida y no me comes.
Yo soy la luz y no me miras.
Yo soy el camino y no me sigues.
Yo soy la verdad y no me crees.
Yo soy la vida y no me buscas.
Yo soy el Maestro y no me conoces.
Yo soy el Señor y no me obedeces.
Yo soy tu amigo y no me amas.
Yo soy el buen Pastor y no me escuchas.
Yo soy el agua viva y no me bebes.
Yo soy la paz y no me quieres.
Yo soy tu Dios y no me rezas.

"Si no eres feliz no culpes a Cristo".

---

**Bendita sea tu pureza**

Bendita sea tu pureza
y eternamente lo sea.
Pues Dios se recrea
en tan graciosa belleza.
A ti, celestial princesa,
Virgen Sagrada, María,
Yo te ofrezco en este día
alma, vida y corazón,
me das con compasión
no me dejes madre mía.

**Dulce madre**

Dulce madre no te alejes,
Tu vista de mi no apartes,
Ven conmigo a todas partes
y sólo nunca me dejas.
Ya que tanto me proteges
como verdadera madre,
has que me bendagas el padre,
el hijo y el espíritu santo.

---

*Imagen de la Virgen María en el templo de la Encarnación*

*Patrona de la parroquia de Tecamachalco*

*Imprimen en México por Licenciado A. D. E. C.*

*Medalla de la Virgen María de la Encarnación*

*Imprimir en la ciudad de México, en la casa de la señora de los Ángeles, de la parroquia de la misma.*
These are prayer cards of El Señor del Desmayo (Ex-Convento) and the Virgen María en Su Asunción (current patron of the Parish), given to parishioners and visitors.
Street views of the chapel of San José in the barrio of San José. It is located only four blocks from the parish church. Photographs on the following page show San Joseph’s church *atrio* (courtyard) and nave (interior).
Street views of the chapel of San Sebastián, located three blocks from the town cemetery. The portal or arches in front of the chapel atrio may have once housed 8 bells that were purchased by the cofradía’s mayordomo circa 1690.
The façade of the barrio chapel of San Sebastián and its courtyard with exterior rooms are shown. Note the cerros (hills) in the background, where the Popolocas once resided, before sheep and goats were introduced by the Spaniards.
This is a view through the arches of the courtyard of the chapel of San Sebastián. According to current residents, the crosses on the cerro mark the location of Pre-Columbian Tecamachalco, before the process of congregación.
Above is the retablo (altarpiece) of the chapel of San Sebastián. Below are its streamers of birds and butterflies.
Street views of the chapel of San Nicolás reveal that it does not have an atrio nor the traditional smooth stone façade of Tecamachalco’s other chapels. Instead, the street is its courtyard and it resembles the late-17th century parish church.
A side view of San Nicolás shows its dome and other signs of late colonial religious architecture, which distinguishes San Nicolás from other chapels.
In April 2001, the Holy Friday procession incorporated the barrio and chapel of San Nicolás. The road was adorned with grass, the electrical lines covered with fiesta streamers, and actors as well as saints’ images acted out the Stations of the Cross. Moments after these pictures, the actor who impersonated Jesus fell onto the grass-covered stone street and we all gasped.
Above: The residents of the barrio of Jonetlán created a sign for the 4th Station of the Cross (Jesus meets with his mother) to demonstrate their contribution to the 2001 Holy Friday procession. The sign-maker’s use of quotes signals that even barrio residents recognize that Jonetlán is a recent or artificial barrio, or section 10 of San Sebastián.

Below: The residents of the barrio of San Martín de Porres marked their sponsorship of the 7th Station of the Cross (Jesus falls for the second time). San Martín de Porres, one of the few saints of color, is frequently portrayed with livestock, because he watches over campesinos (peasant farmers). Note the pineapple decoration blocking the sign.
This map, courtesy of the parish office, shows a 1998 town-wide processional circuit, which began and ended at the parish church. It passed through the barrios of Calvario, by the Ex-Convento, and then the barrios of San Sebastián (chapel and cemetery), Jonetlán (W), San Juan (SW), San Antonio (S), San Nicolás (SW), and San José (E).
Chapter X - The Eventual Rise of Mulatto and Female Lay Leaders:
The Marian Devotions of Our Lady of the Rosary, Solitude, Transit, and Sorrows

Latecomers to Tecamachalco’s confraternal scene included groups that were unique due to their lay leaders’ identities: mulattoes (Confraternity of Our Lady of the Rosary), and female barrio leaders (Sisterhoods of Our Lady of Solitude, Our Lady of Transit and Our Lady of the Sorrows). Each found creative solutions to living, serving and worshipping together in an increasingly multi-ethnic and spatially segmented parish.

I pose the following questions about sodalities established in the final century of confraternal foundations (1668-1743): What factors contributed to the delayed rise of these groups? To what extent did their ritual, membership, leadership, and financial policies as well as practices emulate but also depart from those of earlier groups, which were all dominated by men, whether Spanish or Popoloca? How did corporate statements or enactments of ethnic, gender and/or barrio solidarity fare in relation to supervision by secular priests, bishops and authorities of the Holy Office of the Inquisition?

Emerging Ethnicities and Communities: Managing Mixed Descent in Parish Records

What local circumstances facilitated the exclusion and eventual mobilization of Afro-Mexican Catholics? I address the emergence of mulatto lay leaders in relation to the evolving treatment of castas in censuses (1520-1800), parishioner counts (1660-1768), baptismal and matrimonial records (1641-1740), bishops’ edicts (1760-1811), and confraternal records (1595-1823). The castas’ relative presence and position help to situate their only cofradía, Our Lady of the Rosary (1668-1823). My intention is to
showcase the myriad of ways in which scribes, ecclesiastic authorities and citizens confronted their community’s ongoing ethnic transformation.

By 1540, Tecamachalco’s Popoloca and Nahuatl-speaking peoples were congregated into a native tributary, Spanish town and encomienda (Gerhard 1993: 280). By 1580, they were joined by 100 Spanish cattle ranchers and wheat farmers who built homes and chapels in the San Pablo valley. Soon after, African slaves were forced to work on the Spaniards’ ranchos and haciendas. Blacks and mulattoes first appeared in confraternal records in 1595, as ineligible members. The Tepeaca region remained 99% indigenous in 1580. A century later, Tecamachalco was 73% indigenous (baptisms).

Españoles and other gente de razón (mestizos, castizos, sometimes mulattoes and negros) reportedly constituted 43% of Tecamachalco’s active parishioners in 1660 and 51% in 1668 (Edictos y Cordilleras, Padrones). While these numbers are suspect, non-indios attending church services were 14 times more plentiful in 1660 than in 1580. By 1668, a third more had surfaced. The total rise was 25% so non-indio parishioners expanded 3 times faster than indios. Cultural geography shaped the course of ethnic expansion. There were 3 indios for every español or casta on agricultural estates, but within the town limits, non-indios were 2 to 3 times more numerous than indios. The pueblo, parish and church events were becoming increasingly Spanish and casta-oriented.

Demographic transition is influenced by migration, intermarriage and fertility, but also church attendance and human error in counting parishioners. Parishioners may not represent all residents and attendees could be counted twice or overlooked entirely. Fewer Indians may have attended church events, except for relatives’ baptisms and marriages. Sacramental obligations were emphasized in ordinances that outlined penalties
for absences at masses or processions. But native day laborers and residents of distant ranches could were impeded from regular visits to the parish church. In the 1770s, edicts from the bishop of Puebla granted indios greater leeway than españoles to stay home for work rather than attend communal festivities. The concession was made in the interest of industry, but worded as a special benefit for indios. There was no mention of mestizos, blacks, or mulattoes. Spaniards and other non-indios were likely counted more frequently because they enjoyed the freedom to attend parish events on a regular basis.

Heavy Spanish settlement is not fully supported by local baptismal records. Between 1641 and 1700 (60 year; 10,790 cases), the parish was 83% Indian, 12% Spanish and 5% castas (3% mestizos; 1% mulattoes; 1% castizos, negros esclavos, and moriscos). Baptismal registers are complete and contiguous, producing reliable estimates. The parish’s proportion of non-indios (17% for 1641-1700) was still high compared to nearby Atlixco (14% in 1681), Tepeaca (10%), and Tepeji de la Seda (<2%), which was the true center of Popolocan settlement (Lipsett-Rivera 1999: 89). In 1681, the region as a whole was 89% indigenous. Baptismal records (1679-1700) reveal that Tecamachalco’s ethnic distribution was 73% Indian, 16% Spanish and 11% casta. Tecamachalco continued to host significantly more non-indios than all neighboring towns.

Castas, not yet recognized as sufficiently distinct or numerous, were absent from most population estimates. In the 1743 census of the Tepeaca region, there were 820 Spanish, 581 mestizo, and 154 mulatto families, in addition to African slaves. There were at least 5,133 indigenous families; Peter Gerhard (1993: 280) believed this part of the census to be incomplete. Colonial authorities may have still been struggling to integrate Popoloca communities. There were still 4 times more indios (80%) than non-indios
but among non-indios, castas (47%) nearly matched the Spaniards (53%). When individuals were counted in 1791, non-indios constituted 30%. Among non-indos, mestizos (13,199: 57%) dwarfed mulattoes (1,245: 5%) and Spaniards (8,691: 38%).

Baptismal records led me to anticipate further growth and co-evolution of the Spanish, casta and indigenous populations. Despite an orphan rate of 14%, there is little evidence of 17th-century epidemics. Orphans were rare amongst indios (7-12%), except for circa 1680 (23%), but twice as prevalent among españoles and castas (22-24%). Native baptisms rose from 112 (1641-1663) to 169 (1663-1679) to 180/year (1679-1700). Casta baptisms remained rare (1641-1682: 4/year) until a sharp increase at the end of the 17th century (1683-1700: 26/year). The castas’ parish presence temporarily overshadowed that of the Spaniards, until an annual average of 18 Spanish baptisms (1641-1690) more than doubled by the end of the 17th century (1691-1700: 39). After more people and areas were annexed, the parish hosted an annual average of 300 baptisms (1701-1740).

Sacramental records reveal that castas presented unique challenges to the administrators of New Spain. For at least two centuries, indios’ baptisms were memorialized in separate books from the gente de razón, who were Spaniards and those of mixed descent, essentially all non-indios. The dual classification scheme was somewhat fluid in practice. When it came to subtle distinctions among colonial racial divisions, there was always room for interpretation. Overused catch-all categories, such as gente de razón or non-indios, certainly complicated the matter, but so did intermediate categories like castizo, morisco, pardo, lobo, or mulato blanco. Scribes struggled to consistently ascribe ethnicity over parishioners’ life cycles. One man inspired the diverse appellations of negro, mulatto and lobo on the occasions of his baptism, confirmation,
marriage, and burial. A woman was labeled española as well as castiza and mestiza. It was perhaps most difficult to assign ethnicity to babies. In a few cases of children born to unknown parents, the scribes commented, “he appears to be mulatto” or “to be mestizo.”

Mestizos and castizos were usually listed in the Spaniards’ books. But mulattoes and negros were sometimes listed in the books of indios. Perhaps Afro-Mexicans and Indians were considered to be akin in appearance or spiritual competency. Castas accounted for up to 40% of the cases in the Spaniards’ books but as little as 1% in the Indians’ books. After 1679, a greater variety of non-indios (mulattoes and moriscos) were recorded in the Spaniards’ books. After 1686, some indios are found in the books of Spaniards but the reverse was exceptionally rare. By 1714, book covers were labeled “españoles, mulatos y mestisos” instead of gente de razón. This practice suggests that castas were now distinct and numerous enough to merit their own book. They were liminal beings who did not belong in the Republica de Españoles or that of Indios.

There were only 6 years in which scribes and/or priests formally recognized local Afro-Mexicans and other castas as a distinct, legitimate group. Between 1683 and 1688, the baptisms of “negros, mestisos y mulatos” were documented in their own book. Over 100 indios and 3 españoles were added in 1688 when the notary failed to retrieve the appropriate books; only 41% (85/209) of the baptisms in the castas’ book corresponded to known or perceived castas.

After the initial evangelization and mass baptisms, only one group was baptized as adults. African slaves, whose homelands were sometimes named, were sponsored by priests or other eminent residents, such as notaries. On August 20th, 1673, 5 blacks were baptized together. They were not referred to as orphans or adults, only as “negros.” The
Africans’ locally-born offspring, whether negros, moriscos, or mulattoes _esclavos_ or _libres_ (slaves, freemen and women), were baptized as babies, just like everyone else.

Sacramental records reveal how local religious authorities culturally constructed illegitimacy as a problem closely linked to ethnicity. In early baptismal entries, orphans and babies born outside of wedlock were grouped indiscriminately, with some babies momentarily overlooked, squeezed together at the bottom of a page to which they did not correspond chronologically. A baby whose parents were married through the Church at the time of her birth was an _hija legítima_. Anyone born to a single mother or unwed parents was a _hija natural_ or _ilegítima_. Many others were born to _padres no conocidos_, or unknown parents. Disease and accidents left orphans who became _niños expósitos_, deposited at the doorsteps of wealthy neighbors or their secret fathers, or _hijos de la iglesia_, wards of the Church. But I doubt that priests, scribes, kin, or neighbors told the whole truth when claiming that children were orphans or that the parents were unknown. Witnesses might opt to state nothing in case someone surfaced to reclaim the child.

Significantly different orphan rates among indios and non-indios may suggest health disparities. But it is also likely that parish priests and scribes attempted to hide the abandoned products of Spaniards’ informal unions. Criollos had lived in the area for more than a century, steadily building up their immunity to local disease. They were seldom engaged in arduous and dangerous manual labor, unlike many indios and negros, so their risk of accidental death was less. Therefore, I believe that ‘orphan’ sometimes served as a convenient euphemism for bastard.

Many late colonial officials were hyper-aware and wary of the ethnic mixing associated with coupling and reproduction, especially potential challenges to the status
quo. Interethnic marital unions and the treatment of illegitimate children by the Church
and State were interconnected in royal reforms and legal cases (Lavrin 1991; Martínez
2008; Seed 1991; Twinam 1991). Scholars have employed Inquisition records to reveal
how negro, mulatto and mestizo men and women fared in disputes over family, religion
and *limpieza de sangre* or purity of blood (Bennett 2003; Bristol 2007; Martínez 2008;
Villa Flores 2006). The first generations of mixed unions may have appeared to
consolidate colonial rule. But this view shifted as castas outnumbered Spaniards and
pursued their own agendas. The criollo assertion of ethnic purity and equation of
illegitimacy with ‘miscegenation’ constructed mestizaje as a threat. In 18th-century Sao
Paulo, Brazil, some colonial authorities saw mixed unions as synonymous with
illegitimacy, even applying the term *bastardo* in place of mestizo (Nazzari 2002).

Being born outside of a Church-sanctioned union was by no means equivalent to
being a casta or indio. Only 3% of mothers of baptized babies (1641-1700) were
identified as *solteras*. A mulata mom was even referred to as a *muger suelta* (loose or
unattached woman; 7/15/1644). It appears that almost all women who were willing and
able to present their babies for baptism were “legitimate wives.” After the secular clergy
arrived (1641-1663) single mothers represented 6% of native mothers. But then solteras
accounted for less than 2% of mothers listed in the indios’ books (1663-1700). This trend
suggests that secular clergy strongly encouraged sacramental marriage among their native
wards. Among the Spaniards, single mothers were consistently rare (1%) with a small
rise in the 1690s (2.3%). When castas and indios were listed together in the 1683-1688
castas’ book, 5% of mothers were solteras. Just over half of these mothers were castas
(mestizas or mulatas, but not castizas or negras), which shows that indias were just as likely to give birth outside of wedlock, but españolas did so a bit less frequently.

All ethnicities and classes of people engaged in informal unions, whether short or long-term. Third-order cousins of unknown ethnicity wed in 1685 after the groom “robbed the bride of her virginity.” Her impoverished father pleaded, complaining about his other familial obligations, so perhaps she was already with child. In 1725, mestizos were finally free to wed after the groom “took her Virginity over a year ago.” The priest, who was also the bride’s guardian, obliged reluctantly: “And knowing the grave offense that was committed against God Our Lord all this time. And in order to be rid of her and serve Him and comply with the promise that I made.”

At the outset, matrimonial records echoed the dichotomy seen with baptisms; unions were memorialized in separate books of indios and gente de razón. Castas were distributed in both series, never meriting their own book as they once did with baptisms. Although book covers reveal whom to expect inside, ethnicity was still provided for almost all individuals. The couple’s ages, parents, sponsors, communities, titles, and occupations were noted in most entries. Ethnic endogamy was common, but spouses and witnesses also crossed all ethnic boundaries. In modern-day matrimonial examinations, intrusive questions are volleyed at the couple, their parents and witnesses: Do you live together? Do you have any children? Is this your first marriage? But today’s ecclesiastic examiners would never ask about or to refer to ethnicity.

By 1640, it was already becoming difficult and meaningless to consistently assign ethnicity. What could scribes do when faced with intermarriage or questionable ethnicity? Could only officiating priests and notaries assign ethnicity or was any self-reporting
permitted? I pursued these questions while assessing the marital prospects of men and women who had been orphaned, abandoned or widowed. There were brides and grooms of every age, ethnicity, and class. In 1643, a 14-year old couple professed to be indios. The scribe thought otherwise: “free mulattoes who pass as Indians and only for being the differences in the color.” Perhaps the discrepancy stemmed from the youngsters being orphans who could not report their ancestry, rather than any attempt to mislead authorities. In any case, the union was recorded in a book of indios. In 1682, one groom was tentatively identified as “indio o mestiso” [sic]. Although his parents were unknown, he married well, to a Doña and india principal, a church singer’s noble daughter.

In reality, parish priests and notaries applied various schemes when grouping parishioners in the books. It appears that ethnicity did not always matter, whether due to scribal error or the calidad (quality, meaning ethnicity) of any person of unknown parentage being questionable. After the 1670s, the marriages of numerous Spanish couples and castizo couples appeared in the books of indios. Besides scribal laziness or incompetence, the only justification was the suspect nature of the bride and/or groom’s parentage. In 1689, the bishop of Puebla approved the book as matrimonios de indios, so the widespread pooling of races did not raise his suspicions. The bishop identified his true priorities as “all people of any quality” attending Sunday mass, reciting the Christian Doctrine and “knowing the mysteries of our sacred faith” before they wed.

By 1810, various colonial approaches were altered or abandoned altogether, rejected as backward and ineffectual. In the same era in which New Spain’s ecclesiastic authorities equated ethnic mixture with illegitimate unions Tecamachalco’s baptismal records came to center on illegitimacy rather than ethnicity. Obsession over the condition
of one’s birth determined the new binary system. Babies undergoing baptism were placed in one of two series of books, hijos legítimos or ilegítimos; these categories were written on the covers. An ethnic descriptor was added in most entries but individuals were no longer grouped by ethnicity, as they had been in the period that I studied (1641-1740). This system too was eventually replaced; for generations baptisms have been documented in a single chronological series of books. Current residents were shocked to learn about the criteria that were once implemented to draw divisions among their ancestors.

Interruption and confusion over labeling individuals likely led priests and scribes to abandon the race-based division of parishioners. The classifications of illegitimate unions and births may have been new ways to communicate to castas and indios that they and their families were still inferior. Castas formed an intermediate group that was often of higher status than that of indios, but not always. At least indios could be nobles, even if they were few and far between (<1% of Tecamachalco’s native parents); there were 57 doñas (0.74% of native mothers), 40 dons (0.52% of native fathers), and a handful of caciques and cacicas principales, gobernadores and gobernadoras. In contrast to only one mestiza who was a doña, there were 123 doñas among the Spanish mothers (10% of criollas), 17 Spanish dons and 3 Capitanes (<2% of criollos).

Lastly, edicts from Puebla’s bishop contextualize the castas’ cofradía. Late colonial authorities lamented their eroding dominance over their native and casta subjects. Afro-Mexicans were framed as the most dangerous, particularly if working in concert or as officials. Castas’ choices and actions were targeted as placing the institutions of marriage and limpieza de sangre at risk. Two edicts related from 1809
reveal authorities’ anxieties about intermarriage, maintaining separate Indian and Spanish Republics, and the actions of mulattoes in particular:

In order that the [Indian] nobles do not contract marriage with the castas without permission from the Viceroy, Jose Ignacio Negreyro y Loria – 1809… Laws that do not admit the mulattoes into the offices of scribes and priests to bring about marriages of whites with blacks, mulattoes, Chinese, and other races… (Edictos y Cordilleras II, 1791-1811: 54r-v)

Mexico City’s riot occurred nearly two centuries earlier (1612), so why had xenophobic attitudes extended into later eras and distant communities? The timing of the missives coincided with the height of the *sistema de castas*, a classificatory scheme used to separate and rank ethnic groups, as well as growing unrest among castas, soon to erupt in the uprising led by priest Miguel Hidalgo (1810) and the Yucatec caste war (1811).

The targeted mulattoes and mestizos may have sought solace from persecution through various coping strategies, whether consciously or not. Confraternal, matrimonial and baptismal records indicate that the traditional options were to socialize, wed and reproduce with their own kind or other peoples of mixed descent. Alternatively, castas could patronize, marry into or even try to pass as españoles or indios. Lastly, mestizo and mulatto mayordomos, who oversaw native labor on what was once native land, were sometimes accused of acting as abusive bosses or at least ambiguous middlemen (AGN, Indios, 1658). Tecamachalco’s castas were clearly not without their own sources of angst or agency, which factored into their confraternal experiences.

*Our Lady of the Rosary’s “Mulatos, Negros y Mestizos” (1668-1823)*

What series of events delayed the emergence of castas in cofradías, whether their own or those of Spaniards or Popolocas? Legal obstacles thwarted Afro-Mexicans’
attempts to assemble as active parishioners. After the 1612 casta riots in Mexico City, dances were banned in Puebla de los Angeles (1618), Afro-Mexicans were prevented from gathering in public in Mexico City (1622), and Mexico City’s Afro-Mexican cofradías were circumscribed to their meeting houses (Bristol 2007: 103). Similar laws were issued in Peru in 1602, so the 1612 riot was not the only impetus for the draconian laws. Were these rules transplanted from core cities to peripheral towns? Local copies of casta-hostile edicts suggest that universalizing attitudes and obstacles had emerged.

In Nicole Von Germeten’s (2003: 171) dissertation, cofradías are framed as a means for Afro-Mexicans to become better integrated into the colonial social world: “Africans and their descendants were more likely to organize cofradías than to rebel against vice-regal authorities.” In the 17th and 18th centuries, castas’ experiences with urban cofradías involved various cultural exchanges, processes and strategies. I focus on a single parish and casta cofradía, but the lack of breadth in my study of Afro-Mexican Catholicism is remedied by in-depth analysis of a charter in relation to evolving membership, elections, finances, and spatial relationships. I note how castas deftly imitated Spaniards’ domineering rhetoric while incorporating españoles and naturales.

Asunción Lavrin (2002: 30) observed that “the demographic appearance of mestizos and castas posed a problem not foreseen in the 1540s… eventually some confraternities began making room for them in the 17th century.” On occasion, the personal qualities or circumstances of “foreign” individuals and families, such as their social networking or isolation, generous patronage or abject poverty, may have overridden blood or appearance. In that case, castas could win entry into cofradías.
Persons of mixed descent were absent from the policies if not the practices of most local cofradías. Their confraternal presence and position were decidedly negligible. Confraternal founders, officials and scribes largely overlooked castas, essentially acting as if they did not exist. Castas were omitted from founding statements and charters, but most invisible when Spaniards dominated, who only acknowledged mestizos. The Holy True Cross’ Spaniards welcomed at least one mestizo as a blood brother (1591) and a widowed mestiza sister of light (1632). Ethnicity was rarely tracked (17%) so more mestizos are likely. When lay leaders were identified by ethnicity, they were españoles, indios, naturales, or vecinos. But none were castas except in Our Lady of the Rosary.

In Popoloca cofradías, non-Indians appear to have been few and far between. The founders of the Holy Name of Jesus banned Spaniards, mulattoes, mulatas, and blacks through their 1595 Nahuatl act of foundation. But within two decades, mestizos (after 1616) and Spaniards (a priest, a criollo, couples; 1660s-1690s) enlisted. Perhaps non-Indians were also excluded from the Nativity of Our Lady (1581). No outsiders were admitted except a priest (1712) and español (1735), whose label was ripped off the page.

Our Lady of the Rosary can be framed as another barrio and chapel-centric cofradía. But it was primarily a mulatto group. It was one of a kind in a parish with a decent casta population (11% by 1679-1700), although not like those of the coastal or mining towns of Veracruz or San Luis Potosí respectively. Mestizos, mulattoes and blacks resided in the area by the 1590s or much earlier. Castas were listed in the earliest available sacramental records (1641). They merited their own baptismal book in 1683.

The rise in non-Indios supports patterns seen within 15 cofradías; the same generation emerged as an anomaly. There was a membership spike in the Spaniards’
Holy True Cross in the 1680s. At the same time, new cofradías formed along barrio rather than strictly ethnic boundaries. Most of Tecamachalco’s later cofradías were barrio-based so place of residence may have mattered more than ethnicity. Marital status, kin ties, titles, occupations, and ages were noted as much as if not more than ethnicity. By 1660, Mexico City’s neighbors and parishioners frequently crossed ethnic boundaries in the interest of economic and/or religious cooperation (Cope 1994; Pescador 1998). Ethnicity was just not that pivotal in cities anymore. But was it in Tecamachalco?

*The Confraternal Charter: Following the Path of the Rosary to a “Good Death”*

Afro-Mexicans were finally recognized as hermanos in 1668 when they launched their own group, the Confraternity of the Always Immaculate Virgin Mary Our Lady of the Rosary. It operated as a safe haven for castas, primarily mulattoes, until 1823, which is the latest closure date for any local cofradía. Its founders pledged:

The brethren of the adoration of Our Lady of the Rosary [who are] Mulattoes, Blacks, and Mestizos, that we have our home in this foundation of Tecamachalco, in the doctrine of Mexico, with the sacred image of the Blessed Rosary, which is located in this Parish. In addition to more of this Condition, in order to found the confraternity for the said mulattoes, blacks, and mestizos, with the constitutions that we have agreed upon among us…. That there has been an election and foundation ceded by his Excellency, the Lord Bishop. We, in the month of November, [the license] that the locals have obtained. (Cofradía de Nuestra Señora del Rosario I: 1r)

Then the head priest summoned founding mayordomo mulatto Miguel de Lat to appear in the parish for the reading of the constitution on February 15th, 1668 (RI: 2r). Forty men were present at the signing ceremony in the parish church of San Sebastián, but few could sign with anything more than an X. These men, who dedicated themselves
to the path of the Rosary, were joined by 17 hermanas. Most early members were male but women were soon just as numerous.

In some respects, the cofradía’s policies attracted the humblest and most marginal of parishioners. But considerable ritual spending and socio-economic differentiation were practiced as well as encouraged. Social status ranged from mulatto servants and indigenous farm hands, carpenters, orphans, widows, and choirmasters to criollo priests (after 1672) and Captains. Even Capitán Joseph de Lisama, mayordomo of the Holy True Cross, joined the castas in 1677 (RII: 18r). Throughout the 18th century, the Lisama name resurfaced; influential criollo families were willingly led by castas. The membership lists seldom revealed ethnicity, except in the case of non-castas, whether españoles or naturales. Most members, at least in the founding group, would be mulattoes, followed by negros, mestizos, moriscos, and perhaps castizos, who were most akin to criollos.

Religious fees reflect the castas’ collective socio-economic position. Dues were minute (1 real) but there was also a monthly fee of ½ real for masses and candle wax (Ord. 1). Affluent hermanos paid all mass dues at once (1 p 4 rr) or made politically-motivated donations (Ord. 3: 10 pounds of candle wax to become a mayordomo, 5 for diputados). Instead of being paid for their service, as in the Nativity of Our Lady, casta lay leaders paid to serve. Clearly only men of certain means could present themselves as suitable candidates. New cabildos were elected each year on the Sunday of Carnesto Lendas, “the titular festival of the Blessed Rosary, with its mass, sermon and procession, at which all of the brethren shall pray the Rosary to the Most Blessed Virgin, with the ornament of wax of the finest that is possible” (Ord. 4).
Leaders’ and members’ resources were regularly exhausted through celebrations of the ritual calendar. There were bi-monthly masses (2 pesos) for all living and dead members, in which brethren carried candles when escorting the Holy Eucharist (Ord. 5). Deceased members’ funeral masses and burials (2 pesos) required candle wax, payment and a meal for the priest and singers: “a sung mass of Requiem and in the burial the confraternal banner and twelve candles shall be carried” (Ord. 6). On Holy Wednesday,

[There is to a] penitential procession with the image of the Solitude of the Most Blessed Virgin, [insignias] of Blood and Light, [and the] rosaries, scapularies, and white and black tunics that each member shall pay to rent. The brethren shall carry candles. Five pesos shall be paid to the priest for the sermon. (Ord. 8)

To offset expenses, a license was secured from the Señor Provisor for the purpose of “collecting alms outside of the doctrina” (Ord. 3). Each mayordomo and diputado mayor and menor was entrusted by the bishop, head priest and members to use “alms to help sick or poor brethren or sisters” (Ord. 7). Alms were soon collected in Tlacotepec, Los Carla and Quechula, all nearby but independent of the parish (RII: 42r). In 1680 Bishop Dr. Nicolás Gómez Brizeño, seated in Puebla’s Sacred Church Cathedral of the Holy Cross, instructed the hermanos to “ask for alms in any and all parts, towns and places of this bishopric” in order to buy adornments for the cult of the Rosary (R II: 43r).

New and Old Outsiders: Spaniards and Women

Most ordinances would have been produced with the aid of bishops’ models, so they should not be expected to contain original or subversive statements. But castas actively co-opted rhetoric commonly used by Spaniards and turned it back on them. The founders would permit Spaniards to join “should they be of good life and not scandalous” (Ord. 2). Variants of the phrase were by pious Christians, usually Spaniards, in order to
elevate themselves above their neighbors. In Celaya, Guanajuato, the criollo founders of the Confraternity of the Holy Sacrament welcomed “all people of whatever state [calidad], class, age, sex or condition, excluding those of scandalous habits” (1774; Von Germeten 2006: 196). Despite emphasizing ethnic inclusivity and behavior, Celaya’s criollo lay leaders went on to associate membership types with ranked statuses.

The founding casta lay leaders then stipulated that “Spaniards must bear insignias with us in processions” (Ord. 2). Considering the heated debate over processional insignias in the holy True Cross, the mulattoes’ intentions may be veiled but they can be inferred. There was some concern, whether reasonable or not, that criollo penitents might refuse to march alongside the castas as brethren. Perhaps Spaniards would want to bring their own insignias, dictate to the mulatto officials where they would stand and what they would carry, or even boycott the processions altogether and organize their own.

The question of admitting Spaniards as members and leaders was raised right after the setting of dues (Ord. 1) and again at the end of the document (Ord. 9). Ethnic coexistence was clearly at the forefront of the minds of the 40 founders or their supervisor, Antonio Benitez Coronel, the parish’s cura beneficiado. In the ordinance on “councils and elections” Spaniards were enjoined again. Criollos and all women were blocked from joining the council’s ranks or engaging in decision-making:

In the council meetings and elections, only old [or longstanding] brethren and past officials may attend, not those of insufficient age or brethren who did not have the benefit of knowing the rise of the said confraternity. Women shall not be present nor shall Spanish brethren because they were not present at the initiation of the confraternity. We are obedient sons of the Holy Mother Church. (Ord. 9)
Castas saw themselves as pious Christians worthy of being entrusted with self-governance. Self-conscious, racist, ageist, and patriarchal attitudes expressed here echoed policies and practices that Von Germeten (2006: 196) uncovered among urban criollos.

Invoking Spaniards and women in the ordinances and subsequent entries indicates that they were recognized as valid and active members but not part of the cofradía’s inner circle. The widest possible sphere of members was enjoined when notaries wrote ‘hermanos’, ‘hermanos y hermanas’ or listed all ethnic groups. This practice is reminiscent of the scribes of Popoloca and barrio-based groups using ‘cofrades’, ‘hermanos’ or ‘hermanos y hermanas’ whether writing in Spanish or Nahuatl.

The castas’ records reflect few attempts to emphasize status, other than highlighting confraternal officials, donors, processional penitents, bishops, priests, and members with certain titles or occupations. The 1668 constitution can be seen as hinting at but not making an argument for gender, ethnic or class parity. In this respect, it falls somewhere between Spanish and Popoloca charters.

There is no documentation of mulatto and criollo members conflicting over processions or elections. The charter was read aloud each year; existing and prospective criollo members should have known where they stood in relation to the founders. Their options were to comply with the casta lay hierarchy, petition or defect. The original and customary order of members was “mulatto, black and mestizo.” But in 1677, whether due to ethnic ratios or scribal bias, Spaniards were even afforded primacy: “The Spanish, mulatto, black, and mestizo brethren gathered” (RII: 28r). In 1698, a large group of Spaniards joined but one’s name was crossed out. He stated that he did “not want to be a brother” (RIII: 71r-v). No explanation was given for the man’s apparent change of heart.
Ethnic groups’ ascribed ‘innate qualities’ operate overtly and covertly throughout the wide expanse of colonial societies in their associated institutions, discourses and practices. Self-preservationist views are expressed corporately through ethnic slurs, sometimes in armed combat. Andrew Fisher (2002: 14) examined how 18th-century inhabitants from Tierra Caliente, Guerrero, engaged in violent conflicts over community boundaries. Indians from Apaxteco cried "black outsider dogs" and "mulatto dogs, black sons of whores" at Cacaltepeque’s casta residents in a dispute over a corn field. Afro-mestizas from Cacaltepeque were particularly vocal during and after the exchange, earning them the reputation of "chattering mulata whores." Reversing the "dog" insult, the casta women likened the Indians to barbarian Chichimecas, "bad Christians” as well as "traitors to the King, and enemies of charity and of God Our Lord."

Although more polite, rhetoric in confraternal charters also contains moralistic ethnic stereotypes. Other than the Holy Name of Jesus’ 1595 act, there was no evidence of local conflicts between indigenous and casta peoples. Popolocas grouped mulattoes and blacks with Spaniards, targeting all non-indios except mestizos. Early colonial petitions and the insignia dispute indicate long-term Spanish-Indian tensions. Castas were seldom accused of wrongdoing until late colonial edicts from Puebla’s bishops. In most of these edicts, indios were well-meaning but child-like and dirty pobres miserables. Mulat筏es and all castas were dangerous liminals who overstepped societal boundaries.

When arguing that Spaniards were natural outsiders to the cofradía and/or community and that they could be scandalous, casta lay leaders framed themselves as true insiders and Catholics. When the head priest and Puebla’s bishop sanctioned the 1668 constitution, they did not dispute the castas’ assertions. If the castas had intended to
express subaltern or counter-hegemonic discourse, they did so in a manner that was subtle enough to conform to ecclesiastic authorities’ constitutional models.

*The Interplay of Castas, Criollos, Women, and Priests through Property and Leadership*

Casta lay leaders emulated criollos and Popolocas. Annual cargo (86 pesos) and descargo amounts (147) were in line with poor Popoloca or barrio groups. Most funds went to priests, singers, buglers, bakers, candle-makers, florists, and image guardians for their services during Holy Week (RII: 35r, 1681). Castas collected alms from members and neighbors. Individual donated candle wax or iron, or vowed to “visit and heal the brethren of the said confraternity,” tending to the “poor or alone” (RII: 37r, 1683).

Castas co-owned few ritual items at the cofradía’s inception. The 1671 bienes included “an image of Our Lady with her litter, dressed as [the Virgin of] Solitude, a Holy Cross, a banner with cords and embroidery, a cross of silver-plated wood, half a pound of candle wax, 29 rods, a box with a key, a wood basin for begging alms, and a small bell” (RI: 23v). In 1672, there was a new towel and 14 pounds of worked wax (RI: 24r). By 1693 there were also 2 images of the Virgin with their vestments and crowns, as well as paintings of San Miguel and the Virgin of the Mysteries (RIII: 6r-6v).

The castas managed confraternal lands and churches, just like earlier Popoloca and later barrio groups. In 1668, the “hermanos mulatos, negros and mestizos” requested permission to erect an ermita on a solar that was donated by parish priests:

There is a large plot of land that was given by their fathers [priests]. It is for the said brethren to erect a hermitage for the Most Blessed Virgin of the Rosary, with more than two blocks, on which they erect the said hermitage. In one block [ward or wing] is the Virgin of Solitude and the other is for erecting the said hermitage on the said plot of land, which yields nothing, which is only wasted now and
always, in what is Tecamachalco, on the 14th of September, in the year of 1668. Don Juan de Castillo. (RI: 8v)

The notary employed Spanish colonists’ common device of claiming that a plot of land was useless and unoccupied in order to justify the castas’ appropriation of the solar for their place of worship. Castas had learned to navigate local legal and social circles.

In 1670, mayordomo Nicolás Gómez issued an order that “work shall begin on the said chapel” (RI: 11r). He was grateful to be entrusted with the lands and new chapel. Various solares and donors were listed to situate the sacred space:

José Marín Calle in the center, to the south, with the plot of Head Priest Antonio [Benitez Coronel], to the east …of Judge Sanchez with a patio, and to the west with the house and plot of Maria de Calderas, and also for the cost of a cloak, which belongs solely to the Virgin of the Rosary… that a shrine [casa de vivienda or home for the image] be made, with Gomez de Guzman to the north, towards me [the chief steward] which is located in this said town. I give thanks… to the Most Blessed Virgin to be in this position… (RI: 10v)

There was no more information provided on the solares or the ermita(s). The lands and structure(s) in question became the Christ-centered Church of Calvary. They were identified only by 2 images of the Virgin. The ‘black Christ,’ the current patron of the church, would have been a suitable benefactor for mulattoes, blacks and mestizos. But the dark Savior in the castas’ church is purely coincidental; some claim that poison was miraculously absorbed from a local believer, turning the image black. The move date to the chapel is unknown; elections were still being held in the parish church in 1776.

Like the Spanish and indigenous men and women of the Holy True Cross and San Nicolás, castas offered and pursued rather exclusive penitential orders. By 1700 some hermanos chose to pay extra fees, donate candle wax or other ritual items, recruit 4 or 5 members, and/or rent cloaks in order to qualify for an insignia path, especially those associated with Holy Wednesday. That there were dozens of perpetuated penitents
suggests that castas could attract and reward generous and ambitious members. By 1743, the annual fiesta (October 1st) cost 14 pesos; the Holy Wednesday sermon and procession cost 18 pesos (RIV: 41v, 43r). Processions were expensive enterprises but charging members to walk was lucrative. This “pay-to-play” arrangement was perfectly legal; it had been sanctioned by a 1698 order from Puebla’s bishop and provisor (RIII: 24r).

Despite the castas’ collective marginality and high proportion of female members, castas may have emulated the criollos’ patriarchal attitudes and practices. In the Holy True Cross, some women dedicated themselves solely to the path of the Virgin. In San Nicolás, women became perpetuated penitents but not insignia carriers. In Our Lady of the Rosary, no female penitents were recorded. Men perpetuated into the insignia paths of the Holy Eucharist, Blessed Christ, Virgin, Santa Veronica, and the Holy Cross (in that order), some by recruiting compañeros. There was no rule barring female penitents but Spanish and even casta lay leaders may have had their own reservations about women’s visibility, position, placement, and behavior in processions.

Von Germeten’s (2006: 44) research on Afro-Mexican cofradas sheds some light:

By the 1700s, mulatto men had taken over women’s leadership roles and made their confraternities increasingly similar to male-dominated Spanish brotherhoods. As men sought Spanish-defined respectability in the 1700s, they deemphasized women’s participation… Confraternities lost their unique and perhaps African-influenced practices, exchanging agency through marginality for advantage through inclusion in Hispanic society.

I found no evidence of castas granting leadership roles to women. There were fewer wives, daughters or mothers acknowledged than in the Popoloca or barrio groups. While this could reflect the relative independence of women in casta cofradías, criollo authorities would attribute the difference to casta family disintegration and dysfunction.
Like other lay leaders, castas eventually violated their own charter, albeit not by choice. Most local breaches were financial, but in this case, it was the ethnic exclusivity of elections. Ethnic designation went unstated for most officials (82%) followed by mulattoes and españoles, with no known mestizos, negros or indios ever elected. Besides a few diputados mayores and menores in the 1670s and 1680s, the only man who was clearly identified as a mulatto was Juan Bernabe, a diputado mayor (1671, 1680) and long-standing mayordomo (1678-1679, 1683-1690). Secretarios tracked mulattoes only at the beginning, after which priestly scribes may have downplayed ethnicity. In 1686, one diputado was a maestro de capilla, so he was indigenous and perhaps a nobleman.

Parish priests supervised, recorded and signed off on all of the castas’ elections, in which only 12 men voted. A 1737 entry signed by cura beneficiado Br. Juan de Ochoa, and cura interino Gregorio de San Esteban revealed that “the twelve of the table” elected Don Felipe Caloca as mayordomo (RIV: 26r). More was revealed in 1739:

Being in the parish church of the said town, on the celebration of the festival of the confraternity of Our Lady of the Rosary. And in order to elect the chief steward, the twelve of the table gathered at the sound of the bell, together and congregated in front of the Señor Licenciado Don Francisco Cansino, who attended the said election due to the absence of Señor Don Juan Joseph de Ochoa, Priest, his Majesty, Vicar and Ecclesiastic Judge of this said town and its doctrine… (RIV: 29r)

If the 1668 charter was upheld, then the 12-member voting council included local mulatto, black or mestizo men of a certain age, all presumably married (Ord. #9). But the founders’ pledge to maintain an all-casta cabildo may have been abandoned or overruled.

Fiscal mismanagement (spending was an average of 170% more than earnings) and leadership monopolies (53% of all elections were reelections) led mulattoes to seek help from, or be taken over by, Spanish ecclesiastic authorities. But interventions did not
occur in the first 80 years. As in the Popoloca and barrio cofradías, priests began to make further inroads into the castas’ confraternal business by the 1750s. Electoral and fiscal data between 1712 and 1736 are missing, so certain patterns are obscured.

After mayordomo Don Joseph Marín de la Parra’s 4-year term and “accurate accounts” (1744-1747), followed by 3 years of no records (1748-1750), Spaniard Don Miguel de Vargas, “examiner of the Holy Office of the Inquisition of this Kingdom,” led the cofradía in 1751 (RIV: 38r). Priest Br. Don Vicente Miguel Nagle del Aguila, rector of the doctrina and all local confraternities, was appointed in 1752 and remained until 1755 (RIV: 40v). Following Spanish leadership, there was some stability, momentarily; there were surpluses in 1751 and 1754 as well as a balanced budget in 1755.

Ecclesiastic authorities likely saw themselves as the castas’ benevolent patrons as much as their corrective fathers; hundreds of pesos were channeled in and out of the cofradia during the priests’ terms. Without many contemporaneous inventories, I do not know if ecclesiastic authorities initiated extensive alms campaigns and/or purchases of expensive ritual items. But by 1774, the hermanos held “images, chains of pearls, and clothing in common” (RV: 95r-96r). Mayordomos had acquired nearly the same wealth as the Spanish lay leaders, but little more than was present at their own foundation.

In the late 18th century, a period of confraternal decline, chaos and outsiders surfaced again. Don Diego Ruíz de Santarana resigned after serving for only 2 weeks:

This election, expressed above, is invalid, because even though the elected conceded at first, about fifteen days went by and he resigned, for motives that he alleged, in front of the Señor Don and priest of this district, who received it [the resignation] from him. (RIV: 67r, 1762)

There was some overspending in 1762 but Don Diego’s year was not particularly bad.
Recession or little revenue returned in the 1770s and never fully left, leading to another Spanish intervention. In 1780 and 1795, dons and labradores (landowners) were imposed and accepted as leaders due to “difficulties that were continually experienced in the elections of the chief steward” (RV: 11r, 19r). The 1780 mayordomo, Don Antonio Orea, remained in office until 1791. Appointee Don José Mariano Lisama served only in 1795 after he was not elected but “accepted due to electoral problems” (RV: 19r). The only apparent “electoral problem” was that the 1794-1795 mayordomo, Mariano José Tello, died in office. There was no alleviation of the fiscal crisis under new management; Lisama recorded fewer ritual items than were presented in the 1774 inventory.

The landowners’ ethnicities were not mentioned but it is likely that they were criollos, castizos or even mestizos rather than mulattoes or negros. After 1734, many mayordomos were referred to as dons (1670-1823: 32%), but this may reflect the esteemed public office rather than any inherited socio-economic or ethnic status.

Señor Don Joseph Ignacio Montero led the cofradía in its final 25 years (1799-1823). In 1802, Montero credited hermanos and hermanas with alms collected for the cofradía. Ritual items were still acquired for the cofradía in 1822. Perhaps the bishop was no longer concerned about electoral irregularities because priests or landowners, assumed to be competent caretakers, had seized control of the castas’ cofradía.

Regardless of ethnicity, class or gender, ecclesiastic authorities tended to frame late colonial lay leaders as notoriously poor caretakers of funds and property. But this level of outside intervention was rare. Although parish priests clearly intervened on a few occasions, visitas were documented only in 1708, 1743 and 1776, so the castas may have
operated under the bishop’s radar. At the very end (1823), a rather sizeable deficit of 2,354 pesos was likely remedied by appropriating the castas’ ritual items and property.

If the mulattoes had been to blame for the cofradía’s hardship, chaos or losses, the association was never put to paper. There was no evidence of fraud, corruption or nepotism by mulattoes or anyone specifically, only few resources, reelection and early death. There was no explanation provided for the longevity and delayed closure of Our Lady of the Rosary. Priestly intervention may have been the key to castas being permitted to outlast Popoloca-dominated barrio groups by a half-century (1776-1823), even surviving Mexican Independence. Welcoming criollos did come with some rewards.

“With Her Husband’s Consent”: Tecamachalco’s Late Colonial Barrio Sisterhoods

Lay religious sisterhoods provided rare social arenas in which New Spain’s rural women enjoyed formal leadership positions. Charity and spiritual growth inspired these women, as did civic pride and political competition among parishes, barrios, ethnic groups, and even women. As an alternative to town councils, so clearly dominated by men, whether caciques, Spaniards, or even castizos and mestizos, cofradías afforded a rich public and ritual life to virtually anyone who paid their dues and did not “disturb the peace” of the elected council. Women, whether indigenous, Spanish, casta, free, slave, married, single, widowed, orphaned, sick, old, young, rich, poor, elite, commoner, barrio or farm resident, sustained cofradías through their sizeable presence, alms and endeavors.

How did late colonial women’s forms of religious expression and social activism develop? I explore female membership, service and leadership, ethnic coexistence and neighborhood rivalry within and among three sisterhoods. Each group was dedicated to
an aspect of the Virgin Mary: Our Lady of Solitude (based in the chapel and barrio of San Sebastián, 1713-1776), Our Lady of Transit (San Joseph, 1732-1776) and Our Lady of Sorrows (two groups: San Nicolás and San Joseph, 1743-1776). All barrios were represented but the rise of two San Joseph sisterhoods suggests the barrio’s preeminence.

To what extent could mayordomas and diputadas make decisions, resolve conflicts, acquire and manage property, and pursue their own agendas in comparison to mayordomos and diputados? I compare women’s figurehead positions within sisterhoods to their auxiliary roles in male-dominated cofradías. Highlighting women within a rural, multiethnic, spatially segmented parish adds a new dimension to confraternal studies, most of which have centered on urban, male-dominated groups.

*Social Order and Agency: The Slow Rise of Female Lay Leaders*

In Tecamachalco’s male-dominated cofradías, most women were presented with minimal context amongst other memberships. In certain encounters, the social barrier of gender may have paralleled that of ethnicity. Even though women’s sacred duties often overlapped with those of men, they were summarily excluded from most official confraternal business, whatever their calidad. Women could not attend meetings or engage in elections, even in Popoloca groups and the lone casta cofradía.

Women collected alms, tracked attendance, visited sick members, cared for sacred images, escorted the Eucharist, and taught catechism, roles that parishioners still play today. In daily (vespers) and special events (patron saint days), female attendees still outnumber males, at a ratio of two-to-one. Among volunteers who plan and execute events, the gender ratio is even more pronounced, unless we factor in priests, acolytes,
sacristans, altar boys, and laborers, which are prestigious and paid positions monopolized by male religious specialists. Perhaps parish women have always been the most active lay-workers, even though their voices are not represented in confraternal records.

In colonial Mexico, community leadership was dominated by influential Spanish, mestizo and native men who practiced nepotism and reelection, sometimes serving up to two decades in a row. Rotating their positions in civic-religious hierarchies, these men left little room for newcomers and agendas that did not conform to their own. Had there been contemporaneous documents in the municipal archive, I would have looked for mayordomas’ husbands on the town council.

Married men’s monopoly of leadership positions persists today within rural mayordomías, especially among the Maya. Offices are rotated among established long-term residents. In Tecamachalco’s cofradías, single men could not run for office or join certain orders, likely because they had no wives to prepare special feasts or host neighbors. Affluent elders would have enjoyed the honor of civic-religious leadership more often than younger men with lesser means. Classism and ageism interacted alongside gender and marital status in annual contests of prestige and power.

Parishioner Coexistence and Competition: A Tale of Three Sisterhoods

Tecamachalco’s sisterhoods were a late development, all established within a single generation (1713-1743), a mere generation before most groups were ordered dissolved by the bishop of Puebla. The founding documents did not survive, only records of masses, ecclesiastic inspections, annual elections and accounts. Sisterhoods had short runs, owned little property and were memorialized in scant records. But their mere
existence suggests that a variety of women sought a level of spiritual intimacy and social integration beyond the opportunities afforded to them in male-dominated cofradíás.

As communities became more populated and ethnically diverse in the late colonial period, corporate consciousness was likely compounded. Proliferation of cofradíás and other corporate units operating in the same parish led to differentiation. Within the sphere of local religion, the optimal mediums for expressing ethnic or regional identity were the acquisition and adornment of sacred images, the ritual pageantry of Christian processions and the appropriation of a legitimizing name and chapel that housed confraternal meetings and ritual objects. The founders of the earliest and major male-dominated cofradíás tended to evoke core or masculine religious imagery when adopting a name: the Holy Name of Jesus (1581), the Holy Eucharist (before 1575), the Holy True Cross (1575), and Our Lord of the Holy Tomb of Calvary (by 1718). Later, smaller groups were dedicated to male saints, barrios and chapels: San Joseph (1642), San Sebastián (1686) and San Nicolás de Tolentino (1689).

William B. Taylor (1996: 303) outlined a timeline of confraternal cults after “umbrella sodalities” or core devotional groups, which were supposed to welcome all locals and sponsor weekly activities, were established. Tecamachalco hosted several “open” groups: the Holy Sacrament, the Souls in Purgatory, Our Lady of the Rosary, and the Holy Sepulcher. Then other groups emerged (Ibid: 303):

Ideally, but not often in fact, there would be a cofradía or hermandad for every special advocation, fiesta, or major image in the parish and visita churches. These more specialized sodalities might be made up of people from a particular barrio who were especially devoted to one saint or religious image or a nucleus of families who donated the property and labor to promote a particular devotion.
Later smaller groups, whether Popoloca, barrio or all-female, might not have been under the same pressure to open their doors to everyone, at least not as officers.

There was virtually no separation of barrio, chapel and cofradía or knowledge of which emerged first. For example, San Joseph existed at least a generation before its cofradía. The cofrades’ ancestors may have influenced Franciscan friars to dedicate the barrio, chapel and cofradía to the patron of the residents’ shared profession – Joseph the carpenter. Sisterhoods arose in a time when barrios and chapels already existed. Chief stewardesses were likely drawn from their groups’ respective barrios; their corporate images and activities were likely housed in the barrio chapels. But women did not devote themselves to their barrios’ patron saints; appropriately, they followed the Virgin Mary.

The sisterhoods’ founders distinguished their spiritual and gender identities from those of existing groups. Mayordomas justified their presence and participation in local religion and politics by dedicating their cults to particularly pious and melancholy aspects of the Virgin Mary (solitude and sorrow), and by centering their devotion on the chapels in their home barrios. By 1700, the few devotions yet to be adopted centered on the long-suffering Virgin, who still symbolizes a mother’s love and self-sacrifice to millions of Mexican women today. Six of 15 cofradías (40%), 3 that were male-dominated, were centered on Marian cults. Other than the 3 sisterhoods, the Marian clubs were either minor subaltern or latecomer groups: the Popolocas’ Nativity of Our Lady (1595), the castas’ Our Lady of the Rosary (1668), and Our Lady of Mercy/Charity (by 1726).

The implications of naming patterns are unclear without proof of cofradías being assigned particular devotions by priests, or founders regarding their choices of devotions as strategic. But I view locally-made or commissioned images of Our Lady of Solitude,
Our Lady of Transit and Our Lady of Sorrows, each housed within a barrio shrine, as directly inspiring the co-creation of the sisterhoods by local women and parish priests.

Out of 15 local groups, the sisterhoods and 2 barrio groups (San Joseph, San Nicolás) were hermandades. Taylor (1996: 303) identified these brotherhoods and sisterhoods as minor or less important lay religious organizations. In Tecamachalco only spatially-circumscribed devotional groups tied to a certain barrio and chapel were hermandades. Most groups were referred to as cofradías (8) or the variant archicofradías (2 Spanish-led groups that originated by 1575; denoting preeminence and/or antiquity).

*The Sisterhood of Our Lady of Solitude of the Barrio of San Sebastián (1713-1776)*

Our Lady of Solitude was founded in 1713 by female residents of the barrio of San Sebastián but non-residents were also welcomed. Even if women lived too far away to attend the yearly round of festivities, membership and service in multiple cofradías was customary and indicative of superior service, leisure time, wealth, and social ties.

Our Lady of Solitude was the barrio’s secondary patron, also known as Our Lady of the Barrio of San Sebastián (SOLS I: 3v, 1732). The founders commissioned a black and orange drawing of their patroness, depicted with a solemn facial expression, halo, hands clasped in prayer, and a rosary. To her left and right were two large lit candles. Beneath her was a crown of thorns resting on a cloud. Like other depictions of the Virgin and female saints, Our Lady was set within an oval frame, as if looking out a window.

Regional identity is apparent throughout the records. Associations to the town’s oldest church and the barrio that was named for the parish’s one-time patron saint, San Sebastián, were emphasized. The hermandad was founded and “located in the Church of
the Lord San Sebastián” (SOLS I: 1r, 1713). It is not clear if priest Joseph Blanco de la Vega referred to the parish church or the barrio chapel. By 1730 annual elections and periodic masses were held in the chapel. The 1746 election was “located in the Church of San Sebastián,” which was probably the chapel (SOLS I: 31v, 1746). The chapel would have housed the group’s image of Our Lady as well as other ritual items and served as origination and end point for processions and the fiesta titular.

David Tavárez (2006: 135) urges scholars to search for the hidden agency behind localized Catholic devotions:

Autonomy may be seen as analytical shorthand for several forms of political action – such as secession, the spontaneous organization of local confraternities, or the defense of communal lands – that were articulated in different ways within different native communities.

The sisterhood’s founders were likely cognizant of the “symbolic capital” that was involved when they anchored their group to the ancient chapel of San Sebastián. By commissioning religious images, tending to the chapel, sponsoring masses, holding elections, and organizing processions, activities that were all centered on the chapel, its courtyard, the surrounding barrio and perhaps the adjacent cemetery, women left regular reminders of their legitimate affiliations to ancient and integral sacred spaces.

Ties to other sodalities support the sisterhood’s integration into the town’s spiritual life. A cohort and likely origin point was the mixed-gender and multi-ethnic confraternity of San Sebastián, named for its host barrio and chapel (1689-1776). After 1743, the women of Our Lady of Solitude expressed their solidarity with other female penitents in joint processions with the Sisterhood of Our Lady of Sorrows. The Holy Sepulcher of Calvary, whose leaders and members met in the church of Calvary, was a contemporary and male counterpart. Españoles and indios joined the dual orders of the
Centurion and Death, followed strict processional rules and elected 2 men to officiate “without intervention” from one another. A comparison of the groups’ solutions to ethnic diversity would be useful, but the sisterhood has no charter and the cofradía’s only remaining records are the 1718 constitution and two electoral entries.

There were 38 elections recorded (1720-1776). Most missing years correspond to the sisterhood’s beginning (1713-1740). Only one book survived and there is no act, charter or membership lists. Electoral data point to a few patterns, including a low reelection rate (8%), the lowest in the parish. In 1726, 1740, 1754, and 1759 two women served as mayordomas. These incidences may have involved two candidates earning an equal number of votes or a woman who resigned or died being replaced. In Our Lady of Sorrows, dual mayordomas represented two barrios but this was not the case here.

The sisterhood’s leadership and membership were probably Popoloca-dominated but españolas and castas may have also officiated. Barrio San Sebastián would have been multiethnic but predominantly indigenous due to its peripheral, western location. The mayordomas’ places of residence were overlooked. Perhaps barrio residence was a given or assumed by priests who oversaw the elections. The application of ethnic identifiers was usually far from consistent but almost totally absent here. There was at least one India natural, Luisa Bartholas, elected in 1754. Women were not blind to the differences among them simply because notaries did not record this information. Key obstacles in my analysis of ethnicity are late colonial notaries’ cursory treatment of most confraternal business and the disappearance of crucial sections of the records.

One tool for inferring ethnicity is names analysis. Baptismal records reveal that only Christian or Spanish names were being used by residents, or recognized by parish
priests, in the 18th century. Mayordomas were addressed by what we would recognize as two first names, often that of a female saint, especially María, or the female version of a male name, such as Josepha, Juana, Petrona, or Sebastiana. Local last names, such as Bañuelos, Vetancurt, Villanueva, or Zaragoza, are rare entries, leading me to surmise that most mayordomas were indigenous and not noble by birth.

When a woman accepted her new position as mayordoma her name was annotated. After the 1766 Inquisitional inspection of the parish, mayordomas were presented as the wives of named and presumably well-known men: “Elena María, wife of Francisco Montojes [1767]… Thomasa Valencia, wife of Theodoro Juáres [1768]… Alexandra María, widow of Francisco de Aguila [1769].” In the sisterhood’s final year (1776), an additional statement was provided: “Josepha Cisneros, with her husband’s approval/consent [beneplácito], accepted the position.” Husbands received as much if not more attention than mayordomas in supposedly matrifocal or women-centered records. Men enjoyed public recognition simply by virtue of being male, so it was logical to highlight their indirect involvement, much like couples in today’s “society pages.”

Membership in real and fictive kinship groups was paramount to late colonial women. But I doubt that mayordomas volunteered the words attributed to them without prompting from a priest. The acceptance speech is indicative of ecclesiastic and scribal practices shaped by Bourbon reforms that were generally hostile to women, Indians and castas. The central role of patriarchal kin ties in defining female status throughout New Spain is also apparent. One man emphasized mayordomas’ familial ties: Br. Manuel Joseph Rodríguez de Aboura, the parish priest and local representative of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, who executed parish copies of the bishop’s inspection of chapels. He
sanctioned all of the elections in question (1767-1769, 1776) and signed off on the final
decade of elections, but he only mentioned husbands 4 times. His recognition of the
husbands as key barrio or town residents may be the justification for these 4 entries.

Widows, married and single women enlisted, but no members or leaders were
known doñas or doncellas, of legitimate if not noble birth. Even though women were lay
leaders, 4 of them were noted for their ties to the more visible and socially-valued men in
their lives. Naturally, mayordomos were never labeled as women’s spouses. Linking
women to their husbands conformed to other confraternal and baptismal examples.
Women joined, even led groups, and served as baptismal madrinas on their own. But
priests frequently framed women as mujeres, viudas and solteras. Even women no longer
or not yet married were widows or daughters of men, identified by names and sometimes
titles. Some men were “sons” but “husband” was not an interdependent status. But some
women in Spanish, Popoloca and mixed cofradías were listed before husbands and
children, as if they led the family inscription or were of higher status.

Annual accounts (1728-1775) and occasional inventories (1713, 1733, 1742)
presented by mayordomas as well as periodic inspections by the bishop (1726, 1745,
1753, 1776) and priests (1729, 1766) paint a picture of the sisterhood’s rise and fall. The
1713 inventory attests that the sisterhood was similar in wealth to other barrio groups. In
his 1726 “ecclesiastic visit of this parish,” Puebla’s bishop imparted to priest Joseph
Blanco de Vega that mayordomas should be prevented from “excessive spending” (SOLS
I: 4v, 1726). Br. Joseph later found everything to be in order (SOLS I: 5v, 1729). The
1733 inventory revealed the acquisition of 10 sheep, which were to “stay with the Lady in
the Chapel,” perpetually funding her devotions (SOLS I: 74r, 1733). Proceeds were
channeled into the hermandad, producing the balanced budget of 1732. But annual income remained small (41 pesos) in comparison to spending (76).

The final 1742 inventory revealed more items. The 1740s was a lucrative decade, with mayordomas overspending by 400% in 1744 but then presenting nearly balanced budgets right after the 1745 visita by the “General Bishop of this District” (SOLS I: 14v, 1745). There was another balanced budget a few years after the 1753 visita (SOLS I: 37r, 1757). Then there was sporadic earning, spending and record-keeping in the 1760s, followed by even smaller cargo and descargo in the 1770s. From a fiscal standpoint it is not surprising that the hermandad’s records end right after the Bishop of Puebla’s inspection of the parish in 1776 (SOLS I: 68r, 1776). In contrast to the other sisterhoods, priests did not memorialize the forced closure of Our Lady of Solitude.

Señor Don Nicolás reviewed the books in 1800, writing illegibly in the book’s jacket. He must be Don Nicolás de Santiago, identified in 1800 as a mayordomo, writing directly under the sisterhood’s first inventory (SOLS I: 3v, 1713, 1800). Don Nicolás likely led a surviving group that scavenged the inventories for ritual items. Alternatively he may have revived devotion to Our Lady of Solitude. The image of Our Lady should have remained within the barrio chapel of San Sebastián. But parish priests obscured the final destination of other paraphernalia, whether due to ignorance or complicity.

The Sisterhood of Our Lady of Transit of the Barrio of San Joseph (1732-1776)

Similarities in the curtailed trajectories and sparse records of the sisterhoods lead me to present the remaining two groups only briefly. With no acts, charters or membership lists, policies must be inferred from a small set of practices. Annual
elections and accounts, as well as a handful of inventories and inspections, highlight the relative performances and positions of female lay leaders and ecclesiastic authorities.

Our Lady of Transit was founded in 1732 in the barrio of San Joseph. For a mere 45 years, women focused their energies on their masses, titular festival, image of the barrio’s patroness, and the chapel where it was housed. The church was younger than that of San Sebastián but perhaps redeemed by its more central location (4 blocks from the parish church and town plaza), its larger sanctuary and courtyard. The women’s fundraising efforts, charitable acts and ritual celebrations are unknown.

Electoral data reflect notable particularities; only 32 years are documented with various years missing in the 1740s, despite ecclesiastic inspections in 1745 and 1753. Reelection was practiced in only 25% of the cases but this rate was still 3 times higher than in Our Lady of Solitude. Parish priests observed and sanctioned all elections.

Ethnicity was overlooked but can be inferred from names analysis; 75% of mayordomas had one or more last or family names, such as Melchora de Beristain or Josefa de la Encarnación Ramírez, rather than the second name of Antonia, Cecilia, Gertrudís, Isabel, María, or Rosa. Makeshift last names frequently alluded to one’s saint day, baptismal madrina or the Virgin Mary. The naming pattern in Our Lady of Transit contrasts strongly with that of Our Lady of Solitude, leading me to propose that it was dominated by criollas or elite Popolocas who resided in the center of town.

Only the 1735 mayordoma, María Rosa, was identified as a cacica. Baptismal records reveal that there were few noble parents in the parish by the late 17th century (<1%). The majority were cacicas rather than caciques. Mayordomas named De la Cruz or Mendosa were likely drawn from the native nobility or untitled descendents; titles
were no longer customary. In the baptismal records (1641-1700) De la Cruz, Mendoza and Moctezuma were the most common names tied to cacicas principales and doñas.

The sisterhood was likely ethnically inclusive in membership and leadership. Aldaraca, Ojeda, Rodríguez, and Velasquez, other names of mayordomas, were more commonly linked to criollas, mestizas or castizas. Mayordomas’ presumed residence in the multiethnic barrio of San Joseph, close to the central traza, supports their identities as affluent if not elite townspeople of various backgrounds, excluding mulatas and negras.

Mayordomas, like members of other cofradías and madrinas, were publicly defined not only by their community service, but by the men in their lives, whether their husbands or fathers. The 1768 victor was Anastacia María, “who with the permission of her husband, Matheo Clemente, accepted the position” (SOLT I: 34r, 1768). He was probably the man who served as the paid mayordomo of the Popolocas’ Our Lady of the Nativity in 1780 and 1781. Although Anastacia María’s lay leadership preceded that of her presumed husband, he would be well known enough to warrant identification in the sisterhood’s records. Juana Ambrocia (1770) and Josefa de la Encarnación Ramírez (1771) also assumed power with their husband’s permissions (SOLT I: 37r, 39r).

A familiar priest left his patriarchal mark on 3 elections. Br. Manuel Joseph Rodríguez de Aboura inserted the almost apologetic statements into the women’s imagined acceptance speeches. The parish priest saw female lay leaders as good wives first. Mayordoma autonomy was tempered by familial obligations, but perhaps only according to ecclesiastic policies influenced by the Bourbon reforms, which marginalized women outside of their home devotions. In reality or in local practices, these mayordomas may have enjoyed considerable leeway, but the evidence is inconclusive.
Mayordomas spent more than twice as much (59 pesos) as they collected (24). There was no documentation of corporate ownership of lands or livestock. The 1732 and 1757 inventories, the latter signed by two diputadas or witnesses reflect gradual accumulation of ritual items, including a silver crown for the “Sacred Queen of the Angels” (SOLT I: 26r, 1757). Small growth in the 1760s was followed by decline in the 1770s, but there were no particularly good or bad years. Cargo and descargo figures were the lowest yet seen in the parish. Mayordomas relied on few resources and would have to sponsor modest celebrations or collaborate with other groups. Expenses were offset by the donation of wax by men, presumably the mayordomas’ husbands (SOLT I: 40v).

The 1745 and 1753 visitas resulted in no reproaches. Collective poverty or frugality did not merit accusations of “excessive spending.” The sisterhood was not faring well but perhaps little was expected of the women, who must have recruited and buried enough members to satisfy their supervisors. The nearly balanced budget of 1775 may have been in anticipation of the bishop’s inspection but it failed to redeem the group. During the 1776 visita, an unfortunate occasion for all of the barrio groups, Rodríguez noted the Bishop of Puebla’s decision to dissolve the hermandad: “The sisterhood is extinguished by his Illustrious Lordship the Bishop, my Lord [or Master - Señor], in the inspection that he made of this Parish in 1776” (SOLT I: 40v, 1776).

The Twin Sisterhoods of Our Lady of Sorrows, Barrios of San Nicolás and San Joseph

Founded in 1742 and closing a mere generation later, Our Lady of Sorrows’ members met infrequently, earned and expended little, and they were poorly served by local scribes. Twin contemporaneous sisterhoods with the same name and similar
devotions were established in separate barrio chapels. The core memberships were likely drawn from the multiethnic barrios of San Nicolás and San Joseph.

Several questions emerged: What was the nature of the relationship between the twin hermandades: cooperation, competition or something in between? To what extent did women engage each other in social networks and as spiritual allies or rivals? Why would a group meet in two chapels and draw members from two barrios? Did these two sets of women hold separate gatherings because they did not see each other as social equals, or did it just make sense to attend events closest to one’s home?

One piece of evidence is the election of María Candelaria to both groups (1758-1759 in San Nicolás and 1763 in San Joseph). There was no mayordoma in San Joseph during her terms nor was there a lay leader in San Nicolás when Anna de los Santos, a cacica principal, led San Joseph (1748-1749). Barrio-specific co-mayordomas were the norm except when a woman’s status was so high that she alone led the sisterhood.

The San Nicolás group of Our Lady of Sorrows met and was “founded in the chapel of San Nicolás” in 1742 (SOLSN I: 1r). Periodic masses and annual elections, officiated or observed by parish priests, were held in the barrio chapel, as would be any council meetings. In the first set of records, the San Nicolás group was documented in 28 elections (1742-1776) but only 14 years of annual accounts (1742-1775). As in the other sisterhoods, missing data relate to the early period (1747-1757). Sisterhoods may have been rather organic groups of devotees who surfaced around an image. This genesis may explain the absence of acts of foundation and charters. But a lack of membership lists and receipts for masses, processions and festivals suggests missing books, despite a 1781 bishop’s edict that required all ecclesiastic records to remain in the parish archive.
There were a few mayordomas identified through their husbands, but this time Br. Manuel was not the only culprit. Br. Gabriel Cipriano de Cardeña identified mayordoma María Candelaria (1758-1759) as someone’s wife (SOLSN I: 5v, 1758). According to Br. Barrera, Martha María (1760) was also a wife, as was María Chavez (1762). In 1763 Br. Francisco Xavier Cortes reported that Josepha Maldonado accepted her mayordomía “with the consent of her husband” (SOLSN I: 8r). Br. Thadeo de la Torre described Marcela Juárez (1764) as a wife. Br. Manuel presented Rosa María Maldonado (1765) as a “legitimate wife” (SOLSN I: 8v). While this designation was found in matrimonial and baptismal records, it was not seen in confraternal records, except in the Holy True Cross. As the local representative of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, Br. Manuel was expected to emphasize the superiority of sacramental marriage. Gregoria María (1766) was the wife of Domingo Serrano; Christina Mayza (1768) became mayordoma with the “consent of her husband” (SOLSN I: 9r, 11r). There were no more references to husbands until Rita Arrano (1776) even though Br. Manuel supervised the final decade of elections.

Early on, the group had an extensive inventory of ritual items (SOLSN I: 2r-v, 1742). Two decades later a couple donated a silver sword, cloth and flowers (SOLSN I: 1r, 1762), whether to adorn the chapel of San Nicolás or to be paraded in processions. A two-page inventory was added in 1769 but most of it was crossed out in 1770 (SOLSN I: 11v-14r). Either mayordoma María Ximenes made claims that her successor, María de Jesus Maldonado, could not support or the items were lost or sold. The final inventory in 1780, executed after the group was dissolved, revealed sufficient wax but fewer items than in 1742. This outcome is not surprising considering an average annual cargo of 19 pesos and a descargo of 51 pesos; mayordomas had been expending 260% more than they
earned in any given year. But no priests ever critiqued the hermanas’ electoral or fiscal practices, including a reelection rate of 12%, scant resources and overspending.

The second set of mayordomas was based in the chapel and barrio of San Joseph. Confraternal masses, elections and possessions were hosted in the more centrally-located chapel. Inventories in 1743 and 1768 reveal about half as many ritual items as in San Nicolás (SOLSJ I: 1v, 10v). Annual accounts were strikingly similar if not better, with an average annual cargo of 19 pesos, a descargo of 45 pesos and an overspending rate of 240%. Only one year (of the 15 years that were tracked) resulted in a nearly balanced budget (SOLSJ I: 17r, 1773). In both groups the 1772 descargo was mistakenly presented before the cargo. Ironically, the error can be directly attributed to Br. Manuel, the priest who supervised all of the sisterhoods’ final decade. As a whole, Our Lady of Sorrows was the poorest and perhaps the smallest group ever founded in the parish. It is a wonder that this bipartite devotional group endured as long as it did (35 years).

The ethnic composition of Our Lady of Sorrows remains enigmatic. Whether as a whole or two subsets, it was never described in ethnic terms. When documenting the San Nicolás group priests often (70%) employed the last names of mayordomas or their husbands. But in the San Joseph group, full or last names were found in only half of the cases, suggesting more indigenous or casta commoners. Cacica principal Anna de los Santos became mayordoma in 1746, 1748 and 1749, but this level of detail was the exception, not the rule. Our Lady of Transit’s Tomasa de la Encarnación Parra (1763-1764) went on to lead Our Lady of Sorrows’ San Joseph group (1768), cementing her loyalty to the barrio and the Virgin Mary. Naming patterns suggest that a mix of criollas,
mestizas, castizas and indias became members and lay leaders of both groups, but it is not
known if they interacted with mulatas and negras.

Our Lady of Sorrows’ barrio-based devotional groups differed on very few levels. The
reelection rate was twice as high (26%) in San Joseph than in San Nicolás. Br. Manuel noted only mayordoma Catarina de Ojeda (1766) as a man’s wife, the consent of Eugenia de San Diego’s husband (1767) and the permission of María Luisa’s husband (1773). Husbands were mentioned three times more often in the San Nicolás group. Due to missing elections these disparities may be meaningless. Br. Manuel repeated the ruling imposed on the other sisterhoods: “this sisterhood was extinguished by the Illustrious Lord Bishop, my Lord, in the Inspection that he made of this Parish in 1776.”

Summary: Women’s Obstacles and Contributions

Bishops, priests and mayordomos did not consider women to be endowed with the same capabilities, values and resources as men. Yet it appears that women had a hand in shaping local social networks, even when circumscribed by ethnic and barrio divisions. Beginning by serving in male-dominated cofradías, women went on to institute their own sisterhoods, establishing contacts with members of other groups, and holding user, if not ownership, rights over religious spaces and images in common with men. In most ways, women’s lay religious activism appears to have mirrored that of men, in that they spearheaded dynamic corporations, amassed and redistributed alms, sponsored rituals, and managed property. Women’s leading and supporting roles in lay religious organizations, when looked at in conjunction with their responsibilities as baptismal and matrimonial sponsors, attest to a rich facet of women’s public lives in New Spain.
With most women unable to possess or control as much wealth as their husbands, sons or male neighbors, they remained somewhat marginal and powerless, despite their legitimate appointments as community lay leaders. In the eyes of at least one priest, Br. Manuel, an official examiner of ecclesiastic records, women’s religious service was inseparable from their kinship ties, particularly tolerance from higher status husbands.

Sisterhoods were dissolved somewhat prematurely in response to a bishop’s direct order. The bishop forbade the creation of new groups and encouraged bankrupt sodalities to close in the very near future. Parish priests had become disillusioned by the reported mismanagement of confraternal ceremonies and belongings. Throughout New Spain these failures were attributed to the proliferation of cofradías, which was further linked to corruption and feuding among leaders who represented regional political factions. At least 6 of Tecamachalco’s associations survived the turn of the 19th century, including the Popolocas’ Nativity of Our Lady (1803) and the Spaniards’ Holy True Cross (1809). Two remained active post-Independence, including the castas’ Our Lady of the Rosary (1823).

As evidenced by the 6 closures in 1776, parish-wide groups excelled where barrio groups failed. Perhaps spatially-circumscribed rituals, few members and meager resources justify the latter groups’ rise and fall. Barrio and chapel-based hermandades, all minor devotional groups, most of which lost or never possessed founding documents, were the first to be targeted. Without papers or financial viability, lay leaders’ autonomy and legitimacy became suspect. Overwhelmed ecclesiastic authorities reasoned, “Why had Tecamachalco’s parishioners ever believed that they needed, or could finance, so many minor confraternities?” Some possible answers lie in the Epilogue, which presents my theoretical assessment of Tecamachalco’s confraternal culture.
Primary Sources

Parish Archive of Tecamachalco:  
- Confraternity of Our Lady of the Rosary (6 books)
- Sisterhood of Our Lady of Solitude (1 book)
- Sisterhood of Our Lady of Transit (1 book)
- Sisterhoods of Our Lady of the Sorrows (2 books)

AGN *Indios* (petitions regarding inter-ethnic interactions involving land and/or labor)
La Iglesia del Calvario represents Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross. It is located furthest up the hill of Old Tecamachalco, which serves to symbolize the symbolic geography of Calvary. It is referred to as an iglesia, not a capilla. Some residents recognize Calvario as a barrio even though it falls between the traza and the barrio of San Joseph (east). There are 7 miraculous aspects of Christ that are venerated in the church: Black Christ of Poison (although the church of Our Lady of the Rosary’s mulattoes, Christ’s blackness stems from the local miracle of the image absorbing poison from an afflicted person); Christ of the Three Falls; Christ of Contemplation; Christ of the Good Journey; Christ of the Column; Christ of the Holy Burial; and Christ of the Precious Blood. The church’s erection date is unknown but it was popular among cofradías founded after 1668. The atrio is so small that it is non-existent, like the capilla of San Nicolás. This suggests that the structures were constructed after much of Tecamachalco was populated and town land was unavailable. In 2001, the Christ-centered church was maintained by a sacristána and council, similar to a confraternal cabildo. Church members sponsor processions that incorporate the Calvario and the parish church.
The church nave and altar of the Church of Calvary hosts images of the Black Christ of Poison, the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Virgin Mother with the Christ Child, as well as small images, paintings, and streamers.
My conclusions on the cultivation of legitimacy and autonomy through confraternal charters and ceremonies are informed by anthropological and historical studies of colonialism and folk Catholicism. The rich lay religious history of Tecamachalco, a colonial Mexican parish, is elucidated and contextualized through my emphasis on instances of intercultural dialogue and application of recent scholarship on domination and agency to confraternal rhetoric and practices. While I initiated a case study in religious studies, native studies, social history, and social anthropology, the complexity and breadth of confraternal records led me to integrate and tailor approaches from political science and symbolic anthropology.

My theoretical assessment of this case study in local religion and ethnic politics entails three related foci: cofradías as mitigating or integrative forces for colonial officials as well as subjects; the performance and rebuttal of status differences through public rituals (founding ceremonies, charter readings, processions, elections, and bishops’ inspections), objects (church décor, processional paraphernalia and garb) and spaces (corporate lands, churches and barrios); and my own model of confraternal success and failure: compliant and contested interaction. While the docile guise of colonial cofradías placated authorities (compliance), the prospect of legitimized autonomy enticed, confronted and sustained their member-citizens (contestation).


Cofradías as Instruments of Colonial Citizenry:

Balancing Autonomy with Accountability

At a job talk I was asked an unanticipated question: “How do cofradías factor into the evolution of citizenry in colonial Mexico?” Like states, cofradías employ constitutions, elections, budgets, and authorities who are circumscribed (priests and lay leaders) or nearly omnipotent (viceroys and bishops). Both structures fulfill the civic needs of complex societies by organizing disparate groups into cooperative systems of social security if not fictive kinship. The sovereign bodies entail public sanctions of the dominant power, only partial incorporation of marginalized or subaltern groups, and differential rights, responsibilities or restrictions for member-citizens.

Colonialism’s Power Tools

Agents of colonial institutions wield power widely, creatively and repressively, or at least paternalistically. Colonialism begets the nearly-constant (re)labeling and (re)positioning of dominant as well as subordinate groups. Over time all manner and number of hierarchies are preserved, compounded and galvanized when acted out in public documents and rituals. James C. Scott warned that “those obliged by domination to act a mask will eventually find that their faces have grown to fit that mask” of consent to, or complicity with, the masters (1990: 10).

Citizens must assess and absorb a wide range of colonial institutions, policies and practices in order to survive or overcome the new realities of ethnic plurality and stratification. Contemplating, avoiding and even emulating or re-authoring the dominant group’s modes of self-representation or self-preservation are not convincing evidence of
citizens’ complacency and complicity, nor the alternative - subaltern resistance. Instead these acts are coping mechanisms exercised by leaders of groups who are presented with few viable alternatives. Even in the absence of organized resistance, colonial subjects are not without agendas or sources of agency.

Scholarship on colonialism and cofradías enables me to assess the latter as tools wielded by colonial officials and subjects, as utopian experiments of good government and good citizens. Historical anthropologists Nicolas Thomas and Bernard S. Cohn both approached colonialism as a complex process rooted in intercultural dialogue. Their foci on discourse and material culture relate to seminal works on domination, agency and exoticism or otherness (Foucault 1979; Said 1978; Stoler 1995), in terms of ethnicity, class, region, gender, or sexuality. In Colonialism’s Culture, Thomas (1994) unveils how colonial societies (dys)function. In Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge, Cohn (1996) unpacks an imperial tool-kit in which the powerful command through language, policies, industry, and even objects, such as clothing.

These views dovetail nicely with my findings on Tecamachalco’s confraternal charters, rituals and spaces. They influence how I gauge cofradías as extensions of long-term colonization, pacification or stabilization campaigns. Cofradías, bishops, parish priests, and even lay leaders were institutional agents of “colonial governmentality and conversion,” a couplet coined by Thomas (1994: 105). While bypassing Antonio Gramsci, Thomas (1994: 143) still entertained hegemonic and counter-hegemonic processes by contrasting “imperial triumph, settler failure.” He argued that empires thrive at the expense of the conquered but also the invaders. Similarly Mendicant friars, lay
leaders and cofradías fell into disfavor and financial ruin well before the Catholic Church and Spanish Crown, even though the groups endeavored to sustain the colonies.

Inspired by Michel Foucault, Bernard S. Cohn (1996: 57) focused on the production of colonial knowledge, language and laws. Had Foucault or Cohn studied New Spain’s cofradías, they would have interpreted Spanish ecclesiastic authorities as implementing surveillance and edicts in order to maintain a watchful eye and tight hold on confraternal leadership, business and rituals. Yet all confraternal cabildos exercised self-policing and some even enjoyed considerable latitude. Lay leaders and members internalized dominant discourse about good government or good citizens in regard to knowing one’s place and fulfilling one’s role in society: welcoming neighbors while upholding hierarchies, sacrificing alms, attending all events, fiscal and electoral transparency, obeying policies and ecclesiastic authorities (except for when one Popoloca group petitioned to have a parish priest removed), and making amends for any offenses.

Cohn’s (1996: 76, 106) analyses of artifact creation and industry development by the British in India inform my view of Popolocas as “Indian officials” of music, carpentry, sculpture, and candles. Local men (and women likely) cooked meals, sang, erected churches, and crafted images, insignias and wax candles. Scribes acknowledged the paid work of native men and women, but the latter were sometimes denied the fruits of their labor. The naturales who commissioned an altarpiece and sacramental canopy were impeded by both Spanish officials and settlers (1580s). But Spanish settlers were unencumbered when fundraising for their own altar-piece and canopy. Indios cofrades who created insignias for the Holy True Cross were banned from wearing them in
processions (1605). Popolocas, like castas and women, were productive artisans and pious sponsors who remained second-class citizens of their cofradíás and parishes.

**Cultural Representation: Essentializing Self and Other**

Following six centuries of European evolution and experimentation, the Mesoamerican cofradía became an intricate and heterogeneous colonial innovation. New Spain’s cofradías arose and endured because they were well-suited and constantly refitted to the needs of colonial officials and subjects. Portions of confraternal records reflect dialogue between colonial officials and citizens, as well as among the various ethnic groups, classes, genders, and neighborhoods involved in launching, sustaining and even circumventing cofradíás. But interest groups, whether viceroys, bishops, Inquisitorial critics, parish priests, founding lay leaders, or members, could only go so far when manipulating confraternal models of indoctrination and self-governance.

“Locals,” “Spanish residents and farmers,” and “mulattoes, blacks and mestizos,” as each preferred to be called, formed ethno-political factions who repetitively clashed over land, labor, tribute, processions, church décor, and governance. First Franciscans and then parish priests encouraged Popolocas, Spanish settlers, Afro-Mexicans and other castas to come together in fellowship. But some late colonial bishops and Inquisitorial representatives emphasized more ethnic, class and gender stratification than was conducive to building bridges between polarized social segments. Framing the locals as “poor wretched Indians,” mulattoes as interlopers and mayordomas as men’s wives reflected traditionalist reactionary views of a criollo oligarchy.
Cofradías were shaped by, but did not cause, ethnic conflicts. I argue that cofradías partially mitigated or eased class and gender inequalities and ethnic tensions within increasingly diverse parishes. Dispersed residents were able to worship and govern together more effectively. Only in early urban settings could certain groups be impeded or excluded altogether, thanks to more sodalities and a larger pool of paying members. Small rural parishes were better integrated. Yet the act and art of strategically characterizing one another as foreign, untrustworthy, inferior, or even dangerous did not simply melt away through the miracle of confraternal fellowship.

Dominant and subordinate groups also retreated to cofradías in order to escape the cultural mixing and compromises of colonial society. In Tecamachalco’s self-conscious confraternal charters, especially processional and electoral policies, lay leaders legitimized the socio-political elevation and isolation of their own networks. Criollos reproduced Spanish Christianity, leaving little room for others. Seeking familiarity in a strange land, they re-embraced cofradías. It was a natural strategy for Spanish settlers, followed by criollos, who were surrounded on all sides by “social inferiors,” to insulate themselves. Popolocan penitents chose to present themselves as naturales, the only residents who truly belonged in the area. But some Spanish lay leaders and priests only saw a few indios, regardless of the century. Castas claimed to be a diverse assemblage of vital cultural components, but they were either neglected or feared.

Despite an idealized reputation for inclusivity Spanish, indigenous and casta sodalities could be externally divisive and internally restrictive. Groups and individuals were marginalized, deprived of the full benefits of confraternal membership, and, by extension, citizenship within a parish community and colonial society. This process
occurred whenever lay leaders ignored or targeted entire social segments, often belittling them as poor or ignorant of their place in society. Like indigenous town councils, Nahua and Popoloca cofradías served as fragmented bastions of native autonomy. Elites aided but also bested commoners. In casta cofradías, stressing Afro-Mexican dominance should have chased elitist pure-bloods away, whether Spanish or Indian. Neighborhoods were used to narrow lay religious networks even further. Penitents chose to stay closer to home, fundraising and sponsoring barrio chapels, candidates, masses, and processions.

*The Forced Strategy of “Passing”*

Anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler pinpointed a strategy in which colonial subjects *passed* as fully *compliant* members of the dominant group in order to qualify for the full benefits of citizenship. In the colonial family courts of Southeast Asia, individuals who successfully demonstrated an appreciation for, and exercise of, the dominant culture’s ideas and customs were deemed to be *cultural competent* (Stoler 1997: 202). The label was a prerequisite for anyone belonging to the “dangerous classes,” especially the children of mixed unions, to pass and thereby attain citizenship. Through the mixed messages of *inclusive rhetoric* and *exclusive practices*, French and Dutch colonial authorities fostered confusion and tensions regarding where their current and potential citizens stood in relation to ethnic, class and gender proscriptions.

Like colonial family courts, cofradías brought their own opportunities, constraints and contradictions. It was in the best interest of every lay leader and member to demonstrate, to bishops, parish priests and neighbors, a shared but also a unique commitment and contribution to bettering confraternities and communities. Prospective
enlistees and lay leaders who could pass as members of a cofradía’s dominant group, by
virtue of belonging to a particular family, barrio, gender, class or ethnic group, or other
socio-economic network, would be most successful.

Stoler, influenced by Michel Foucault’s views on race and sexuality, inspired
me to identify incidents in which ecclesiastic authorities and lay leaders linked *spiritual
competency* to certain groups, usually only their own. Ethnic, class and gender
inequalities were reflected in, as well as reinforced by, confraternal discourse about
spiritual competency, in terms of greater devotion, trustworthiness, frugality, and
leadership ability. Ritual and social obligations were not rights but privileges and
responsibilities granted on the basis of cofrades’ perceived qualities.

In *Genealogical Fictions* (2008) social historian María Elena Martínez linked
*limpieza de sangre*, gender, class, and religion in Iberia and New Spain. She examined
the maintenance and negotiation of separate Spanish and Indian Republics, particularly
the “socio-religious roots” of the *sistema de castas*. In Inquisitorial proceedings, criollos,
indios and even castas attempted to prove absolute or even relative “nobility and purity,”
genuine faith in the Catholic Church and loyalty to the Spanish Crown (Martínez 2008:
91). Unscientific, dehumanizing and dangerous claims to innate qualities formed a
legitimate obsession, art and science in the early modern era.

Colonial subjects were presented with limited options when cornered by
repressive ecclesiastic authorities who targeted miscegenation. Some felt pressure to pass
as first-class or at least second-class citizens rather than be categorized as members of
lesser classes - the polluted and/or wayward castes. In a climate in which parental
permission shaped marital choice, not only in practice but also by law, colonial officials
presided over the suitability of certain matches. Ethnic mixture was the chief dilemma but class and spiritual competency also factored into decisions about who could marry and thereby reproduce, and which pairings or families posed a risk to the integrity of colonial Mexican society. Martínez’s study has much in common with Stoler’s analysis of family courts and my confraternal project. We each explore citizenship status based on ethnicity, class, gender, and compliance with authorities within colonial institutions.

Most confraternal councils would not have considered their members to be equally endowed with capabilities, values or resources. But the freedom to manipulate what it meant to be cofrades and ciudadanos rested in the hands of many: priest and parishioner, man and woman, Spanish, native and casta. Castas were often framed as unpredictable intruders who should stay with their own kind rather than corrupt the integrity of the Spanish and Indian Republics. One of Puebla’s late colonial bishops feared that mulattoes would violate sacramental marriage by posing as priests or pairing with other groups, even Filipinos. But only Our Lady of the Rosary’s “mulattoes, negros and mestizos” dared to entertain the idea of Spaniards being scandalous (1668). Women were banned from most confraternal meetings, even informal ones held in the Maundy. Cofradas were told where to stand and what to wear in male-centric processions. Due to spotty records, we have little idea of what women managed to accomplish once their husbands allowed them to lead.

Indigenous peoples were perhaps the most problematic of the marginal citizens. In 1605 the Spanish lay leaders of the Holy True Cross categorized indios cofrades as “indecent and incapable” beings who lacked the sufficient “intelligence and economy” to qualify as full members. Spanish men were willing to tolerate indios and mujeres (women
or wives) unless or until they overstepped colonial ethnic and gender boundaries by demanding parity in elections or processions. One late colonial bishop wrote that the “poor wretched Indians” would forget to wash, clothe and feed their children without the guidance of well-meaning parish priests and Spanish settlers. But Popoloca lay leaders, not Spaniards, provided relatively sound management of large populations and corporate landholdings. I do not see the Nativity of Our Lady’s payment of chief stewards and debts to parish priests as evidence of the Indians’ ignorance and depravity. Instead these troubling practices were strategic choices based on key values and few resources.

Overcoming Domination

I am intrigued by the unintended consequences or failures of colonial policies and institutions, not just their successes. Likewise Ann Laura Stoler’s (1995: 97) “starting point is not the hegemony of imperial systems of control, but their precarious vulnerabilities.” Rather than only focusing on evangelizing and reconsolidating communities, I ask how cofradías served but also foiled the disparate agendas of ecclesiastic authorities, lay leaders and members.

Why does dominance ultimately fail? Inasmuch as all authority is checked, nearly everyone enjoys a degree of agency. Disenfranchised individuals, families and communities are too resilient, creative and integral to the success of colonial societies to be seen and not heard. Perceptions about the subalterns’ qualities earn them a low place in the new social experiment, but a place nonetheless. Indigenous nobles and commoners as well as castas were often closely supervised and set apart from Spanish settlers, circumscribed into certain areas and occupations. But Gonzalo Lamana’s Domination
without Dominance (2008), R. Douglas Cope’s The Limits of Racial Domination (1994) and my work on cofradías show that this was not always the case.

Lamana penned a decolonial narrative of mid-16th century Spanish-Andean relations. Spanish clergymen and Inca nobles appropriated each other’s belief systems. One unanticipated result was that new Inca kings publicly outdid Spaniards “in their Christianity while at the same time they led Inca religious lives” (Lamana 2008: 3). In between the lines of glowing reports from conquistadores and priests, there were “plural attempts to define the [colonial] order of things” and a “lack of Spanish mastery,” which suggests instability and impermanence (Ibid: 3).

A lack of Spanish mastery was evident when a few Popoloca officials protested and interfered with Spanish governing principles in the 1570s. They fled rather than seek consensus or clash directly with the foreigners. At first so many Indians came to mass that open chapels were used. The Franciscan friars’ prioritization of the native converts’ spiritual health may have led Spanish settlers to close confraternal ranks. Some Spanish Catholics saw the Popolocas as rivals. Indians were accused of attempting to outshine Spanish settlers as Christians when sponsoring a sacramental canopy and altar-piece or proposing to wear insignias. As lay leaders, native noblemen attempted to retain their hold over the “little commoners” through noblesse oblige. Likewise mulattoes proposed to tolerate some Spaniards as members but not as leaders.

Cope concluded that in 17th-century Mexico City, plebian interactions were more based on shared poverty and residence than ethnicity. Plebes also crossed ethnic and class boundaries through patron-client ties, in business, domestic service and compadrazgo (Cope 1994: 86). Seldom upwardly mobile, urban poor families still
labored to better their “condition.” But the cumulative harsh realities of life at the bottom resulted in race riots and rather draconian policies.

Confraternal, baptismal and matrimonial records testify that individuals and families crossed the real and imagined boundaries of Tecamachalco’s subject towns, neighborhoods, farms, classes, and ethnic groups on a regular basis. Together parisioners sustained the local agricultural industry, engaged in and resolved disputes over land, labor and ritual items, founded and joined cofradías, and sponsored churches, images and celebrations, whether parish-wide, barrio-centered, or the rites of passage of their family members and fellow townspeople.

I doubt that many men and women became much more upwardly mobile through their cofradismo, particularly because officials were supposed to lead by serving and giving. Caciques principales still portrayed the macehualtin as “the little commoners” and “the poor” despite their sacrificial alms to Popoloca cofradías; Spanish settlers only saw a mass of Indians. Women were members’ kin and castas were invisible until they launched their own groups. But if an officer’s term, alms campaign or festival was well-executed, with no obvious mistake, loss or omission, then the entrusted man, woman or group would at least retain their conditional status in town.

Pierre Bourdieu argued that habitus, or cumulative experiences, daily practices and choices, reinforces subordinate or interdependent positions within a hierarchy. Bourdieu (1998: 104) argued that “symbolic capital assumes the existence of social agents believing in what is proposed to them, which means in certain cases, obedience or submission [symbolic violence].” Individuals and groups do have agency. But for all our
strategizing and ultimate goals, we may not stray far from where we started. In fact, downward social mobility is as likely as upward.

Cofrades were pious Catholics tasked with conforming to power structures that were both internal (lay leaders and parents) and external (priests, bishops, employers, and other patrons). The *symbolic capital* gained by becoming a confraternal leader or member had to be tempered. Petitioning, fiscal sacrifice, consensus-building, and respect for the structures of the cofradía, community, Catholic Church, and the colony as a whole were prerequisites for good government and citizenship. Yet members, especially long-term officials, envisioned heavenly but also earthly futures in which they would be valued and rewarded for helping their brethren.

As opposed to the plebes, ethnicity did matter to some confraternal founders, parish priests and bishops. It was often the ‘elephant in the room,’ unmentionable but uncomfortably present. Spaniards spent the most space on contrasting themselves with Indians, but only in the Holy True Cross and the Holy Sepulcher of Calvary. Popolocan elites cared more about ensuring that their glories were remembered but they did ban non-indios, at least initially. The castas’ Our Lady of the Rosary (1668-1823), in which criollo and female officers were initially banned, as well as the two self-proclaimed cofradías de españoles – the Holy Eucharist (circa 1570-1820) and the Blessed Souls of Purgatory – endured by eventually welcoming everyone. It appears that the contradiction of *exclusive rhetoric* and *inclusive practice* was tolerated, just as *inclusive rhetoric* and *exclusive practice* were juxtaposed. In some cases, signs of ethnic coexistence or factionalism might be little more than lay leaders’ strategically-placed command performances.
Cofradías as Families and Factions:

Women and Castas in a World of Spanish and Native Men

Confraternal scholars illuminate the citizenship benefits and limitations of cofradías. In New Spain cofradías promised and often delivered certain rewards to those divested of them in other realms. Women, castas and indigenous commoners, or “the poor,” were the most marginal, even in cofradías. Spanish men were once the true outsiders to indigenous communities. But encomiendas, reducciones and cofradías made them masters of industry, government and Christianity. Maya elites used cofradías to hold onto a certain degree of economic stability, cultural legitimacy and political autonomy, even if they did not always exercise their power in sustainable ways (Gosner 1992; Megged 1996). The same might be said of Nahua and Popoloca elites. But we need more research on lay religious and secular cabildos (Haskett 1991: 122).

I argue that Spanish, native and casta concepts of good government and good citizens, especially those affecting female positions and freedoms, intersected through cofradías. Pre-conquest Nahua and African women enjoyed complementarity if not parity with men in the spiritual realm. There were Aztec sweepers who protected the home-front (Burkhart 1997: 30) and priestess-diviners in the Congo (Von Germeten 2006: 45). Nahua lay leaders afforded women more options than did their Spanish counterparts (Sell 2000: 336). So too did Afro-Mexicans, at least initially, but then mulatto cofradías conformed to Spanish paternalism (Von Germeten 2006: 56).

Women were capable and active parishioners. As alms collectors who carried saints’ images, Nahua women were free to move, speak publicly and socialize in distant towns. Edward W. Osowski (2010: 100) argues that women exercised and publicly
displayed Nahua authority when they petitioned for and secured licenses to travel as legitimate servants of the Catholic Church. Susan Schroeder (2000: 62) identified various complementary leadership roles in a late colonial “good death society” based in a barrio of Mexico City. Like mayordomos, diputadas, capitanas and compañeras gained their brethren’s favor in order to perform a wide range of vital duties that would have been off-limits without confraternal structures and sanctions.

A familiar pattern emerged in Tecamachalco’s male-dominated cofradías: Popoloca were best at enjoining women, whether as penitents, light-bearers, scribes, comrades, deputy or chief stewardesses, even if the latter was in name only. The native scribal practice of couplets gave equal billing to hermanos y hermanas. Popoloca women, especially noblewomen, were almost first-class citizens; they were vital halves of a whole. Only the Spaniards of the Holy True Cross framed women as potential pollutants and interferers (1605). But women were soon named penitential sisters dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Due to Spanish paternalism “women of any quality” were second-class citizens; they were wives first, if not widows, daughters or mothers.

Female membership, alms and service, if not formal leadership, were integral to virtually every cofradía’s success. But the Spanish paternalism of parish priests and scribes obscured most of the vital data. The casta records bypassed women altogether. Louise M. Burkhart (2001: 88) explains why female voices are largely absent from Christian texts: “The apparatus of inscription marginalized women in a manner parallel to and functionally interrelated with their exclusion from other domains of formal and public culture in the colony.” No longer satisfied as auxiliary groups of Marian penitents, 18th-century (1713-1776) women formed sisterhoods, meeting in chapels in order to
honor their barrio patroness. But Br. Manuel Joseph Rodríguez de Abourra’s over-emphasis of spousal consent suggests that Inquisitorial parish priests were not quite ready to envision or treat chief stewardesses as productive citizens.

Lay leaders and devotional groups mitigated colonial authorities’ goals of evangelizing, pacifying and reconsolidating native settlements into multiethnic parishes (compliance). But these groups also attended to the diverse, evolving needs of colonial subjects or citizens (contested interaction). Nearly everyone benefited, particularly lauded mayordomos, paid priests and the Catholic Church. Even the very poor and seemingly powerless secured a “good death,” albeit at a great expense of their time and meager resources. Busy ritual calendars and the socio-political drama of elections and processions were welcome distractions from decimating epidemics and oppressive labor obligations. More affluent parishioners could ‘see and be seen,’ thereby solidifying and expanding their spiritual, social, economic, and political entanglements.

Cofradías’ integrative or conciliatory properties were apparent in the Valley of Lima, Peru. Paul Charney (1998) saw Indian cofradías as providing a restorative sense of belonging. Andean brethren looked to one another for social cohesion and political-economic stability. While Indians were not necessarily elevated in relation to Spaniards, nor were all tensions within native communities remedied, citizen status was granted or returned through native cofradías. Cofrades benefitted from frequent fellowship. Everyone was expected to contribute to the community through alms, prayer and labor. Being in need or needed were means to belonging.

Mexico City’s cofradías were also largely integrative. Cofrades were ritual kinsmen, extensions of families who sponsored charitable endeavors, especially local
hospitals and orphans. But according to Asunción Lavrin (1980, 2002) some early groups closed their doors to people of “lower races or classes.” These private clubs soon practiced greater inclusivity and interethnic interaction. These concessions were likely due to pressure from bishops, parish priests and prospective members who did not meet the original criteria for membership. Had there had been fewer Spanish settlers to displace Popolocas from land, livelihood and leadership positions, Tecamachalco’s confraternal charters would likely contain less xenophobic material. But there would have been more if priests and/or bishops had not diluted the wayward founders’ legitimacy and autonomy-driven rhetoric, even by crossing out or replacing entire statements.

Almost all confraternal research highlights European or indigenous peoples. Most studies of Afro-Mexican religion rely on Inquisitorial records. Thus, there has been little attention paid to Afro-Mexicans as spiritual and political insiders, not just outsiders. Globally colonial authorities were most likely to categorize persons of color (in this case Africans) and mixed descent (mulattoes), rather than Indians, as members of the “dangerous classes” (Stoler 1995). African slaves, freemen and women, and other castas seemed willing and ready to do anything that was required of them to secure entry into cofradías. But xenophobic attitudes and draconian laws were difficult obstacles to overcome. Riots in Mexico City (1612, 1692) inspired widespread fear of Afro-Mexican gatherings (Bristol 2007: 103). Nicole Von Germeten’s book (2006) and my study finally bring Afro-Mexican cofrades to the forefront. Von Germeten views cofradías as cementing Afro-Mexicans’ integration into colonial society. She sees Afro-Mexicans as more likely to join or lead cofradías than to incite race riots or commit heresy.
Our Lady of the Rosary (1668) and the baptismal book of “mulattoes, negros and mestizos” (1683-1688) symbolize the rise of Tecamachalco’s casta citizenry, which culminated when castas outnumbered Spanish settlers (1680-1700). Casta cofrades were nearly invisible until well after españoles and naturales secured their positions. Mulatto mayordomos were pious Christians who reserved the right to decide who was too scandalous to join them. Afro-Mexicans were legitimate citizens, visible and vocal members of an evolving parish. When castas instituted their own brotherhood, they alone defined its good government and citizenship. The casta group outlasted any other (1823) but they may have done so by falling victim to Spanish interference. A late colonial crack-down on devotional groups’ spending, redundancy and autonomy was difficult to escape. Bourbon Reforms thwarted the burgeoning citizenship of castas and women.

Confraternities and Communities Coalesce and Disengage

William B. Taylor (1996: 302) traced the rise and fall of cofradías based on their ability to integrate the entire parish through particular devotions. He explored the cofradía as a business, an ethnic polity and a target of ecclesiastic interference. These approaches informed my political-economic analysis of confraternal properties, debts and elections. Ethnic conflict over the ownership of corporate lands generated some of Tecamachalco’s most elaborate and colorful confraternal entries. When squaring off against one another, naturales and españoles appeared to be more homogenous than they ever were. Each group tried to align itself to colonial officials.

John K. Chance (1989: 103) dissected the conflation and co-evolution of the cult of the saints, cofradías and barrios. He argued that they were inseparable and
functionally-identical. Most barrios’ and cofradías’ ethnic compositions are elusive. But two Nahuatl barrio charters (San Sebastián and San Nicolás) disclosed urban Popolocas among the Spaniards and castas, the more common city-dwellers. Ethnic coexistence appears to have outweighed factionalism within and among short-lived barrio cofradías that focused their energies on chapels, saints’ images and lands. I detected barrio solidarity but little evidence of competition. While many stewards and stewardesses were barrio residents, the elections and memberships reveal parish integration.

Ethnic factionalism was still a big rift among late colonial Catholics. Lay religiosity and parishes were supposed to provide a sense of belonging. Even smaller “flocks” were created through the sistema de castas but also parishioners’ choices and actions (O’Hara 2010: 171). Sanctioned modes of Christian thinking and practice were adopted for the purpose of segregation. By the time colonial subjects became citizens of the Republic, they may have already lost their spirit of citizenship. It appears that Tecamachalco was somewhat more integrated in 1810 than in 1570. Lay leaders first sought to circumscribe the service of anyone who fell outside of their immediate groups. The charters of the Holy Name of Jesus (1590), the Holy True Cross (1605), Our Lady of the Rosary (1668), and the Holy Sepulcher of Calvary (1718) attest to ongoing ethnic factions and tensions. But ecclesiastic edicts, penitential orders, barrio and parish-wide sodalities enabled outsiders to legitimately infiltrate the insiders’ camps.

Brian Larkin (2006: 189) attributed 18th-century confraternal decline to primacy of the individual over the “communal quest for salvation.” Mexico City wills reveal few donations to cofradías, indicating less concern for testators’ neighbors and churches. But confraternal records from that area may tell a different story. Entries about
Tecamachalco’s alms campaigns for its hospital and church décor were replaced by ones about debts incurred from fiestas. Had a local corpus of wills survived, cofrades would be more visible as individuals, families and donors.

Tecamachalco’s confraternal decline was precipitated by confraternal ubiquity, only partially justified by demographic growth (1670-1740). Puebla’s late colonial bishops tolerated some devotional groups more than others. Spanish-dominated, parish-wide and/or financially solvent sodalities stood the best chance of escaping closure edicts. Overspending on fiestas led to bankruptcy, the fatal flaw. Marked decreases in the Catholic Church’s wealth and personnel as well as redundancy in indebted cofradías’ memberships and responsibilities conspired to exclude relatively poor and minor barrio groups and at least one Popoloca sodality from Tecamachalco’s evolving confraternal culture. Status competitions among individuals, families, barrios, and ethnic groups may have also interfered with the communal pursuits of salvation and charity.

The Mexican Republic won statehood, followed by over a century of political-economic chaos. Parishioners still flocked to mass, served as processional penitents, sacrificed alms, and cared for one another. But nothing replaced cofradías in terms of integrating communities. Tecamachalco’s residents eventually forgot about cofradías; the word is no longer used locally.

Laymen and women still sweep churches, polish ritual items and organize processions. (Post)colonial inequalities, competitive factions and ecclesiastic criticism also endure: upwardly mobile residents invite priests to lunch and petition to host images before patron saint fiestas; “the poor” happily pay full price for masses (250 pesos) while the well-dressed readily accept discount offers; middle-class residents claim that weekly
processions are nuisances, all about money and showing off; priests try to dissuade parishioners from the expense and dangers of fiesta fireworks and pagan rituals, such as substituting Halloween for Todos Santos. Perceived invasions by a global secularization movement, evangelicals and Mormons have even led some to post “We are Catholics” on their doors. The old message is still clear: “You can keep your path to God. We have our own.” Much and little has changed over the course of four centuries.

**Confraternal Rhetoric and Rituals: Legitimizing Dominance and Agency**

Confraternal models and charters were necessarily conservative. Texts were meant to be copied, meet a bishop’s approval with few criticisms or amendments, and read aloud each year. But despite obvious similarities and borrowing among texts, religious ideals and socio-political contexts inspired diverse examples of a single genre. Barry D. Sell (2002: 3) found the Molina model ordinances for Nahua confraternities (1552) to be “so much more declamatory, hortatory and explanatory” than the Tula (1570) and San Miguel Coyotlán manuscripts (1619).

Nahuatl constitutions from Tecamachalco were abbreviated and singular examples. Popoloca lay leaders emphasized the permanence and distinction of their nobility but also the value of all of their brethren, male and female. Emphases on mayordomos, diputados, hermanos and hermanas, consistently coupled together, reflect confraternal hierarchies but also members’ integration as well as gender parity or complementarity. My contrast of Spanish and Nahuatl versions of a charter (Holy Name of Jesus, 1590) was the first of its kind. My next steps will be translating the Nativity of Our Lady’s 22 Nahuatl ordinances (1581, 5 pages) and identifying elements removed or
added by Franciscan friars in the 22 Spanish policies. Once duplicates are accounted for, unique cultural contexts, perspectives and agendas will emerge. The project will deepen our knowledge of native appropriations and elaborations of ecclesiastic models.

Constitutions may appear to only emulate standardized and legitimized rhetoric. But it was not due to a lack of innovation or unique perspectives on the part of founding lay leaders. Repetition, stock phrases and appeals to ecclesiastic authorities, sprinkled with local flavor and often hiding in plain sight, were adopted in order to further specific corporate goals. As long as certain ethos, rules and formulas were followed, there was substantial room within the charters for rhetoric. John F. Schwaller (2011: personal communication) recognizes the genre’s potential to serve the xenophobic attitudes of Nahuas as well as those of Spaniards. Whether in Spanish or Nahuatl, ordinances, especially amendments, were creative forces that could be highly self-conscious and self-serving. Most policies addressed politically-neutral ritual matters, which make any that facilitate the pursuit of social control or agency stand out all the more.

*Performing Power through Confraternal Rituals*

Confraternal rhetoric and practices united and divided parishioners. Processions and fiestas were (and are) public rituals but also political ceremonies heavily charged with hierarchal as well as homogenizing symbols. Masses, alms campaigns, annual charter readings, marches, and fiestas incorporated a great number and variety of members. But privileges were established according to ethnicity, sex, wealth, and existing socio-political networks. Petition and ordinance writing, founding ceremonies, elections, ecclesiastic inspections, and the core spaces of church altars, sacristies, the
Maundy, and processional focal points (the locations of images) were controlled by ecclesiastic authorities, lay leaders, sacristans or fiscales, paying penitents, and men in general. Many prized, sponsored and labored on various items (corporate lands, chapels, saints’ images, altarpieces, sacramental canopies, banners, color-coded robes, hoods, insignias, swords, flagellant whips, torches, crosses, and bells) mastered by only a few.

Scholarship on power, ritual performances and material culture informs my assessment of confraternal charters, rituals and spaces as vehicles for domination, liberation or something else entirely. My view of confraternal interactions and objects as sites of *intercultural dialogue* is shaped by case studies of indigenous Catholicism and James C. Scott’s views on domination and resistance. The practice of domination generates *public transcripts*, or “how the dominant group would have things appear,” and *hidden transcripts*, which occur “off-stage, beyond direct observation by power-holders,” only among *social intimates* from the same kin, class, ethnic, or interest group (Scott 1990: 4, 18, 26). Scott’s conclusions on public “displays of domination and consent” (Ibid: xii) reconcile Gramsci’s *hegemony*, Foucault’s *surveillance* or the *colonial gaze*, Bourdieu’s *structure-reinforcing practices*, and Giddens’ *agency* of subordinates.

Scott’s view of the *performance of power* in political and religious ceremonies, such as “parades, inaugurations, processions, coronations, and funerals” (Ibid: 58), dovetail seamlessly with my findings on hierarchal confraternal rituals. The “maintenance work” of the dominants’ “flattering self-portrait” occurs in public juxtapositions with the subordinates:

Forms of domination based on a premise of or claim to inherent superiority by ruling elites would seem to depend heavily on lavish display, sumptuary laws, regalia, and public acts of deference or tribute by subordinates... Every visible, outward use of power – each command, each act of deference, each list and
ranking, each ceremonial order, each public punishment, each use of an honorific or a term of derogation – is a symbolic gesture of domination that serves to manifest and reinforce a hierarchal order. (Ibid: 12, 45)

Cofradíás facilitated the *public transcript* of Spanish mastery but also the legitimated autonomy of Popoloca elites, mulattoes and barrio leaders. The Holy Friday marches of the Holy True Cross (1605) and the Holy Sepulcher of Calvary (1718-1719) were orchestrated in order to crystallize and cement colonial hierarchies for Spaniards and Indians, men and women. Spanish men monopolized the material culture and direction of marches in order to remind themselves and all other groups that they, and not the much more numerous Indians, were the community’s true spiritual leaders. The criollos’ rules about processional robes, insignias, swords, set roles, positions, and order provide overwhelming support for Scott’s view of power performances. Processional symbols and cultural geography were not haphazard but very strategic and tangible.

Cofrades were publically admonished about their ascribed statuses in the annual readings of the 1605 ordinances of the Holy True Cross. Non-Spaniards and non-men were welcome albeit in visibly secondary or tertiary positions. Indios cofrades were tolerated in marches and the cofradía as a whole due to the Spaniards’ “grace and indulgences.” “Women of any condition” spiritually competent enough to recall their place in the Maundy (none) and marches (alongside an image of the Virgin Mary, not their husbands) could accompany men and even collect alms. But outsiders were forbidden from peering behind the lay leaders’ façades at council meetings. The *hidden transcripts* of the cofradía’s dominant group had to remain so. Elections and governance were too significant to be risked by the presence of marginal citizens. The circle of actors had to be narrowed to men of similar backgrounds, resources and mindsets.
A deafening silence communicated to the castas, “You do not exist,” or “You are not one of us or one of them. We do not know what to do with you yet.” But Our Lady of the Rosary’s “mulattoes, negros and mestizos” firmly declared who they were as well as who they did not want to be. Castas chose to admonish the group that overlooked them but ignored their fellow subalterns. Spaniards would be admitted on a case-by-case basis but not as lay leaders. Lack of involvement in the cofradía’s foundation and growth was cited, precluding any accusations of racism. Castas acknowledged that some but not all Spaniards were scandalous. Indians and women were not worth mentioning. Scott (1990: 91) would have diagnosed these apparently deliberate acts as reflecting “the imaginative capacity of subordinate groups to reverse or negate dominant ideologies. So common is this pattern that it is plausible to consider it part and parcel of the religio-political equipment of historically disadvantaged groups.”

Casta responses reversed Spanish and Popoloca policies but they were not too polemic or retaliatory to be ratified. Scott (1990:32) would explain the ways in which castas and naturales portrayed criollos and themselves as the non-reciprocity of address. Spanish settlers and bishops had issued infantilizing and dehumanizing proclamations about Indians and mulattoes. But in the interest of protecting self, family and community, the latter did not reciprocate with anger, violence or full exclusion. Instead they chose their battles and words rather cautiously.

Public transcripts could not succeed in drowning out all other messages from founding ceremonies, charters and processions. Thanks partly to the covert operation of hidden transcripts, “the dominant never control the stage absolutely, but their wishes normally prevail” (Scott 1990: 4). Fear of repercussions or few alternatives make it
situationally-rational for subordinates to feign cooperation: “Powerless groups have self-interest in conspiring to reinforce hegemonic appearances… This person to whom we misinterpret ourselves may be able to harm or help us in some way” (Ibid: xii, 1). No group is entirely powerless, but when women, locals and castas could not be lay leaders, their limited options likely led diplomacy to prevail. It was better to acquiesce or use petitions to appeal to ecclesiastic authorities than to engage in direct conflict.

Performances reveal the masters to the audience, which includes the members of one’s own group. When dominance (by Spanish settlers) is contested, perhaps due to other social segments’ (native or casta men) greater numbers or similar achievements, more frequent and exaggerated enactments may be pursued. Popoloca elites strived to assert their legitimacy and autonomy as lay leaders after their once native community was over-populated with Spaniards and castas. They resorted to aggrandizing caciques principales’ contributions and positions while belittling those of the macehualtzitzintin (little commoners) and banning the “yspañoles, tliltic, mulato y mulata” (Spaniards, blacks and mulattoes). Non-reciprocity of address surfaced again when commoners appeared to agree to play the parts of the subordinates and the poor. I found no evidence of commoners questioning elite native authority after the late 16th century. But non-elites are only partially visible in petitions, censuses and records of sacraments or cofrades.

Amidst parishioners’ statements of deference, devotion and sacrifice, there was a degree of ‘playing along to get ahead,’ mostly in terms of presenting petitions for licenses of foundation. Confraternal councils’ internal authority and legitimacy relied on the perceived omnipotence of bishops and native noblemen. Authors of 3 of Tecamachalco’s Nahuatl charters highlighted the positions of secular dignitaries and the Bishop of Puebla.
Nahuatl honorifics and officials’ occupational titles were customary in petitions. But in this context and combination the linguistic devices communicated that powerful representatives of enduring colonial institutions and royal authority protected the groups’ leaders, members, activities, and wealth. The locals of the Holy Name of Jesus and the Nativity of Our Lady, the neighborhood leaders of San Sebastián and San Nicolás, and the Spaniards and locals of the Holy Sepulcher of Calvary all emphasized the chief steward, fiscal, parish priest, and/or local dignitaries as much as the Bishop of Puebla. In large gatherings of Popolocas, social intimates or familiar elites continued to sanction sacred business.

Scott would identify all of these self-conscious and lopsided interactions as examples of command performances. Members of both dominant and subordinate groups know full well what is expected of them and they usually comply. But more is at stake for the seemingly powerless:

Subordinates offer a performance of deference and consent while attempting to discern, to read, the real intentions and mood of the potentially threatening power-holder. The power figure, in turn, produces a performance of mastery and command while attempting to peer behind the mask of the subordinates to read their real intentions. (Scott 1990: 3-4)

Residents would have learned volumes about one another through the social intimacy and frequent events of cofradías, particularly those with memberships drawn from all barrios, classes and ethnic groups. But no cofrades could fully see one another, nor be themselves. Everyone was performing, investigating and attempting to (re)produce as well as (re)channel power, whether as a dominant, subordinate or something in between. All of these ascribed and achieved roles were fulfilled out of necessity rather than choice alone. But in comparison to Spaniards, indigenous and casta Catholics had to
act more cautiously in a variety of situations and for longer durations. The main risk is that dominants and subordinates start believing in their own propaganda (Scott 1990: 10). Eventually they stop performing a role, becoming what they only pretended to be.

Subordinate _infra-politics_ revolve around the “issues of dignity and autonomy” (Scott 1990: 19, 23). Colonial subjects are somewhat at liberty to express dissatisfaction and strategize for change, but only behind the scenes. The locals ultimately rejected the public humiliation of the joint Holy Friday marches. Unable to reconcile criollos’ portrayal of “some local Indians… indecent and incompetent people” with their own self-image (in the Holy True Cross), or perform ethnic parity when it was never a reality inside or outside of the cofradía (the Holy Sepulcher of Calvary), the locals opted to launch their own marches and perhaps even defect.

Despite continuous attempts by Spanish bishops, priests and settlers to control and even impede Popoloca, casta and female elections, lands and celebrations, there is no direct evidence of resistance, only accommodation. Patriarchal rhetoric was absorbed in exchange for sisterhoods. Inspections, inventories and annual fiscal reports do suggest that lay leaders of all ethnicities quietly broke known rules, even long after they were caught and warned. Spaniards stole and/or sold their own ritual items (Holy True Cross) or those of other sodalities (Holy Eucharist). The Nativity of Our Lady’s Popolocas consistently remunerated chief stewards while failing to compensate priests for their services. Priests interfered only with castas’ “irregular elections” but the casta sodality managed to outlast all others. Contesting a scathing inspection report or closure edict from the Bishop of Puebla and refusing to admit parish priests to elections and council meetings may have been options for criollo men, but not for locals, castas or women.
Scott claimed that “most acts of power from below, even when they are protests – implicitly or explicitly – largely observe the “rules” even if their objective is to undermine them” (Scott 1990: 93). New Spain’s system of legal petitions and ecclesiastic courts gave effective recourse to disenfranchised groups. Substantial knowledge, effort and patience were required, but native claims succeeded at least as often as those of Spaniards. Even without permission Popolocas dared to commission and install the convento’s first altarpiece. They were just being good Catholics, so Spanish ecclesiastic authorities could not justify punishing them.

*Rituals of Rule and Rebellion within Tecamachalco’s Confraternal Culture*

Parishioners were united but also divided according to the varied meanings and contexts that they associated with lay religious events and objects. Ethnohistoric and ethnographic studies of indigenous Catholicism support my conclusions that Tecamachalco’s confraternal rituals, symbols and spaces legitimized power structures, both existing (criollo and indigenous elites) and emerging (mulattoes, women and barrio groups, regardless of ethnicity).

Tecamachalco’s parishioners and their discrete social segments adopted and adapted multi-vocal symbols (patron saints, other images, jewels, processional paraphernalia and garb) and spaces (churches, hospitals, barrios, solares, villas, estates, and processional circuits). There are numerous examples of residents engaging or even sparring over powerful confraternal symbols and spaces. When Popolocas co-managed confraternal lands and livestock, Spaniards failed to prove that the properties were abandoned and undocumented. When castas lamented that they had no land for a church,
parish priests donated an unused plot. Parish priests, or their relatives, had done the same for locals, who already had the greatest access to communal lands. No criollo cofradías were given church plots, only unused ritual items from the parish sacristy.

Tecamachalco’s cofradías, saints and religious geography continuously shaped one another. When too many groups shared the two main churches, barrio chapels were erected or repaired. When barrio brotherhoods experienced decline, sisterhoods replaced them in the barrio chapels. After numerous cofradías were closed and/or reconsolidated, there was a renewed focus on Christ-centered worship, the Holy Eucharist and the Virgin Mary. Late colonial parishioners flocked to the parish church and the church of Calvary instead of the chapels of barrio saints.

Priests and lay leaders practiced manifest destiny and revisionist history when they appropriated churches and saints. When the parish church displaced the convento, Spanish lay leaders misidentified the new ceremonial center as their original home. When Tecamachalco’s patron San Francisco (the first Popoloca cofradía) was replaced by San Sebastián and then the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, no explanations were provided. Former community protectors were simply circumscribed to their namesake churches. Various pueblos’ patron saints were selected by cofradías’ founding lay leaders, in conjunction with their friars (Rubial García 2006: 46). The system worked well when there was one cofradía in town, but that was never the case.

It seemed as if every “micro-patriotic unit” sought legitimacy, autonomy and territory through cofradías (Lockhart 1992). Founders of later cofradías could only choose the patrons of their barrios or estates. Writing in Nahuatl, Nahuas and Popolocas linked their new pueblos and parishes to ancient altepetl. But we cannot know if
indigenous peoples considered their barrios, saints, chapels, and cofradías to be the colonial incarnations of their tlaxilacalli or calpulli.

Like fiestas, cofradías and compadrazgo, saints transformed individuals, households and neighborhoods into fictive kin, community citizens and parishes. In his study of modern fiestas in Tlayacapan, Morelos, John Ingham (1986: 99) observed that “the saints, in effect, are symbols of social entities – persons and groups – and, viewed as a system, are a means of modeling social solidarity and diversity.” In other words, saints, fiestas, cofradías, and even compadrazgo sustain selective solidarity or social differentiation as well as cultural homogeneity.

Ethnic and/or regional pride was asserted when groups overstepped spatial, social and spiritual boundaries. In colonial Mexico City, Nahua penitents were concerned with piety but also their dignity or ethnic politics (Burkhart 1998: 376). Tecamachalco’s lay leaders had to resort to following set processional circuits and crafting unique symbols in order to minimize tensions with other groups. Spaniards protested after locals sponsored a sacramental canopy and the convento altarpiece. When that failed, they depleted their coffer in order to follow suit. When criollos attempted to monopolize processional symbols, locals and mestizos asserted their own identities as Catholic gentlemen by petitioning for penitential robes, insignias and swords.

Confraternal rituals were highly hierarchal but also participatory or even democratic. Colonial officials and subjects, leaders and followers, participants and observers, insiders and outsiders, locals and foreigners all took their places in community rituals performed in full view (fiestas, masses and processions) or behind closed doors (founding ceremonies, elections, inventories, and inspections). Each year assigned roles
were performed for an attentive audience. Lay leaders from every social segment assumed their positions as the temporary stewards, if not the masters, of their respective micro-communities. Everyone (bishops, priests, cofrades, and the unincorporated masses) watched carefully, whether for omissions, violations or instructions.

Competing perspectives were filtered and reconciled by various actors. On occasion, certain roles were even negotiated, contested, reversed, or avoided altogether. Locals, mestizos and women infiltrated processions led by Spanish men. Native marches linked noblewomen to the Virgin. Popolocas and castas circumscribed or banned criollos but then welcomed them. Indigenous dignitaries and customary practice (paying mayordomos), and not bishops alone, sanctioned confraternal business. Corrupt or overwhelmed mayordomos resigned. Some priests went unpaid while others assaulted lay leaders’ autonomy by acting as scribes and supervisors.

Like Tecamachalco’s Spanish-led confraternal marches, fiestas were (and are) mass spectacles, exceptionally hierarchal and rule-driven. Most qualify as rituals of rule, whereas riots and even subtle role reversals within fiestas are rituals of rebellion (Beezley et al. 1994). As “tools of hegemonic control and institutional legitimization,” fiestas reinforce structure (Curcio-Nagy 1994: 1). Fiestas were among the few sanctioned large-scale gatherings of colonial officials and subjects. The investment of time and resources, along with the enjoyment of civic pride and entertainment, cemented a symbolic social contract between the governing and the governed. Infrequent expensive performances of power enabled agents of the State to co-opt, acculturate and monitor its citizens as well as symbolize the permanence of the colonies.
On Corpus Christi, the viceroy, ecclesiastic authorities and Mexico City’s elite Spanish residents received top billing (Curcio-Nagy 1994: 4). Virtually all colonial subjects had been afforded integral roles, most as the requisite spectators. Citizens were told where to stand, what to wear and how to behave. Various town councils, barrio groups, cofradías, saints’ images, and canopies crafted by native Catholics attested to ethnic, gender and class integration. Cofradías were invited to pool alms for their own contributions, no matter how meager. Fiestas reflected a democratic or productive view of power, one that rested in the hands of many. But this was only a temporary performance of coexistence, freedom and fellowship. Fiestas persuade participants and observers to succumb to social control on a daily basis: “It is the predictability of performers and script, together with the marked delimitation in time and space of the performance that ultimately promotes a sense of order” (Brandes 1988: 169). At the end of the performance, everyone was expected to return home and resume his or her position in the colonial hierarchy.

Colonial subjects’ take-home interpretations of fiestas depended on the quality of the performance and the agendas, perspectives and cumulative experiences of both participants and observers. There was considerable room for hidden transcripts within patron-saint celebrations. “Santiago and his horse” were symbols of Spanish conquest and Moorish submission. William Taylor (1996: 273-275) observed that Santiago was ambiguous enough to be reclaimed as the patron saint of 81 towns in New Spain. Rather than faithfully enact the conquest of the Moors or Aztecs, the conquered could become the conquerors in playful but also political performances. Through role reversal, the meanings of colonial Catholic images and dramas were contested. Reenactments of the
battle of the Moors and Christians and Virgin of Guadalupe fiestas have integrated
indigenous Catholic communities for centuries. Judith Friedlander (1975: 101) noted the
fiestas’ instrumentality in forcing an Indian identity upon Mexican villagers, even as late
as 1969. ‘Indians’ saw themselves as Catholics and citizens, the true locals of Hueyapan.

Fiestas have to continue, whatever the sacrifice and whoever is in charge.
Differences of opinion surrounded the Santa Fe festival, a long-standing symbol of
spiritual “conquest” (Grimes 1976: 95). As in colonial Tecamachalco, 20th-century
ecclesiastic authorities criticized the excessive expense and party atmosphere. The 1963
fiesta council lost the financial and moral support of New Mexico’s representatives of the
Catholic Church, but the festivities proceeded as planned. The Santa Fe fiesta carried
many meanings for its diverse body of citizens. Each meaning was too valuable to be
disrupted by the passing fickleness of parish priests.

Cofrades also weathered many storms, particularly intolerant neighbors and
fiscal crises. Tecamachalco’s cofradías may be gone but all of the saints, chapels,
processions, and fiestas remain. Two centuries after the last cofradía’s dissolution,
residents still contend with divergent views of salient rituals, symbols and spaces through
the prism of lay religious activism.

Confraternal Rewards and Risks: Modeling Compliant and Contested Interaction

Cofradías are ongoing, complex interactions of opportunities, strategies and
trade-offs. The colonial Mesoamerican cofradía is a prime example of indigenous, Afro-
Mexican and even criollo accommodations to colonialism and evangelization. Compliant
and contested interactions were required in order for the experiment to succeed and
ultimately fail. In this model, I envision Church agents as deftly engaging multiethnic parishioners to invest in their own salvation and communities. Lay leaders and members schooled themselves in how the confraternal system worked by actively pursuing their own legitimacy and autonomy (*contestation*), while still visibly satisfying the colonial goals of a peaceful, cooperative and Catholic society (*compliance*).

In terms of *compliance*, friars wanted cofradías to ‘bring home’ native neophytes’ conversion, finance the Catholic Church and stabilize reconsolidated communities through a common purpose and shared tasks. Secular clergy, focused on fiscal responsibility and parish integration, were placated that they could control and channel confraternal business and rituals.

Confraternal founders engaged in *contests* whenever they ventured creative solutions to the universal problems of cultural representation and multiethnic coexistence. Rather than fully partner in their own domination, individuals and groups devoted themselves to promoting their own paths to salvation, social solidarity, recognition and mobility. Locals, mulattoes, Spanish settlers, and female penitents all sought to be seen, heard and set apart, yet be fully integrated into the parish community of Tecamachalco. Lay leaders’ collective authority and wealth were to go unquestioned, except by the Bishop of Puebla or his representatives.

As instruments of corporate lay religiosity, cofradías had the potential to circumvent policies and practices that sustained colonial hierarchies. Tecamachalco’s Popoloca, casta and female-directed sodalities served as local experiments, at least at their inceptions. But the friars’ utopia of cofradías clashed with various competing social, political and economic realities and agendas. Conservative elements were omnipresent in
the form of bishops, parish priests, criollo landowners, and indigenous noblemen who were reluctant to surrender valuable leadership and resource monopolies to neighbors who were less visible, vocal, elite, masculine, or pure-blood.

There is little evidence that any social segment ultimately succeeded in charting its own course. But the sobering realities of meager resources, ecclesiastic oversight and encroaching or even hostile neighbors failed to impede confraternal officials from trying to assert their own religious, political, economic, and social ideals. Cofradías thrived but also struggled because ecclesiastic authorities gave multiethnic parishioners just enough rope to hang themselves.

After the Bourbon reforms and the height of the Mexican Inquisition, late colonial bishops became distressed over cofradías’ minimal economic returns, spiritual rewards and social cohesion. Edicts painted native sacristans, female and casta church workers as overlooking or overstepping their spiritual assignments, essentially ‘playing priest.’ The end result was the widespread closure or at least censure of sodalities and their fiestas. Between 1776 and 1823, impoverished and politically irrelevant groups were forcibly disbanded. But the coveted mayordomías, cooperative lay councils (now known as The Committee), luxurious fiestas, solemn masses, and hierarchal processions, as well as complaints from neighbors and priests, persist into the present day.

My contribution to confraternal studies is a holistic, systematic and comprehensive approach. Concentrating on multiple generations (1563-1823) of a single parish, I compared 15 sodalities of every type imaginable (elite, commoner, Popoloca, criollo, multiethnic, casta, parish-wide, guild or barrio-based, minor devotional brotherhood/sisterhood, confraternity, and arch-confraternity). I looked beyond isolated
documents or record segments in order to contrast what lay leaders did with what they said, as well as how they fared in relation to one another and their religious supervisors. I also offered new ideas about the complex co-evolution of cofradías, parishes, barrios, churches, corporate lands, and ethnic, class and gender relations.

After this case study, much remains to be done. I will return to Mexico to deliver my study as well as secure digital copies of all of the constitutions and permission to publish them in a document-centric manuscript. My translation and analysis of the Nahuatl charter of the Nativity of Our Lady will complete the Tecamachalco confraternal project. Then I will capitalize on compiled baptismal and matrimonial data in order to explore the co-evolution of inter-ethnic, class and gender relations, as well as illegitimacy, through ritual sponsorship and marital choice (1641-1740). Moving beyond the parish, I intend to specialize in Nahuatl and Spanish confraternal charters and amendments as a genre. Comparative analysis of lay leaders’ self-conscious rhetoric has surfaced as a promising avenue for illuminating accommodations by colonial subjects and officials, as well as by subordinate and dominant groups of parishioners.
Bibliography


Deeds, Susan M.. “Double Jeopardy: Indian Women in Jesuit Missions of Nueva...


_____.


_____.


_____.. “Jesuits, Nahuas, and the Good Death Society in Mexico City, 1710-1767,” in


_____ “The Spiritual Mothers of Tula and Other Episodes in the Life of an Indigenous Confraternity,” unpublished draft.


_____ “Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial Southeast Asia,” in Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World, edited by Frederick Cooper and Ann


1989 (1579).


_____.. “Routes to Respectability: Confraternities and Men of African Descent in New


Webster, Susan Verdi. *La Cofradía de la Vera-Cruz representada en las pinturas murales de Huejotzinco, Mexico*. Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, 1996.


