

When at the end of the sixteenth century a Dominican friar Diego Durán described the pre-Hispanic performances of the Nahuas (popularly called Aztecs), he often emphasized that they were extremely entertaining for the audience, which encouraged him to compare these shows to the Spanish short comic plays, such as farces or interludes. Similar comments are found in the works of other Spanish and acculturated indigenous and *mestizo* authors who left to us writings on the ancient customs of the inhabitants of Central Mexico. The basic question that arises after reading such texts is whether the humor and comicality, noticed by the authors of the chronicles, were often the result of erroneous interpretation, which the authors of these documents often unwittingly produced, using their own cultural criteria, or if they, in fact, reflect the indigenous point of view. The answer to this question in the framework of the proposed project will lead both to further analysis carried out in order to determine the deeper cultural dimension and the importance of humour and laughter among the Nahuas before contact with Spanish (and, more broadly, European) culture, and to a research on how these aspects changed after the conquest.

Due to the fact that all alphabetic documents that describe the pre-Hispanic reality were created already during the colonial period, the first step allowing to get to the specifics of indigenous humour will consist of "filtering" the available data in order to cleanse them from the possible influence of the culture of colonizers. To achieve this, I will look closely at manifestations of humour in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spanish culture. Special attention will be given to the approach of the Spanish Church towards these issues, given that clergy (religious and, to a lesser extent, secular) was one of the most important forces that influenced the attitudes and worldview of the indigenous people after the conquest.

Further research steps planned in the proposed project include a careful examination of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century alphabetic sources in Spanish and Nahuatl, such as indigenous creation stories, annals, ethnographic relations, Christian doctrinal texts, speeches (*huehuetlahtolli*), as well as examples of the so-called Nahua literature: *cuicatl* (term translated as "song" or "poetry") and dramas. This will allow to get a closer look at the manifestations of humour on both situational (performative) and linguistic (discursive) levels, visible in various ceremonies, rituals and public performances on the one hand, and in the examples of verbal puns, metaphors and jokes on the other hand. Within the scope of interest of the proposed project is also the research on the extent to which this medium was used by Spanish friars and priests as a tool in their evangelizational project of the indigenous people in New Spain. Another important step will involve the analysis of the pre-Hispanic indigenous manuscripts (called codices), which can provide valuable information about the deities related to ludic activities, and about humour expressed in visual metaphors, which are graphic equivalents of verbal puns.

The issue of humour as a cultural phenomenon, though at first glance not serious, has a huge potential for getting to deeper structures of worldview and, consequently, for a better understanding of such aspects of culture as religion (humour as a form of communication with the supernatural, creative and destructive force of laughter), social relations (humour as entertainment, bonding agent or a tool of social control) and politics (humour as a means of coercion and subversion, and as an element of political struggle). However, despite the growing interest of researchers in humour and laughter from anthropological perspective, hardly any scholars have decided to approach this complex yet extremely important subject holistically, offering a synthetic study of these cultural phenomena. Given the above, the proposed project will have a pioneering character, while providing a solid foundation and an important starting point for undertaking further studies on this so far poorly understood subject.