

# STRATEGIES OF LEGITIMATION AND THE AZTEC STATE<sup>1</sup>

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This paper analyzes the process by which early states attempt to become legitimate employing the Aztecs of Mexico as a specific case in point. The aim here is to describe how early states survive after they emerge, particularly with the purpose of understanding the array of symbolic and materialistic activities in which leaders of early states engage, such as promoting economic production and establishing a state priesthood. The survival of a state and such activities by its leaders seem to be related. The epistemology, in fact, is fundamentally political; a quest for resources upon which the power and authority of state leaders rests and by which they endure. Yet, while some of the actions of leaders are obviously political, such as the elaboration of government and the codification of laws, others are less so and raise some questions regarding their political import.

For example, in early states sumptuary laws favoring the rulers and elites are codified (Kurtz 1978, 1981). The sexual activities of citizens become a concern of state authorities (Y. A. Cohen 1969). Institutions, such as schools, that are not indigenous to stateless societies emerge (Y. A. Cohen 1970). State leaders try to influence the organization of local level kinship, religious, political and other institutions (Adams 1966). To provide a more synthetic explanation of these and related phenomena, this paper argues that these actions are directed toward a primary state goal—legitimacy—and comprise the process of legitimation.

Legitimation refers to the means by which the leaders of a state acquire the support of the population over which they rule. The process entails the implementation of a variety of strategies by which state leaders attempt to shift the allegiance and support of the people from local level organizations to the state and mobilize these populations in the service of the state. A state that has not been able to acquire the support of its polity may survive and govern but its survival will be precarious. Following suggestions by Swartz, Turner, and Tuden (1966) that legitimacy is the outcome of a process, I argue that legitimation is the result of several strategies that can be demonstrated empirically and explained by existing anthropological theory.

## LEGITIMACY AND LEGITIMATION

Anthropologists have expressed interest in the concept of legitimacy and legitimation only recently (Kurtz 1978, 1981; Orenstein 1980; Swartz, Turner, and Tuden 1966). Most nonanthropological discussions regarding legitimacy are abstract and philosophical and tend to focus on the role of ideology in promoting authorities' right to rule and functional concerns with sociopolitical stability and cohesion (Easton 1965; Parsons 1969; Weber 1954). But notions of a validating ideology and sociopolitical stability are static conceptualizations that ignore the

complex dialectic underlying legitimacy. In any case, analyses of legitimation are almost nonexistent.

Legitimacy is an achieved condition, the consequence of legitimation. Swartz *et al.* (1966) make clear that legitimacy refers to a type of support and is the result of an intricate process and suggest that legitimacy derives from the implementation of strategies that political leaders use to attempt to attain goals. A fundamental goal of state politics is acquisition of support; i.e., either the active or passive compliance of citizens with state policies and goals. It is my contention that support is the underpinning of legitimacy and provides the most fruitful concept for understanding legitimation. This paper attempts to demonstrate the dialectic involved in the development and acquisition of such support.

Support comes in many guises. It may be given directly by an individual or group to the existing authority structure or indirectly, in which case it is mediated through some intervening process or object of support, such as ideology (Swartz *et al.* 1966). However, all support is fragile and subject to change as the social and political environment changes (Easton 1965; Swartz *et al.* 1966). It responds to events and the actions of leaders and rests in part on the threat of coercion. But undue coercion may be counterproductive, for individuals and groups who provide support at one moment may be moved to support an alternative political structure. To mitigate this leaders develop strategies to marshal support. These involve calculated risks, for actions in one arena may detract from support in another.

Nettl (1967) has suggested that legitimation represents a mobilization by the state of its nation's citizens and institutions. Indeed, state agents do play a critical role in co-ordinating activities of citizens in tasks that shift their support from local level organizations to the state itself. Yet, few states have attained complete legitimacy. In protohistoric states, crises of legitimacy are not well documented, but inferences may be drawn from ethnohistorical data which suggest that even in early states legitimation is orchestrated by political leaders in a protracted dialectic.

### CONCEPTS AND HYPOTHESIS

State and nation, although inseparable functionally, are distinct analytic entities. A state is an organization of bureaucracies over which most commonly a single office presides. The occupant of that office is the head of state and the major actor in state political affairs and rituals. Below the head of state exists a political bureaucracy dedicated to governing a subordinate population (Y. A. Cohen 1969).

Nation refers to a socially and culturally differentiated population that resides in a variety of communities within a more or less firmly demarcated territory. Part of that population comprises a social class that is politically and economically dominant; its members staff the state bureaucracy. The subordinate population, or lower classes, comprise another social category toward whom the state directs strategies designed to win support. A major source of potential threat to state support resides in the conditions of state and national inchoateness; i.e., the condition in which autonomous organizations that the state either has not been able to subvert or assimilate persist and threaten it (Y. A. Cohen 1969). Therefore, the extent to which legitimacy is attainable is always a matter of degree due to inchoateness.

In order to become legitimate, early states have to overcome inchoateness at two levels; the nation, and the state (Kurtz 1981). National inchoateness is marked by heterogeneity based upon regional differences, like language diversity, ethnic plurality, religious affiliation, and resident kin or nonkin organizations. Within the latter, leaders, symbols, and ideologies exist that may detract from the support citizens should provide the state (Claessen and Skalnik 1978; Y. A. Cohen 1969). State inchoateness is manifest in the incomplete formulation of

government institutions designed to execute public policy and manage public affairs (Rounds 1979; Webster 1976). A state tries to overcome inchoateness by acquiring sufficient resources to supplant local centers of autonomy and mobilize citizens in its support. Inability of a state to overcome inchoateness and acquire the support of its population is a major threat to its legitimacy and, therefore, survival.

As a working hypothesis, I argue that legitimation of political authority is in large measure a consequence of the ability of authorities to generate, control, and allocate economic and symbolic resources in pursuit of public and private goals (A. Cohen 1969, 1974; Nettl 1967). Then, following Firth's (1973) suggestion that the anthropological study of symbols should link symbols to specific social structures and events, let us view legitimating strategies as articulating the material and symbolic domains of political activity. For example, the state attempts to develop an economy that will satisfy the material needs of its citizens and provide it with resources to carry out public policy. A major goal of state economic policy is to mobilize the labor of its citizens to produce goods and commodities above the *per capita* requirements of the population. These gross surpluses then may be co-ordinated by the state and deployed strategically in ways that increase its power and influence (Adams 1966; Kurtz 1974, 1978, 1981). The positive feedback between the resources on which state power rests and the planning and mobilization it undertakes, all conditions being equal, tend to augment legitimacy. Since, conditions are rarely equal, symbols come to play a strategic role.

The articulation of local and state institutions concerned with activities, such as market exchange, enforcement of conformity, and education, provide points of critical disjunction in the relationship of the state and local level (Befu 1965). Symbols are likely to occur in situations of disjunction because they overcome contradictions (A. Cohen 1974; Firth 1973). The state pours its symbolic resources into the disjunction between state and local institutions in order to redirect the support of its citizens. A panoply of uncommon state symbols emerge to communicate to citizens state values and expectations; patriotism, hard work, self sacrifice. The head of state and subordinate functionaries, such as priests, create and manipulate symbols just as they themselves become symbols in rituals that reaffirm state authority in order to constantly renew citizen allegiance. Actions by the state are aimed teleologically at reducing inchoateness by either welding rival social structures, such as lineages and local religious cults, into the structure of the state or replacing them with those of state derivation.

The process is not linear. That is, the state does not fulfill one strategy before embarking upon another. It moves when and where it can, ideally triggering a positive feedback that continually generates support. Success depends upon the inchoateness a state confronts. In general the process is slow and few states are ever completely legitimate. The Aztec state was no exception to this pattern, as I will demonstrate.

#### LEGITIMATION STRATEGIES

The process of legitimation contains five overlapping strategies: a planned mobilization of the nation's economy; establishment of social distance between rulers and ruled; validation of state authority, consolidation of state authority and power; and political socialization of citizens. These strategies were carried out by the Aztec state over nearly 150 years (1376-1520).

##### *Economic Development*

Even in early states economic planning is the keystone to state development. Planning derives from a conscious awareness of desirable goals and involves strategies to achieve them expeditiously. It employs a variety of symbols—redistribution, markets, prices, goods—aimed at reducing local autonomy and

welding the population into a unified nation. Finally, it usually is directed at urban populations, for it is among them that such symbols communicate most effectively.

The economic foundation of the Aztec state was laid by successive emperors in the first century of its existence, approximately 1375-1475. The last fifty or so years, 1475-1520, was a period of political and economic consolidation. Economic and social transformations over this 150 years suggests considerable planning. Tenochtitlan was a planned city that gradually emerged as a dominant symbol of developing Aztec hegemony (Calnek 1972:111; Duran 1964:32) and as a center for institutional innovations by the state. During Acamapichtli's reign (1376-1396), the market system of Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco was organized and began to come under state control. Trade was encouraged by the state and some *pochteca*, a specialized category of traders, conducted business on its behalf in international ports of trade on the frontiers of the empire (Berdan 1982:31-35; Bray 1977:383; Chapman 1957; Kurtz 1974; Sahagun 1950-1969, BK. 9). Specialization in production was encouraged and resulted in increasing bifurcation between peasants and urban craft specialists (Calnek 1972:114; Hicks 1982; Kurtz 1974). Nobles, the primary entrepreneurs of Aztec society, engaged in buying and selling land, invested in craft manufacturing, and other business ventures (Carrasco 1961:491; Caso 1963:871; Kurtz 1974). Slaves provided an important source of energy. They were concentrated in the service of well-to-do citizens, such as the *pochteca*. Military expansion aimed at acquiring additional revenues was continuous.

The first century of the Aztec State (1376-1476) was a period of remarkable technological development, especially hydraulic innovations engineered by the state. Chimalpopoca (1415-1428), the third emperor, acquired a supply of fresh water for Tenochtitlan, a resource critical to the growth of the city (Duran 1964:45). Construction of *chinampas* continued and probably expanded along the lakes' shores (Calnek 1972). Irrigation was extensive, and under Moctezuma I a dike was constructed across Lake Texcoco to alleviate flooding of Tenochtitlan and separate saline from fresh waters (Berdan 1982:23; Gomara 1954:144; Soustelle 1961:32).

Of incalculable economic significance was the acquisition by nobility of private lands and the assumption by the state of the right of eminent domain (Caso 1963:868; Kurtz 1974), which could be invoked as state needs required. Following independence from the Tepanecs, the Aztec nobility claimed most of the Tepanec land for themselves, thus acquiring private holdings that were disproportionate to their numbers in Aztec Society (Bray 1977:382; Caso 1963:867; Tezozomoc 1944:35-37). The nobles subsequently augmented these holdings with lands acquired through conquest (Zorita 1963:111-125). By and large, lands of the nobility were worked by tenants.

Almost every Aztec citizen paid some tax to the state, either in work or kind. Corvée labor was required on roads, public buildings, royal palaces, state projects, and the emperor's lands (Zorita 1963:111ff). Artisans paid in kind with goods they produced. Tributes in the form of raw materials, subsistence goods, luxury items, and manufactured products were appropriated from conquered peoples to supplement the state treasury (Chapman 1957; Duran 1964:102; Kurtz 1974). Proceeds from these taxes flowed into the state's coffers and subsidized other state policies.

Some of these revenues were redistributed to the people, although probably less than one half filtered down to Aztec citizens (Kurtz 1974). During famines and droughts the state provided citizens with food from its warehouses (Duran 1964:148). The state gave gifts, awarded titles, and granted rights to land to individuals who served it well (Duran 1964:70), subventions which tended to co-opt their local allegiances. The state obviously was aware of the political credit which it earned through redistribution and subventions.

Markets were the major mechanism by which goods were provided to the people. The market system continued to expand and modernize, subject increasingly to state manipulation and the forces of supply and demand (Kurtz 1974; Sahagun 1950-1969, BK. 8:67-69). People were required by law to attend the markets and sell their produce and goods in them in order to ensure that provisions would be available (Duran 1971:274-276). Markets also were centers for a variety of state activities which complemented their economic functions; public announcements, religious rituals, dispensations of justice. They symbolized the concern of the state with its citizens, as well as its increasing control over their affairs (Duran 1971:273ff; Kurtz 1974). An important step in mobilizing the market system in the service of the state was effected in 1473 when the great market at Tlatelolco was absorbed into the Aztec political economy. Among other benefits, this provided the state with the means to continue expansionist policies aimed at acquiring additional revenues (Duran 1964:78-80, 91ff).

Aztec political economy suggests that a viable economy is imperative in permitting a state to rule and that economic development in early states is conscious, directed, and planned by individuals in power. Only by building an economy that is sound and sensitive to the needs of its people can an inchoate state hope to attain legitimacy. The economy subsidizes the power of the state and the strategies by which it pursues legitimacy.

### *Social Distance*

Following the emergence of the state its leaders attempt to effect a real and cognitive distance between themselves and the polity (Y. A. Cohen 1969; Kurtz 1978, 1981). The distinction between rulers and ruled may be formalized through laws and reflected in differences in life style, moral exclusiveness, ritualized patterns of behavior, myths concerned with descent and exclusiveness, and access to *desiderata*. The establishment of social distance between rulers and ruled serves different functions and seems to be essential to the well-being of the state.

The formalization of behavior distinctive to different categories of Aztec society probably began during the period of incipient statehood. Descent and myths justifying distinctiveness are important indicators of social distance. Succession to the head of state through a distinctive royal line was established under Huitzilhuhtl, the second emperor (Duran 1964:72; Rounds 1979; Zorita 1963:92). After independence from the Tepanecs, myth and legend were used to establish the exclusiveness of the rulers (Duran 1971:299). From the reign of Moctezuma I (1440-1469) emperors were vested with divine status (Caso 1963:865; Duran 1964:168; Sahagun 1950-1969, BK. 6:52).

The law code that Moctezuma I bequeathed the nation established the moral exclusiveness of the rulers (Berdan 1982:37; Caso 1963:867; Duran 1964:118). The first clause of Moctezuma's code asserts that the emperor should not appear in public except on special occasions (Duran 1964:131). Nobles were tried in special courts and for the same offense a noble was punished more severely than a commoner; with greater privilege went greater responsibility (Berdan 1982:49; George 1961; Sahagun 1950-1969, BK. 8:41). Commoners, however, were bound by restrictive sumptuary laws. Nobility were distinguished from commoners by clothing, jewelry, emoluments of prestige, and a sybaritic life style in general (Berdan 1982:49-50; Cortes 1928:66, 77; Duran 1964:129, 131-132; 1971:435; Sahagun 1950-1969, BK. 8:23ff). Ritualized patterns of deference and demeanor between rulers and ruled had become extremely formalized by the reign of Moctezuma II (1502-1520). Commoners were required to relate to nobility in special ways; they had to prostrate themselves before the emperor and were neither permitted to speak nor look at him. Even the nobility approached him bowed, with eyes lowered (Cortes 1928:27; Duran 1964:224; Motolinia 1950:212).

Preferential access to economic *desiderata* by the ruling class, such as land, slaves, tenant farmers, and corvée symbolized the distinction between rulers and ruled and compounded economic differences. Commoners, for example, were not permitted to own more land than they could work in person; nobles could buy and sell land and employ commoners as laborers (Bray 1977:383; Caso 1963). Commoners also were subject to different education than nobles (Berdan 1982:88-90; Zorita 1963:135-136), and were thus allocated to inferior social roles.

Social distance affirms the class structure and symbolically demarcates and distinguishes rulers from commoners. It creates an aura of state authority, enhances the respect and obedience which the state demands, and symbolizes the right of a few to rule many (Y. A. Cohen 1969; Kurtz 1978, 1981). Although social distance reduces potential conflict between rulers and ruled which familiarity is likely to breed, it also entails risk. Physical and cognitive distance between the state and its citizens may impair the identification of citizens with the state and create a credibility crisis. However, proximity of rulers to ruled may reduce the ability of the state to govern, since, as noted, it is unlikely to be able to meet the expectations of its citizens. These risks are ameliorated by other legitimating strategies.

#### *Validation of Authority*

The elaboration of a state religion is one of the more dramatic changes that the early state effects. It is a major step in developing the state's values and ideology, and supernatural sanction for legitimate state authority. The linchpins of this institution are state priests. The Aztec state priesthood recruited novitiates from both sexes and apparently all classes of society (Berdan 1982:130) as a means of co-opting local level allegiances. In the forefront of the state's legitimating strategies, priests provided the Aztec state with direct support and served as objects of indirect support for the population at large. They were dedicated to formulating a theology that provided direction to the state, imbued it with a numinous quality, and extolled the virtues of state and nation.

By the time of the Spanish intrusion, Aztec priests were attempting to define the state pantheon more precisely; providing many gods with more specific personalities, and merging attributes of the gods into a more unified concept, perhaps that of a single God (Caso 1937:20; 1958:23). They were attempting to elevate *Huitzilopochtli* to a pre-eminent place in the pantheon, probably to serve as a unifying symbol for state, nation, and empire (Caso 1937:9). As well as connoting social distance, a correlative symbol of state unity was the deification of the Aztec emperors.

The Aztec state also exploited the strong popular sentiment in central Mexico that the Toltec dynasty was the sacred source of legitimate power and authority. From the time of Acamapichtli, a Toltec prince, Aztec rulers stressed that they were the legitimate heirs of the Toltec Dynasty. State priests, among others, tied Aztec to Toltec myths and legends in order to extend the historical depth of the state (Caso 1958:84; Duran 1964:13ff, 141-143; 1971:299; Sahagun 1959-1960, BK. 2). Some myths, such as those that bound the commoners in service to the rulers following the war of independence, validated the rights of the ruling class and provided a charter for Aztec class structure as it emerged after independence (Duran 1964:57-58).

With the establishment of the state the customary symbols of the rulers' majesty, morality, and responsibility to the gods were elaborated and redefined. At the investiture of the head of state, high priests admonished him of his obligations and duties (Zorita 1963:93-94). Priests could invoke the wrath of the gods upon rulers who were evil or otherwise unfit to rule (Sahagun 1950-1969, BK. 6:25; Zorita 1963:93-94).

A covert but powerful symbol of priestly support for the state was the vow of celibacy. Celibacy symbolizes the total commitment to God and state by a few persons who willingly disenfranchise themselves from mundane society and who place their service to God and state above any concerns for themselves. Whether secular and/or religious, celibacy appears to be sponsored by early states (Y. A. Cohen 1969). During training Aztec novitiates remained celibate; for certain members of the priesthood celibacy may have been a permanent condition (Berdan 1982:131-132).

### *Consolidation of Authority and Power*

The early state consolidates its authority and power by developing legal, political, and religious institutions that convey state values to its citizens, and state agents infiltrate local organizations to ensure their entrenchment. In general, the state attempts to reduce the influence of local organizations on the people and to mobilize its citizens behind its policies. There are three major features to this strategy: the codification of laws and elaboration of legal institutions, extension of state political influence over local affairs, and intervention of the state religion into the religion and affairs at the local level.

*Law.* The relationship between the codification of law by early states and the embellishment of formal legal institutions suggests an indispensable legitimating strategy (Kurtz 1981). Early states codify laws for several reasons: (1) to prescribe the behavior of citizens and the relationship between state and citizen; (2) to define citizenship and the rights that derive therefrom; (3) to validate the class structure by providing differential legal treatment for persons of different status; and (4) to legalize the right of the state to act against sources of inchoateness, such as kinship associations and secret societies. An increasing number of crimes are considered to be against the state, a legal interpretation which supercedes traditional law (Kurtz 1981).

Moctezuma I is considered to be the law giver of Aztec society. His code encompasses an array of legal prescriptions and norms, defining among other attributes the mutual obligations between state and citizen (Duran 1964:131; George 1961). Personal vengeance was forbidden; only state agents could exact punishments. Persons who aided a wrong-doer or contributed to a crime were equally responsible with the guilty party. The law code designated crimes against the state and social order, such as treason and unauthorized use of dress or insignia of nobility. Crimes against the moral order included drunkenness, prostitution, and homosexuality. Crimes against persons included homicide, theft, and property damage (Duran 1964:131-132; 1971:282ff; George 1961; Sahagun 1950-1969, BK. 2:100; BK. 8:41-42, BK. 10).

Aztec law was enforced through a hierarchy of courts. Local courts commonly were convened in market places. Above them were an appellate court, a supreme court, and two special courts—one of which heard cases restricted to problems in Tenochtitlan while the other reviewed local court decisions. Military courts disposed of cases against commoners and nobility who committed crimes in time of war (Duran 1964:122; George 1961; Zorita 1963:124ff). Judges appointed by the Emperor presided over the courts (Sahagun 1950-1969, BK. 8:54). The Emperor was the ultimate judicial authority. He rendered decisions when the special courts reached an impasse and approved all death sentences.

*Politics.* With sufficient resources and a legally sanctioned right to act the state can extend its political influence and neutralize that of local organizations. Overt opposition by local organizations to state authority is not a prerequisite for pre-emptive actions by the state. State behavior toward the *calpullis*, *pochteca*, and nobility suggest that the state perceived them as potential threats. *Calpullis* probably were endogamous clan organizations (Bray 1972:175; Carrasco 1971:363-371) and as such probably claimed the strong allegiance of their

members. As state power developed the influence of *calpulli* officials in state government declined, and *calpulli* kinship associations were increasingly subjected to state control (Bray 1972:176; Carrasco 1971:365; Hicks 1982). Able-bodied Aztec males were liable for military service (Berdan 1982:79; Sahagun 1950-1969, BK. 2:212-214). Headmen of noble descent and state priests were appointed by the state to *calpulli* political and religious organizations. Heads of wards were charged with supplying corvée labor and royal edicts were sent to them to be transmitted to the people (Duran 1971:201). Although individuals' rights to land were determined by their status within a *calpulli*, one's status within a *calpulli* increasingly was determined by the state (Hicks 1982).

Upon marriage an individual was inscribed in the *calpulli* register for tax purposes (Carrasco 1971:357; Zorita 1963:367-369). The state may have been restricting polygynous unions (Carrasco 1971:367-368; Duran 1971:435), to reduce the potential to expand kinship structures. Courts were reluctant to grant divorces. These actions reaffirmed the strength of the monogamous household, the social structure that threatens the state least.

The *pochteca* were intimately involved with state economic, military and political affairs. Some served as judges in courts convened in market places. They also were more powerful and richer than most other Aztec *calpullis* (Sahagun 1950-1969, BKS. 4-5:87). Leadership was hereditary. They had their own courts, judges, gods, rituals, and festivals (Berdan 1982:31-34; Chapman 1957; Sahagun 1950-1969, BK. 9). Because they represented a very firmly bounded social group in possession of considerable power and influence, it is not difficult to see how the state might consider them a potential threat, and why they were subject to state regulations.

The state restricted the interaction of the *pochteca* with other Aztec citizens, functionally segregating them in their own wards. Certain categories of *pochteca* were not allowed to trade in public markets. Others were required to trade only in certain commodities, such as slaves. In general, the economic activities of the *pochteca* took place on behalf of the state in international ports of trade (Chapman 1957; Sahagun 1950-1969, BK. 9:17-18).

The head of state established alliances with neighboring states through marriage (Duran 1971:435; Motolinia 1950:25). This may have been especially important in the early stages of state development. Acamapichtli is reputed to have married twenty daughters of the chiefs of the clans that comprised Aztec society. From these unions presumably descended the original nobility of Aztec society, and some ultimately may have become heads of wards and *calpullis*. Itzcoatl granted titles, privileges, and high offices to his noble relatives, thereafter restricting participation of commoners in state bureaucracies (Caso 1963:866-867; Tezozomoc 1944:35-37). By the reign of Moctezuma II the nobility had grown in size considerably, due largely to the appointment of persons of low status to "knighthood" as reward for service to the state. In a move suggesting that this burgeoning petty nobility may have posed some threat, Moctezuma II removed such entitled nobility from state posts, denied privileges to others, and executed many of questionable birth. The bureaucracy was restructured and access to state offices was denied to all but pedigree nobles (Berdan 1982:46; Carrasco 1971:361; Duran 1964:222-226).

*Religion.* Early states are comprised of state and local level religions that are related dialectically. The state religion sanctifies the legitimacy of state government and is a source of real and symbolic power that the ruling class manipulates to impose its values on all citizens. Local religions validate structures and organizations with which they are associated. Both may be polytheistic but local level polytheism may harbor theologies that provide justification for local organizations that may threaten state authority. Polytheism is a manifestation of inchoateness against which the state reacts.



Aztec religion comprised state and local polytheism (Bray 1977:393). This condition persisted despite attempts by the state to overcome it. State priests attempted to reduce state and local polytheism and replace or integrate local *calpulli* and kin based religions with the state religion. Yet some of these activities promoted polytheism, for the state had a policy of incorporating the major deities of conquered peoples into its pantheon (Caso 1937:8). While this welded subject peoples into the Aztec state and empire, it also created an increasingly chaotic state pantheon.

The state priesthood was hierarchic. At its apex high priests were dedicated to major gods (Caso 1958:82). The head of state and other high officials also presided as priests in important state ceremonies (Caso 1937:54, 1958:82). State priests were involved in local level affairs and may have exercised a loose suzerainty over the priesthoods of tributary communities, even occasionally imposing Aztec cults upon them (Nicholson 1971:436). Although *calpulli* kin groups worshipped their own gods, state priests infiltrated their cults (Carrasco 1971:363; Caso 1958:90; Duran 1964:32).

Priests forced obedience to state norms, using the threat of divine retribution against nonconformers (Duran 1971:274). Priests attended court to ensure that religious observations concerned with the law were carried out and that justice was dispensed with the approval of the gods (George 1961:39). In some instances oaths to the gods were accepted as truth of the testimony being given (George 1961:39). Priests also served as judges and military commanders (Caso 1937:54, 59; 1958:85). Complementing the preceding strategies were others aimed at socializing citizens regarding state expectations.

### *Political Socialization*

If efforts by the state to inculcate its citizens with values which will ensure their support were accomplished easily, other legitimating strategies would be unnecessary. The fact that socialization is not accomplished easily is suggested by the investment the state makes in political socialization in material and symbolic resources. Political socialization as explored here, differs from what has been assumed previously (see Easton 1965; Greenstein 1965; Weber 1954). As conceptualized here, socialization in early states presumes the complementary and contradictory practices of benevolence, information control, and terror. The state attempts to ensure support by dramatizing what it can do for the loyal citizen (benevolence), what the citizen should do for the state (information), and the consequences for citizens who do not conform to state expectations (terror).

*Benevolence.* Wittfogel (1957) suggests that any activities by early states that outwardly appear to benefit the people are designed explicitly to maintain the ruler's power and prosperity and cannot be considered benevolent. Still, considerable evidence suggests that early states do act benevolently toward their citizens, if only to bind citizens to the state (Claessen and Skalnik 1978). But it also is clear that the motivation for benevolence is not always altruism.

Sahagun (1950-1969, BK. 8:59; BK. 10:13) claimed that Aztec rulers and nobles generally were benevolent. Certainly the Aztec state directed several subventions at its citizens, such as distributing food in times of shortage and at certain state ceremonies (Bray 1977:390; Duran 1964:144-147; Sahagun 1950-1969, BK. 8:44). Rewards in titles and land for state service obligated individuals to the state (Duran 1971:174). Public works, such as irrigation, flood control, roads, and temples not only provided goods and services to the citizens (Duran 1971:201), they were symbols of the state's concern with its people. They also had practical consequences. Irrigation and flood control enhanced agricultural production, a major source of state revenue. Roads expedited the movement of goods to market, *pochteca* to trade zones, and troops to conquest (Sahagun 1950-

1969, BK. 11:267-268; Zorita 1963:73). Construction and maintenance of temples and other public buildings appeased the gods, organized people's labor according to state directives, and supported priests and other state functionaries. Perhaps more than any other aspect of legitimation, state benevolence fulfills a functional paradigm that depicts reciprocal obligations between state and citizen as a major source of legitimacy (Easton 1965; Parsons 1969).

*Information.* Early states controlled the dissemination of selected information among their citizens, aimed in large measure at inculcating them with state values (Y. A. Cohen 1970; Kurtz 1981). The Aztec state maintained a firm control over information (Duran 1964:141-143) and disseminated it in a variety of ways. Aztec markets served as centers of communication because many people could be contacted there at any one time. State edicts and announcements were promulgated in them. Local and high courts convened there and criminals were tried publicly (Kurtz 1974; Sahagun 1950-1969, BK. 2:100).

The state also used schools to convey information to young children. The law code of Moctezuma I declared that all city wards would have schools and prescribed the curriculum (Duran 1964:132). It stressed training in religious and military matters, manners, morals, hard work, and discipline. Priests controlled education in both the *calmecacs* (the schools for noble children) and the *telpochallis* (the schools for commoners) (Caso 1937:60; 1958:89). Religious and military training were stressed in both schools. However, the *calmecacs'* curriculum was more extensive than that of the *telpochallis'* and was concerned with training judges, priests, administrators and military leaders. Both males and females received formal education. School attendance for boys, at least, was compulsory (Berdan 1982:88-90; Carrasco 1971:356-257; Sahagun 1950-1969, BK. 6:209). Females were trained in *calmecacs* to become priestesses. The instruction in *telpochallis* was an extension of training received in the home (Sahagun 1950-1969, BK. 6:171ff), and its students provided a major source of corvée labor for the state (Berdan 1982:90; Carrasco 1961:485; Sahagun 1950-1969, BK. 8:54). Education above all was aimed at creating a good citizen. Intellectual curiosity was not stimulated, the inculcation of state values and conformity were the goals (Caso 1937:60; 1958:85-87; George 1961; Sahagun 1950-1969; BK. 6:209; Torquemada 1964:113-117).

The state also appears to have promoted Nahuatl as a national language from early in the 15th century (Offner 1979). By the 16th century it apparently was attempting to establish it as a *lingua franca* for the central highlands (Heath 1972). The imposition of a national language would be an important unifying force for the nation. To what extent Aztec schools were promoting this is not clear.

Information also may be conveyed through other channels. Public trials and punishments, for example, symbolize the consequences for nonconformity. These and other activities are best considered in the final mode of socialization—state terror.

*Terror.* The value of terror as a means of socialization is summed up in the saying attributed to an anonymous Chinese of the Confucian era: "Kill one, frighten ten thousand." State activities that evoke terror among citizens convey a message regarding consequences for nonconformity. Terror may be an aspect of the politics of any state; it occurs most commonly when the legitimacy of an established state is threatened or when a state is extremely inchoate. Under these conditions the state tries to regulate areas of its citizens' behavior that in more secure states by and large are overlooked.

State terror in Aztec society increased after the Tepanec war. While it is difficult to measure this terror, or ascertain variations in its application, by the reign of Moctezuma II state terror had increased noticeably. During his reign spying on Mexican citizens as well as potential enemies was common state practice (Duran 1964:210ff, 227-229; Sahagun 1950-1959, BK. 8:57).

One characteristic of terror in early states is a severity of punishment exceeding what might seem to be just and reasonable. Theoretically punishment demonstrates the power of the state. The Aztec state prescribed death for crimes such as theft, drunkenness, fornication, adultery, and others (Berdan 1982:96-98; Duran 1964:131-132, 223, 1971:124, 282ff; George 1961; Motolinia 1950:75; Sahagun 1950-1969, BK. 2:100; BK. 8:43, 69). Most executions were public and carried out in market places. Although execution for theft might be understandable, the concern the state had with its citizens' drinking habits and sexual activity is more difficult to explain. Perhaps if a state thinks it can control fundamental areas of its citizens' affective behavior, it has taken a giant stride toward control of other, less affective areas of their lives, such as their productive labors.

The state held extended kin jointly liable for certain transgressions by their members, especially if they were sufficiently heinous to nullify the individual's right to citizenship. For lesser offenses an individual's family might suffer to the extent that their house was destroyed (Sahagun 1950-1969, BK. 8:44). For more serious offenses, such as treason or aiding a traitor, the offender might be executed, all family property confiscated, and kin subjected to punishment (Berdan 1982:38; George 1961; Sahagun 1950-1969, BK. 8:44, 57; Zorita 1963:132).

The nobility was not exempt from subtle forms of persuasion. From the reign of Moctezuma I, each emperor required that a certain number of lords and children of lords attend the court for part of each year (Cortez 1928:94; Zorita 1963:104, 111, 160). While the purpose for this service is not clear, enforced attendance at court does encourage obedience and allegiance of the nobility (Befu 1965). Aztec courtiers who did not comport themselves appropriately might be killed (Duran 1964:223). In effect, courtiers became state hostages.

Although the most common explanations for human sacrifice among the Aztecs center around religious activity and, more recently, ecological considerations (Harner 1977), political explanations have been rare. Bourdillon (1980:23) and Berdan (1982:111-118) recognize a connection between human sacrifice and political power in states. Although Aztec human sacrifice clearly had religious import, for them and other early states generally it was also an exercise in the demonstration and use of political power and a subtle feature of the repertoire of terror the state employed in the socialization of its citizens. This is suggested by several factors.

Aztec human sacrifice was public, justified, enforced legally, religiously sanctioned, and conducted on behalf of the state. It increased steadily after the Tepanac war and seemed to correspond to Aztec territorial expansion (Berdan 1982:118; Kinman 1952). Sacrifice also was carried out at all Aztec state and religious functions and at the death of heads of state and other important functionaries (Kinman 1952; Sahagun 1950-1969, BK. 2). State priests, the head of state, and other important officials actively participated in it (Duran 1964:178; Kinman 1952). Berdan (1982:112) comments that "Everyone was a potential candidate for sacrifice." But individuals whose status as citizens was clear and unambiguous almost never were sacrificed. Common sacrificial victims were prisoners of war, criminals, slaves, children and adults of both sexes (Berdan 1982:114; Kinman 1952; Motolinia 1950:63-66; Sahagun 1950-1969, BK. 2). War prisoners clearly were not citizens. Sacrifice of prisoners demonstrated Aztec political power and hegemony. On occasion, enemy heads of state were invited to Aztec ceremonies where they watched the sacrifice of their own captured warriors (Duran 1964:194-195). While their sacrifice may have had religious connotations, their deaths also demonstrated the fate of those who defied Aztec military might (Hicks 1982). Thus human sacrifice was an important symbolic aspect of Aztec state politics.

As social undesirables criminals held dubious citizenship, as they do in most states. Slaves often had been criminals, as well as debtors and indigents. Neither

slaves nor criminals fulfilled normative expectations of the ideal Aztec citizen (Sahagun 1950-1969, BK. 10, BK. 6). Sacrifice of these individuals also tended to demonstrate state power and convey a message regarding the possible fate of anyone who did not live up to Aztec ideals of citizenship.

More ambiguous is the sacrifice of children and adults. Religious considerations well may have been pre-eminently important in these contexts. Still, in state societies generally, children rarely are considered to be full, responsible citizens. Further, Aztec adults prior to their sacrifice were symbolically divested of their human social status (*ergo* citizenship) and allocated that of a surrogate deity. The fact that mature, responsible individuals holding a clear and unambiguous status of citizen rarely were sacrificed suggests a subtle symbolic relationship between state and citizen. A good citizen was made a god prior to sacrifice; a less desirable person was expendable.

Many aspects of terror are more symbolic than real. While the right to employ terror is legally sanctioned, to what extent coercive laws are enforced is not always clear, or even important. There is little evidence that joint liability or the death penalty for adultery were used commonly but it is important that such laws were codified. They can be applied as the state deems necessary.

### CONCLUSIONS

This paper has explored the process by which the Aztec state attempted to attain legitimacy. The focus has been upon legitimation, not on legitimacy. The paper suggests that support is a key concept for understanding legitimation. Legitimation is accomplished through a series of strategies by which the state attempts to acquire the support and allegiance of its citizens.

The legitimation of a state is based on its ability to control sufficient resources and mobilize its citizen's labors and its nation's institutions and to permit it to create and manipulate an array of uncommon symbols. State economic policies are aimed at increasing production above *per capita* requirements of the population. Surplus goods and commodities are mobilized by the state and provide it with the means to pursue legitimating strategies, a major goal of which is the reduction of the influence of local level organization upon the citizens. Symbols intervene and imbue every phase of the process. Their interdigitation with the material aspects of legitimation appears to be necessary for the state to attain legitimacy.

Legitimizing strategies do not follow one upon the other. Perhaps the only necessary first step is increased state control over the nation's economy. This provides the state with resources that permit it to pursue other strategies which, ideally, interact systemically in a positive feedback. If legitimation is successful inchoateness is reduced and legitimacy is increased. Some states are more successful than others but few states become indelibly legitimate. Legitimation is an ongoing process. It is never a permanent condition. Some states are more successful than others.

### NOTE

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