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Colonial Myths: The Conquest of Cabeza de Vaca

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COLONIAL MYTHS: THE CONQUEST OF CABEZA DE VACA

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The Department of World Languages,
Literatures & Cultures

by
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B.A., Louisiana State University, 2019
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the *relaciones* (report) *Naufragios* (1542) and *Comentarios* (1555) with the intention of expanding upon the ample publications already existent on Cabeza de Vaca. With this thesis I offer a contrasting reading and reexamination of both of Cabeza de Vaca's works. I argue that a number of the scholarly publications on Cabeza de Vaca fail to understand, define, and explore the identity and goals of Cabeza de Vaca as his own unique version of a conqueror which ultimately leads to a misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the texts. After an initial chapter discussing how Cabeza de Vaca never underwent a transformation of identity in *Naufragios* the following chapter applies and builds upon certain aspects from Mary Louise Pratt's (1992) concept of the anti-conquest to explore how Cabeza de Vaca creates a narrative that attempts to acquit him from being responsible yet, at the same time, gives justification for colonization. I use Pratt's anti-conquest approach to explore the ways in which Cabeza de Vaca's narrative in both *Naufragios* and *Comentarios* justifies European expansion while at the same time distinguishes itself from the common sixteenth century imperialist imperial rhetoric of the conquest. Through this interpretation, this thesis discusses how Cabeza de Vaca writes himself out of being responsible for acting as an agent, direct or indirect, of colonization and colonialism in an attempt to establish his innocence while at the same time legitimizing the conquest. I examine how he pushes this anti-conquest narrative even further to become what I call the counter-conquest to portray an extreme of the natives as being reliant on the Spaniards. The last chapter of this thesis sets out to analyze, rebalance and clarify the roles and contributions of both the natives and the Spaniards in *Naufragios* and *Comentarios* and analyze how natives resisted colonization.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis discusses and explores *Naufragios* (1542) and *Comentarios* (1555) by Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca. *Naufragios*, the better known of the two works that this thesis will examine, covers the 1527 Pánfilo de Narváez expedition that set out to explore and conquer lands between la Florida and Río de las Palmas. During the Narváez expedition Cabeza de Vaca initially held the role of treasurer; however, things drastically changed as the expedition endured a series of hardships. After various shipwrecks Cabeza de Vaca, Alonso de Castillo, Andres Dorantes, and Estebanico were the only four members of the expedition who survived and ended up on the coast of present-day Texas. Cabeza de Vaca and the remaining survivors wandered for eight years across southwest North America and finally made it to Mexico City where they re-established contact with other Spaniards. After the year 1537, he wrote his account of the expedition, which would later become known as *Naufragios* after being published in 1542. The *relación* (report) documents his experiences and journey among many indigenous populations and is one of the earliest written histories of North America.

After Cabeza de Vaca's return to Spain he intended to seek an appointment as governor of La Florida. However, it had already been granted to Hernando de Soto. Later, in 1540, he was appointed the conditional title of *adelantado*¹ of the Río de la Plata, pending the living state of Juan de Ayolas. Upon his arrival to the settlement of Asunción, after the confirmation of Ayolas death, Cabeza de Vaca was appointed *adelantado* of Río de la Plata. The work *Comentarios* (1555) was published under the name of his secretary, Pedro Hernández, and is the third person memoir of Cabeza de Vaca's experience at Asunción and his journey to Río de la Plata. While it is still uncertain how much Cabeza de Vaca directly contributed to and had influence on

¹ *Adelantados* were titles given by the Spanish monarch to governors and military commanders of a specific region which they were sent out to conquer and colonize.

Comentarios, like in *Naufragios*, the *relato* (report) gives us an account of what happened during the expedition. It covers the entire second expedition from his landing at the island of Santa Catalina, Brazil in 1541, to his arrival at the settlement of Asunción in 1542, up until his return to Spain after his imprisonment by the settlers and conquistadors he had originally been sent out to aid. While *Comentarios* remains the lesser-discussed *relato* of Cabeza de Vaca, this account is no less captivating and adventure filled than *Naufragios*.

Along the journey in the *relación* of *Naufragios*, we read of Cabeza de Vaca's claims that he was made a slave for six years by the Capoque peoples on an island off the coast of Texas, and then was able to become a tradesman and eventually a well-respected shaman. Almost ethnographic in nature, his descriptions of the natives' customs and societies are very detailed and demonstrate how intimate and extensive his contact with them was. Because of this unique and extraordinary *relación*, much attention has been given to the anthropological, historical, and literary importance of the text over the years. As Ann Ortiz notes, "From the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries, commentators have tended to assign to Núñez the role of saint without examining his own remarks on healing in the text. Twentieth century studies tend to emphasize his role as shaman..." (1995, 11).

While religious and healing aspects of *Naufragios* have garnered the majority of interest and attention from readers, in this thesis I challenge these interpretations and argue that they lead to a limited understanding about Cabeza de Vaca and the text. I argue that it is a mistake to only focus on his curing and religious rhetoric in the text without considering the context and entirety of the text. Rolena Adorno has come the closest to this understanding by stating that his shamanistic curing practices are "...only one aspect of a complex web of negotiations between the shipwrecked survivors and the native peoples they encountered" (1991, 166). The first

chapter of this thesis discusses how these misinterpretations of his shamanistic curing practices, his religious narrative, and his use of rhetoric lead readers to wrongly infer that he led a peaceful conquest and that his Christianity and experience with the natives transformed his identity.

To analyze and understand Cabeza de Vaca's identity I look at how he perceives and portrays his own identity in interaction with the natives, and also among the Spaniard colonists in *Comentarios*, which previous studies have failed to consider doing. Essential to tackling the common perception that Cabeza de Vaca was a "saint" of the conquest, it is important to understand to whom he was being compared. To recalibrate our understanding and perspective on Spanish conquerors, I discuss the concept behind the title of a conqueror, the perception of the archetypal conqueror, and call for Cabeza de Vaca to be placed as and thought of as a conqueror. Assisting in the clarification of Cabeza de Vaca's identity in the text, I discuss his intentions and modified approach to the traditional conquest, compare his priorities and methods of colonizing with those of other conquerors, and look at how these are presented differently in each of the two works. I challenge the notion that he assumed a new non-European identity and highlight that if his identity was transformed during his first expedition, then that new identity should be reflected in *Comentarios* as well.

The desire to see Cabeza de Vaca as a saint or peaceful conqueror (Adorno, 1991; Docter, 2008) in combination with his seductive literary style and strategic narrative often blind readers to reading between the lines of the text and results in the readers only seeing what Cabeza de Vaca wants us to see. In my second chapter I expose and analyze Cabeza de Vaca's strategic narrative as a consistent attempt to circumvent guilt and rewrite colonial domination as a passive innocent activity. Mary Louise Pratt uses the term "anti-conquest" to refer to "the strategies of representation whereby the European bourgeois seek to secure their innocence in the

same moment as they assert European hegemony” (1992, 9). She developed this concept to explore the underlying desire in the conquest to have it both ways; serving the needs of European capitalist expansion while at the same time avoiding or even challenging older imperial rhetoric of the conquest. A significant portion of chapter two discusses applying an anti-conquest narrative in both works while also asking what purpose it serves uniquely in each work.

While the expeditions and works of Cabeza de Vaca do not pertain to the 18th century in which Pratt bases the concept of the anti-conquest, this concept can be expanded upon in order to allow us to transpose it to the 16th century and find aspects and features of the anti-conquest narrative present in *Naufraios* and *Comentarios*. I interpret and apply Pratt’s anti-conquest to explore the ways in which Cabeza de Vaca’s narrative justifies European expansion while at the same time showing how it differs from the common sixteenth century imperialist rhetoric of the conquest. I also build upon Pratt’s concept of the anti-conquest and develop my own concept that I call the “counter-conquest” which is centered upon the dynamic of commensalism. In contrast to the proposal of a mutually beneficial relationship of exchange proposed in the anti-conquest, in *Comentarios* and *Naufraios*, the narratives surrounding Cabeza de Vaca at times center on a relationship through which only the natives benefit from the Spaniards presence. Through this interpretation, this thesis demonstrates that Cabeza de Vaca writes himself out of being responsible for acting as an agent of colonization and colonialism in an attempt to establish his innocence while at the same time legitimizing the conquest. Furthermore, I examine how he pushes this anti-conquest narrative even further in the counter-conquest to portray an extreme of the natives as being reliant on him and the Spaniards in some instances.

Through this close reading and analysis, we see that while Cabeza de Vaca was skillful with his representations in the text, we can still find blemishes in the narrative that clue us to a

different and somewhat contradictory account to what he wants to represent to the reader regarding relations with the natives. In chapter three I highlight the breaks in the rhetoric where we see examples of native agency and resistance to colonization. To the detriment of the literature surrounding Cabeza de Vaca, no study has looked for native resistance in the texts thus far. In the third chapter, however, I show that there was plenty of native resistance and Cabeza de Vaca was not always peaceful with the resolution of conflicts. In analyzing the text for native agency and voice we can return power and control back to the natives by reading them as unified and intelligent people in control of their own actions and, at some points, in control of the Spaniards.

Other essential questions I explore in chapter three include how Cabeza de Vaca gains authority and agency amongst the natives and if his portrayal is a true and accurate representation. In both works Cabeza de Vaca portrays himself as an authority figure amongst the natives as well as among the Spanish settlers in *Comentarios*. However, despite the fact that he portrays himself this way, at several points in both works it is clear that he does not have complete authority or agency. This lack of authority then brings up the question of determining what the true balance of the relationship between Cabeza de Vaca and the natives was. Central to the discussion in this chapter is a reexamination and criticism of the acceptance of this favorable reading and interpretation of Cabeza de Vaca (Bruce-Novoa, 1993; Doctor, 2008; Hickerson, 1998; Spitta, 2006; Howard, 1997). Because of the absolute lack of attention literary readings pay to indigenous resistance and agency in the text, readers have championed Cabeza de Vaca as leading “the most successful and the most peaceful of conquests” (Adorno, 1991, 191) and end up reproducing and contributing to the colonial myth themselves.

The primary objective of this thesis is to reexamine, rebalance, and challenge what has been widely accepted about Cabeza de Vaca and his narrative. While the literature on Cabeza de Vaca is extensive, most of the scholarly work fixates on selective themes in just one of his works (Ortiz, 1995). Failing to take into consideration both of his works ultimately causes us to lose out on a better understanding of Cabeza de Vaca and the intentions behind his works. There is a sharp contrast between Cabeza de Vaca's experience surviving as a castaway in North America and his experience as *adelantado* with bountiful resources and as the leader of an armed expedition in the Río de la Plata. Analyzing both works in this thesis has allowed me to observe and explore Cabeza de Vaca under two very distinct and interesting circumstances.

CHAPTER ONE. THE IDENTITY OF CABEZA DE VACA

Cabeza de Vaca's *Naufragios* has largely captured interest from critics due to its literary value (Jaffe, 2015; Rabasa, 2000) which in turn has led to a common problematic reading of the text that seemingly not only absolves Cabeza de Vaca of his identity as a Spanish conqueror but also prevents readers from seeing his imperialist discourse in the text. According to José Rabasa, it is the same seductive power that makes *Naufragios* a brilliant literary piece that leads historians and critics to argue that Cabeza de Vaca underwent a personal transformation during his journey through North America (2000, 31). Through this "personal transformation" it is widely accepted that Cabeza de Vaca changed his identity to one that is hybrid Spanish-Indian, and that he emerged from years of captivity with the goal of bringing the Indians of America into the Spanish empire with justice and liberty (Howard, 1997, 3).

This romanticized reading of *Naufragios* has led scholars to describe Cabeza de Vaca as someone who was an advocate of peaceful conquest (Adorno, 1991, 191), underwent a transformation within himself (Docter, 2008, 5), was the first Chicano (Bruce-Novoa, 1993, 4), Indianized but not an Indian, Spanish speaking but not a Spaniard (Molloy, 1986, 31) and the first Spanish transculturator of Indian culture (Spitta, 1995). Not only is this reading of *Naufragios* problematic, but the conversation about Cabeza de Vaca as some form of a hybrid Spanish-Indian ignores the discourse in the text that illustrates Cabeza de Vaca's ideology on the conversion and pacification of the natives and "his belief that the superiority of Spanish culture excused the Spaniard's violent conquering and taking of land from Americans" (Jaffe, 2015, 5). Furthermore, these readings manage to critique imperialism while still retaining a redeemable view of Spanish colonialism in exceptional individuals, which forces us to consider if we have

been seduced by Cabeza de Vaca into an uncritical participation in and reproduction of the culture of the conquest (Rabasa, 2000, 35).

Understanding Cabeza de Vaca as the Atypical Conqueror

First and foremost, it is paramount to keep in mind the intention and purpose of the Pánfilo de Narváez expedition. As noted in Adorno and Pautz, the intention for the expedition to Florida, according to Narváez, was to “conquer, populate, and discover everything there is to discover in those parts” (1999, 1: 11). Cabeza de Vaca would eventually join this expedition with the recognition of his successful soldiering in Italy and Andalusia contributing to his appointment as official treasurer (Adorno and Pautz, 1999, 1: 372). As royal treasurer, Cabeza de Vaca was responsible for the collection of the royal revenues, mainly the King’s Fifth, as well as maintaining discipline among the men of the expedition and reporting any harm inflicted upon the Indians to the king (Docter, 2008, 7). As an official in the Narváez expedition, Cabeza de Vaca undoubtably possessed the mentality of a sixteenth century colonialist and conquistador. However, most scholars do not perceive him as such, and thus their interpretation and reading of the text and his identity is based upon a different understanding. What I argue first here is that the title and identity of “conquistador” is not something categorical where one either fits the mold or not; rather, it is a scale along which individuals can be placed. What has proved to be problematic is placing Cabeza de Vaca on this scale instead of entirely removing him from it. Placing someone like Cabeza de Vaca, who had one of the most unique experiences of the colonial period, on this scale is necessary in order to truly be able to comprehend his identity. As Rabasa notes, by dissolving the separation of the domains of violence and ideology we may call into question the difference between Cabeza de Vaca’s colonial approach and that of slave raiders, “good” and “bad” *conquistadores*, and the law and its criminals (2000, 37).

Public and sometimes even scholarly perception of what a conquistador is and who deserves the title poses a challenge and is directly oppositional to understanding the varied identities and forms of a conqueror, especially in the case of Cabeza de Vaca. As Mathew Restall notes, the variety of identities, experiences, and life stories of the Spanish in the “Indies” renders the concept of the typical conquistador somewhat nonsensical and leaves other forms of conquistadors largely invisible (2003, 43). As popular perception would have it, conquistadors are seen as brutal, genocidal colonists culpable of a savage assault on innocent civilizations; they were the perpetrators of the first great act of early modern colonialism (Cervantes, 2020, xvi). The most notable conquistador who embodies this narrative would of course be Hernán Cortés. Testifying to this point, Restall asserts that in the sixteenth century Cortés became the archetypal conquistador, and he remains so today (2003, xv). In agreement with Restall, Brinkerhoff adds that the legend of Hernán Cortés as a brilliant conqueror still represents the myth of sixteenth-century European superiority and “the image of Cortés and his band of Spanish adventurers, as seen in both popular history and more serious academic scholarship, has dominated narratives of the Spanish conquest for decades” (2016, 169-70). These dominating archetypal representations of a conqueror that have been derived from the images and perceptions of conquerors like Cortés contribute to defining not only the public’s perception, but also the scholarly perception of what a “true” conqueror is. This in combination with the captivating literary narrative from Cabeza de Vaca blinds many readers and critics and leads them to misplace his identity to begin with.

Several critics (Bruce-Novoa, 1993; Doctor, 2008; Silva 1999; Spitta, 2006; Howard, 1997) who posit that Cabeza de Vaca either changed or lost his Spanish identity argue that the change occurred through his interactions with the natives in North America. I argue that even if these arguments were sound, they fail to consider the complexity of Cabeza de Vaca’s identity

before he even had interactions with the natives, and therefore cannot adequately nor accurately comment on how or if his identity changed throughout his journey. Through a careful reading of the beginning of *Naufragios* it is easily noted that even prior to the shipwreck and separation from the expedition Cabeza de Vaca is at odds with the other Spaniards in the expedition. His disagreement with Narváez regarding the abandonment of the ships for an inland expedition in 1528 illustrates this point. Narváez wanted to move the expedition inland on foot into the coast of Florida while Cabeza de Vaca suggested waiting to disembark until the safe arrival at Pánuco and the Río de las Palmas, given the previous complications the expedition had experienced (Adorno and Pautz, 1999, 2; 94). Narváez, however, went against the will of Cabeza de Vaca and the other officials of the expedition. After being disembarked for several days onshore Cabeza de Vaca wrote:

And on the third day after having arrived there, we- the comptroller, the inspector, the commissary, and I- met together, and we begged the governor to send scouts to look for the sea to see if we could find a port, because the Indians said that the sea was not very far from there. He replied to us that we should not trouble ourselves with talking about that, because it was very far from there. And since I was the one who importuned him the most, he told me that I should go to find it and seek a port and that I was to go on foot with forty men to do this. (Adorno and Pautz translation 1999, 1; 47-9)

Cabeza de Vaca not only objected to the Governor's original orders to leave the ships on the coast of Florida and send an exploration party into the interior but, he also urged Narváez that they should return to the ships (Silva, 1999, 142). In his *relación*, Cabeza de Vaca tells us that the reason Narváez gave for moving the settlement inland was because of a lack of food and resources in the land where they were (Adorno and Pautz, 1999, 1; 43). Adorno and Pautz add that it is evident based on Cabeza de Vaca's writing that the poverty of the land was not Narváez's primary motive for moving the settlement inland. Narváez's true intentions were to

continue inland in search of the riches of Apalache that the Indians had told him of earlier, rather than staying with the ships and finding the ports (1999, 2; 133).

It is worth mention that Cabeza de Vaca's narration of Narváez's shortcomings and bad judgments could be characterized as a fabricated literary construction created to exonerate himself before the emperor regarding the loss of the expedition (Adorno and Pautz, 1999, 2; 132). However, we must take his account at face value given that questions of the validity of his writings cannot be demonstrated; and doubts remain throughout the entirety of both *Naufragios* and *Comentarios*. Nonetheless, Cabeza de Vaca's dramatic objection and opposition to Narváez's aggressive and reckless desire to move inland at the risk of endangering the expedition in search of riches in Appalache suggests that he did not fit the mold of the archetypal conquistador one could argue Narváez epitomized. Instead of possessing the mindset of the stereotypical conqueror that Restall describes as eager to "risk his life if absolutely necessary in order to be a member of the first company to conquer" (2003, 43) and explore, Cabeza de Vaca thinks and behaves in the inverse manner, prioritizing the viability and safety of the expedition over the pursuit of riches and conquest.

Applying a more nuanced concept of a conqueror with varied identities, occupations, and motivations is important not just in the case of Cabeza de Vaca, but also for a more realistic comprehension of the general history of the conquest and *conquistadors* as well. Cabeza de Vaca's objections and tamed hunger for conquering and searching for riches could portray him to the reader as weaker and less aggressive than the typical conqueror, thus encouraging them to distance him from the identity of a conqueror. However, this interpretation contributes to a limited vision of Cabeza de Vaca. Cortés, Narváez, and Cabeza de Vaca are all conquerors in essence, but were simply different types of conquerors with differing prioritizations, who each

occupy different spaces within the concept of conqueror. Considering that some critics lack an understanding of Cabeza de Vaca's complex identity with which he enters the expedition, their claims of witnessing a transformation in his identity are based on the erroneous imposition that he began the journey as an archetypal conquistador. It is understandable how the claim of change or transformation can be seen in Cabeza de Vaca when using the perception of an archetypal conquistador as the starting point of his personal transformational journey. However, the extent of the transformation he undergoes drastically decreases, and one could argue even disappears, as we shift away from perceiving him as an archetypal conqueror.

In Contact with the Natives

When looking into the popular belief that he was able to transform his identity, it is important to understand how readers see this transformation taking place in Cabeza de Vaca. Several critics (Bruce-Novoa, 1993; Doctor, 2008; Silva 1999; Spitta, 2006; Howard, 1997) heavily romanticize his *relación* and claim that his experience of living with the natives for several years, in combination with his pacific behavior with the natives, was what allowed him to transform his identity. Cabeza de Vaca's self-portrayal as kind and empathetic in his writings have led many scholars such as Adorno (1991) to believe that he led a "peaceful conquest". Others like Alan Silva mention that he both observes and participates in native life and becomes a participant observer, or "goes native", and "gradually transforms the colonizing self of the Florida parts in the narrative into a middle phase" between himself and "the Other" (1999, 131). As mentioned earlier, the common perception is that the Cabeza de Vaca in the "Florida parts" during the Narváez expedition is soon to be transformed by "the Others", being the natives, along his journey. To these critics, the image of Cabeza de Vaca dressing, speaking, eating, and living like the natives is what detaches him from his identity as a Spaniard.

Mary Docter's article titled "Enriched by Otherness: The Transformational Journey of Cabeza de Vaca" (2008) contains a synthesis of many of these same problematic interpretations that can be reduced to first, portraying Cabeza de Vaca as a benevolent character who does not exhibit any use of direct force or brutality against the natives, and second, perceiving him as someone who becomes indifferent and no longer imposes negative judgement on the natives and their culture. Docter bases her analysis on Miroslav Volf's (1996) notion of self and other as elaborated in *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, quoting Vlof:

Identity is the result of the distinction from the other and the internalization of the relationship to the other; it arises out of the complex history of "differentiation" in which both the self and the other take part by negotiating their identities in interaction with one another. Hence, as Paul Ricoeur has argued in *Oneself as Another*, "the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other (3)" (Vlof, 1996, 66).

Docter posits that "we define ourselves solely by what differentiates ourselves from others", and in order to embrace the other "we must first see the other through their eyes and not our own particular lens" (2008, 5). She relates Vlof's notion of self to Cabeza de Vaca, arguing that "understanding Vlof's notion of identity and otherness helps illumine our study of the relationship between Cabeza de Vaca's evolving construction of self and his view of the other" (2008, 6).

In part two of her article where she dubs Cabeza de Vaca as the "Struggling Survivor", she asserts that after the shipwreck, Cabeza de Vaca, now reliant on the natives, grows a greater comprehension and understanding of them as he spends more time living among them and continues his journey toward seeing through the other's eyes (2008, 12). Docter claims that prior to the shipwreck Cabeza de Vaca had no interest in understanding the natives, but once he is reliant upon them, he must learn their language and customs to survive. She also makes note of

Cabeza de Vaca's ethnographic writing. In particular, she points to a section in chapter twenty-eight where he describes and explains the natives' reasoning behind sacrificing their newborn daughters. She goes on to assert that through his explanation, "he doesn't just describe the custom, but he makes sense of it for us" (2008, 12-3). While Docter focuses on his ethnographic descriptions and justification in the text, she mistakes Cabeza de Vaca's participation and ethnographic comprehension for complete acceptance of the natives and their culture *without* judgement, and ultimately fails to contribute to the point she is trying to prove.

Believing that Cabeza de Vaca truly accepted without judgement the natives and their cultures would require one to fall victim to the seductive literary narrative he produces. Scholars such as Justo García Morales call Cabeza de Vaca's time with the natives, which he spent part of as a slave, a "positive experience of co-habitation", while Bruce-Novoa goes as far to call his experience as an "apprenticeship" with the natives (García Morales qtd. in Bruce-Novoa 1993, 9; 13). In the text, Cabeza de Vaca is not simply conveying what happened to him during those years; he intentionally adds nuance, ambiguity, and miraculous scenes, in order to captivate the reader. Thus, it is easy to fall into the trap of reading *Naufragios* as a literary narrative (Jaffe, 2015, 76). These scholars' romanticized interpretations of Cabeza de Vaca's time and interactions with the natives completely dismiss the *relación* as a historical document and separate it from reality.

Cabeza de Vaca was not in an apprenticeship with the natives. Rather, he was a lost, shipwrecked conquistador who was not only completely dependent on the natives but was also enslaved by them. He was forced to adapt to a new environment to survive. Eating and dressing like them, hunting with them, speaking their language, and understanding the traditions of a foreign culture does not transform one's cultural identity into that of an indigenous person, much

less so for a sixteenth-century Spanish conquistador. Yes, Cabeza de Vaca participated in native language and culture, but his participation in these acts were a means of survival and adaptation. However, they are commonly misconceived as acceptance and even embracement of these customs. Nonetheless, Docter argues through Volf's notion of self that Cabeza de Vaca was able to see the other through their eyes and was thus able to negotiate his identity through interaction with the other, in turn releasing him from the need to distinguish himself from the other (2008, 5).

Tzvetan Todorov (1984) shares a similar thinking to Docter and the other critics who see a transitional Cabeza de Vaca in *Naufragios*. Comparing him to Bartolomé de las Casas, Todorov states that Cabeza de Vaca “reached a neutral point, not because he was indifferent to the two cultures but because he had experienced them both from within, thereby he no longer had anything but “the others” around him; without becoming an Indian, Cabeza de Vaca was no longer quite a Spaniard” (1984, 249). Todorov places Cabeza de Vaca in a hybrid space and suggests that just living within both communities has made Cabeza de Vaca “neutral” and “indifferent” to both cultural identities. Jaffe further adds that Todorov's suggestion also seems to “have anti-imperialist connotations, because it also argues in part that Cabeza de Vaca is no longer altogether Spanish” (2015, 61).

Critics cited above argue that Cabeza de Vaca discards his Spanish identity and transitions into a hybrid one that is neither purely Spanish nor native. However, I find no evidence that Cabeza de Vaca ever surrenders to view himself as anything other than the superior Spaniard. As Silva correctly notes, the natives in fact are always read in a rhetoric of “Not”, as a “lack, a void, as deficient in the values of society” (1999, 127). For example, Cabeza de Vaca sets out to degrade the natives and separate them from his western superiority, writing in Chapter

Twenty-two “All these people did not know how to calculate the seasons either by the sun or the moon, nor do they have reckoning of the months and years...” and in Chapter Nineteen “...even though there are rivers, since they are never permanently settled, they never have a known or fixed source of water... it seems to me that it would be very productive land if it were worked and inhabited by men of reason.” (Adorno and Pautz, 1999, 1;169, 151).

In Memmi’s (1967) theory of the colonizer, he argues that colonialists stress those things which keep them separate, rather than emphasizing that which might contribute to the foundation of a joint community and in those differences, characterized as deficits, the colonized is always degraded and the colonialist finds justification for rejecting his subjects (1967, 115). Applying this to the text in the *relación*, we see that Cabeza de Vaca firmly retains his Spanish imperial colonialist identity by repeatedly resisting and separating himself from the native identity and way of life. Thus he is not “neutral” or “indifferent” to the Spanish or to the natives as Todorov proposes. Docter herself acknowledges in the notes section of her article that Cabeza de Vaca always “placed the other in a position of inferiority, not equality” (2008, 23) which incidentally also calls into question the validity and integrity of her argument. Participating in native cultures, food ways, rituals, and language, does not change one’s identity, especially if this level of assimilation is required for one’s survival and there is a persistent effort to resist and differentiate yourself from the other.

In the last section of Docter’s article where she discusses Cabeza de Vaca’s participation in the natives’ healing rituals, she maintains that Cabeza de Vaca takes on an identity “that initiates a radically new relationship with the Indians” (2008, 14). Not only does she suggest that Cabeza de Vaca’s participation in the natives’ healing rituals reflects his acceptance of them, but she also quotes a passage from Chapter Twenty-eight in *Naufragios* where the Spaniards arrival

at a village where the Indians who brought them there proceed to rob and loot the occupants' homes:

We were very sorry to see this ill treatment of those who had welcomed us and we also feared that this might cause some altercation or uproar among them. But since we had no way to prevent it nor punish those who were doing it, we had to suffer it until we had greater authority among them (XXVIII; as qtd. in Docter 2008, 16).

Above all, Docter, notices that Cabeza de Vaca has a sympathetic reaction to the Indians and appears genuinely sorry for their mistreatment (2008, 16). She then points to a similar incident that occurs at the very end of the *relación* when Cabeza de Vaca hears news of other Europeans nearby, noting that while Cabeza de Vaca was initially excited by the news, the excitement diminished once he saw the signs of cruelty the Spaniards had committed by enslaving the natives and raiding and burning the land. Docter proceeds to equate the actions and mentality of these other Spaniards to that of Cabeza de Vaca at the beginning of the *relación* and uses it to highlight what she sees as his transformation stating that "It is Cabeza de Vaca who has changed. Seeing these cruel acts through the other's eyes, he is moved to compassion and empathy..." (2008, 18).

In Docter's conclusion she summarizes how she and others who share her view see Cabeza de Vaca as a transformed man. She mentions that unlike the other conquistadors, Cabeza de Vaca "achieves authority among the natives not through force or violence, but through knowledge, understanding, and actions based upon Christ-like love" (2008, 19). Additionally, she concludes that he was able to distance himself from the imperial ideology that shaped the conquest and was able to end his pilgrimage a changed man, one "enriched by otherness" (2008, 20). Her perception of Cabeza de Vaca's assertion of empathy for the natives is one that many critics latch on to (Todorov, 1984; Adorno, 1991; Docter, 2008; Molloy, 1986; Howard, 1997). This empathetic portrayal can seduce the reader into an idealized perception that Cabeza de Vaca

led a “peaceful conquest” which further distances him, in their minds, from the dominant archetypal conqueror and contributes to the narrative that his identity had been transformed.

Rabasa comments on this concept of a peaceful and sympathetic Cabeza de Vaca and notes that a “peaceful conquest” is an oxymoron that negotiates colonial dominance with hegemonic consent in that the right kind of treatment will render the “hostile” Indian “servile” (2000, 32). Cabeza de Vaca is still in fact an agent of conquest and imperialism, albeit in a different fashion that seemingly persuades one into separating him from any “negative” connotations. As Jaffe notes, although he does not participate in direct physical violence, he does participate in a “softer violence” that involves pacification of peoples through conversion practices by constructing Spanish religion as superior and the native peoples as easily conquerable (2015, 23). Silva further explains how without the use of force Cabeza de Vaca was still able to actively participate in the conquest:

Cultural contact disrupts Cabeza de Vaca's colonizing objective, but paradoxically reinforces it. No longer is he interested in using Christianity as a support system for enslaving the natives; instead, he chooses to see it as a tool for creating a community of believers. This evangelizing motive is not as physically violent as military conquest, but it still allows the colonizer to maintain authority over the indigenous population. He can thus preserve his colonialist relation to the natives... (1999, 143).

I agree with Rabasa and Silva in that even though Cabeza de Vaca presents himself as a somewhat benevolent character, he nevertheless reproduces “the colonial myths that structure and articulate the same violence he condemns” (Rabasa 2000, 35). We see examples of this not only through his reduction of native knowledge systems and religions to shams and superstitions inspired by the devil but we also see it through his emphasis of Spanish superiority over the natives (Rabasa 2000, 33).

Although he did not use violent physical force, Cabeza de Vaca proselytized and thus acted within Spanish political structures in attempting to colonize the natives. “Calling the

treasurer empathetic to the natives ignores how the text reflects that colonial power not only involved direct physical violence but also a soft violence that involved creating a dialogue that prioritized Spanish religion and a way of life and depicted the natives as people who the Spanish needed to conquer in order to convert Indians to Christianity” (Jaffe, 2015, 17). That Bruce-Novoa calls Cabeza de Vaca the first “*Chicano*” (Bruce-Novoa, 1993) only contributes to the problematic narrative that suggests he was a “good”, purely sympathetic figure who protected the natives. Not only is it problematic to use Cabeza de Vaca’s benevolent self-portrayal as evidence of him being a changed man, it also distracts from the historical realities of the conquest, and is rooted in the complexity of his being as well as his motives and priorities as a conqueror.

Cabeza de Vaca the Mercantilist

To definitively separate what many perceive as Cabeza de Vaca’s sympathy for the natives from the notion that it was a result of a transformational journey he undertook, we must look deeper into the text to find the origins and purpose of his portrayed pacifism and gentler approach to the conquest so that we can make sense of it in a larger context. Nan Goodman claims that looking at the link between mercantilist policies and the *relación*’s unusual account of its colonial subjects allows us to rewrite what others have called Cabeza de Vaca’s ethnography as a “social vision trained on the formation of groups with the ideas of market productivity and population densities” (2005, 230). She asserts that “a mercantilist reading of the text allows us to see Cabeza de Vaca’s understanding of cultural difference as a modified approach to conquest” that, “while less violent than that of his predecessors”, is still “characterized by the motive of subordination of the natives to Spanish rule” (2005, 231).

Goodman notes that the first indication of Cabeza de Vaca’s mercantilist tendencies “can be found in his subordination of the acquisition of gold to a greater interest in colonization”

(2005, 234). At start of the *relación*, Cabeza de Vaca voices his opposition to Narváez wanting to explore further inland to find the supposed riches of Apalachee not because he was against searching for gold but because it reflected a different priority than his own. Highlighting the difference in motivations, Goodman explains that conquerors like Cortés and Narváez shared a feudal mentality and were driven by receiving percentages of profits from the gold and land they acquired, while Cabeza de Vaca in his role as treasurer would be paid only after a colony was established, and only for as long as he maintained his official role, which would lead to his more mercantilist outlook (2005, 236). Cabeza de Vaca was responsible for implementing and regulating a working colony and collecting taxes if and when a colony was established, so it is reasonable that Cabeza de Vaca had motivations to prioritize a productive settlement over the acquisition of gold (Goodman, 2005, 236). Not only would prioritizing the development of colonies create a market for Spanish goods but the colonies would also continue being a source of revenue for the Spanish crown after the primary acquisition of gold was exhausted.

Despite the many assertions that Cabeza de Vaca grew more sympathetic towards the natives throughout his journey, Goodman makes an interesting observation, noting that never once does Cabeza de Vaca identify a native by name nor is any attention paid to individuals within the tribes (2005, 241). Cabeza de Vaca's descriptions always highlight differences on a communal level that characterize the cultures and structures of the different tribes. At times he would make distinctions between the living situations of certain groups, noting those that have permanent homes as opposed to those who continuously moved around, while at other times, he would distinguish certain groups' cultivation or lack of cultivation strategies. A section from Chapter 26 exemplifies the caliber of distinctions he made:

On the Isle of Ill Fortune there are two languages: they call one of them the language of the Capoques, and the other, Han. On the mainland, opposite the island, there are other

Indians called Chorrucos, and they take their name from the woods where they dwell. Farther on, along the seacoast, there are others called Deaguanes. And opposite them others whose name is the Mendicas. Farther along the coast are the Queuenes. And opposite them, well inland, the Maremes (Adorno and Pautz 1999, 1; 187).

In turn, the *relación* gives us plenty of information on how Cabeza de Vaca sees the tribes in relation to each other and how he constructs a network of “states” that mirrors his mercantilist emphasis on the community (Goodman, 2005, 244). From these descriptions, we see that Cabeza de Vaca primarily understands these multiple communities in terms of their differences and economic interest or needs. As Goodman notes, throughout the *relación*, Cabeza de Vaca is concerned with revealing the differences between tribes with respect to their market potentials (2005, 246).

Through Cabeza de Vaca’s understanding of mercantilist exchange we can come to understand his approach to conquest. Cabeza de Vaca not only embarked on the expedition with a different mindset and prioritization than Narváez, but we see him maintain it throughout his whole journey. I argue that a close reading of the section most critics use to support their argument that he was sympathetic toward the natives portrays not so much a sympathetic Cabeza de Vaca, but rather someone who only sees a potential threat to future market potential and his conception of how colonization should take place:

We traveled through much land and we found all of it deserted, because the inhabitants of it went fleeing through the sierras *without daring to keep houses or work the land* for fear of the Christians. It was a thing that gave us great sorrow, seeing the *land very fertile and very beautiful and very full of waterways and rivers*, and seeing *the places deserted and burned* and people so emaciated and sick, all of them having fled and hiding (Adorno and Pautz, 1999, 239; my emphasis).

Cabeza de Vaca does mention that he has sorrow but, looking at the text I argue that the wellbeing of the actual natives comes as a second thought to him. He describes at length how awful it is that the very beautiful fertile land and waterways were left, and he even dares to gripe

that the land was not being cultivated before he even thinks to mention the treatment and condition of the natives. Cabeza de Vaca does not have sympathy for the natives; what moves him emotionally is his perception that damage is being done to the collective community of natives and the land, which makes him see the violent actions of the other conquerors as a potential threat to the future economic relations and colonization efforts that he prioritizes.

In contrast to the Spanish conquistadors he encounters in Mexico, Cabeza de Vaca's priority was never the enslavement of the natives and acquisition of their land. Claiming that he employed a gentler, peaceful, and more sympathetic approach to the conquest due to a transformational journey is based on a complete misunderstanding of someone who was never in a position to use force or violence in his conquest to begin with. From the beginning of the *relación* to the very end it is apparent that Cabeza de Vaca maintains the same identity and priorities and should have never been thought of in the same light as other conquerors. His role was that of an administrator. Throughout the entirety of *Naufragios* Cabeza de Vaca possesses a stronger orientation and prioritization for colonization and the establishment of productive settlements above all else.

Same man, different place

So far, I have argued for the need of a more comprehensive understanding of Cabeza de Vaca and his intentions prior to and throughout his first expedition. However, very few have entertained the idea of analyzing his identity in the text of his second expedition to the Río de la Plata. Based on the number of scholars and critics who believe that Cabeza de Vaca underwent a transformational journey as related in *Naufragios*, one would assume that in his second expedition we would not only observe the transformed hybrid Cabeza de Vaca but also a Cabeza de Vaca that might be transformed yet again. Before we can begin to look at specific instances in

the text of *Comentarios* we need to understand the difference between the circumstances upon which he enters each expedition.

Cabeza de Vaca's experience surviving as a castaway in North America and living "naked" amongst the natives presents a sharp contrast to his later short-lived experience in the Río de la Plata, where he held the title of *adelantado* and was accompanied by a well-armed expedition and had a surplus of material resources at his disposal. This difference in role is a significant one because it leads to the most notable change in the way in which we see Cabeza de Vaca interacting with the natives. As Adorno notes, the common interpretation of Cabeza de Vaca's experience in *Naufragios* is that the healing practices and miraculous cures performed by the Spaniards contributed to their success in returning to Spain and constituted one aspect of the complex web of negotiations between the shipwreck survivors and the native peoples they encountered (1991, 166). In her article she discusses the many ways in which Cabeza de Vaca and the Spaniards "negotiate fear" with the natives throughout their journey. However, I argue that the most pivotal application and use of fear in their negotiations with the natives began with the negotiation of the miracle cures and with the promise of protection from the devilish figure Mala Cosa.

Looking at how and why the Spaniards "negotiated" and created fear in the natives in *Naufragios*, it is clear that fear was their only bargaining chip. Very shortly after the Spaniards were initially forced to perform healing rituals, they became perceived by the natives as great healers, with the news of their abilities spreading far. Furthermore, the healing cures performed by the Spaniards created such exhilaration amongst the natives; they believed that "with the Spaniards they would not die" (Adorno, 1991; 173). With respect to Mala Cosa, Cabeza de Vaca describes him as a demon like figure with European likeness who harmed and terrorized the

natives. Once hearing and bearing witness to the scars some had received from Mala Cosa, Cabeza de Vaca creates more fear to bargain with, telling the natives that if they were to believe in the Christian god and become Christians, they would not have to fear Mala Cosa, nor would Mala Cosa dare come to do those things to them again. He further stated that they should be assured that as long as the Christians were in their midst, Mala Cosa would not dare to set foot there (Adorno, 1991; 175). As a result of their belief in the Spaniards' healing abilities and in the superiority of the Christian faith, Cabeza de Vaca depicts the natives as developing a dependency on them, later describing the large gatherings of natives wishing to touch them and bring them food.

Where the four Spaniards previously were utterly reliant on the natives and had no authority or anything to barter with, now they manipulated and controlled an intangible and infinite power over the natives that allowed them to gain authority and respect from them and eventually negotiate their way to Mexico City. While Cabeza de Vaca in essence negotiated his religion and identity as a healer in *Naufragios*, we do not see anything like that in *Comentarios* at all. In fact, we get just the opposite:

In comparison to the 1542 relación, the *Comentarios* is strangely silent on the subject of healing...nor is the existence of “physicians” or shamans acknowledged in the *Relación general*...the absence of descriptions of shamanistic rituals in either the *Comentarios* or the *Relación general* raises several potential interpretations. Either Cabeza de Vaca misread, or was unable to read, the signs of ritual practices, or, alternatively, he understood their significance but was determined to assert his imperial authority as a conqueror who no longer had the necessity of adapting to an indigenous worldview (Tuer, 2011, 150).

I agree with Tuer's interpretation, and argue that in *Naufragios* Cabeza de Vaca didn't have anything but his difference and Christian faith to take advantage of and negotiate with the native communities while in *Comentarios* we see he no longer is desperate nor does need to exploit his religion to communicate and negotiate with the natives. In his subsequent journey to Asunción,

however, “it was the friars who possessed the sign of the cross and the ability to attract indigenous converts”, while Cabeza de Vaca resorted to an emphasis on utilizing his armed Spaniards and trading goods (Tuer, 2011, 152). In *Comentarios*, Cabeza de Vaca never arrives empty handed when greeting a new village or forming an alliance with one:

When the Guaycurús had received them, they affirmed once more their wish to become vassals of His Majesty, promising obedience and submission, and that they would henceforth not molest the Guaranís, and that they would bring whatever they took, to the town for the provisionment of the Spaniards. Alvar Nuñez was much pleased with their promises, and *he distributed gifts and jewels among the chiefs, and peace was cemented* (Dominguez et al., 1891, 154; my emphasis).

Not once does he offer cures or healings to any of the groups in South America. The difference between the two expeditions is not only Cabeza de Vaca’s different roles, but fundamentally *what* Cabeza de Vaca uses to negotiate with and manipulate the native communities.

As Tuer noted, the complete lack of religious narrative in *Comentarios* is a sharp contrast to what is present in *Naufragios*. Returning to the concept of clarifying Cabeza de Vaca’s identity and considering what scholars like Docter have claimed about the role of religion in his transformation, it is clear after comparing both expeditions that these interpretations about the source of his alleged transformation are open to other exploration. We further can argue that Cabeza de Vaca did not actually experience a transformation. Docter’s comments on Adorno’s notion that the Spaniards used the fear of religion to take advantage of the natives suggest that Docter believes Cabeza de Vaca acted out of his love as a Christian:

While there is certainly validity to these claims - the Spaniards did use their authority and the natives' fear to their advantage in order to move from village to village- as they continue their journey, Cabeza de Vaca’s motives clearly change. If before the Indians had value to him only as a means of survival, now his actions are driven less by selfish motives, and more by Christian love as he perceives God genuinely working through him to produce miracles...Unlike the conquistadors, Cabeza de Vaca achieves authority among the natives not through force or violence, but through... actions based upon Christ-like love... and a transformational spiritual journey both of self-discovery and of deepening of love for the other (Docker, 2008, 17; 19-20).

Docter's suggestion that Cabeza de Vaca was acting out of love and underwent a spiritual journey requires us to ask if the spiritually transformed Cabeza de Vaca she sees in *Naufragios* is present in *Comentarios*, and the answer is no. I argue that he only temporarily took on the role of religious healer in *Naufragios* as a tool of survival and a means to escape back to Spain. I do not see evidence that Cabeza de Vaca ever underwent a spiritual awakening or transformation of identity because if he did, it would also be revealed through his relations with the natives in *Comentarios*, yet it never appears in that context.

Although the means that Cabeza de Vaca uses to negotiate with the natives change between expeditions, he seems to remain the same person that we see in *Naufragios* throughout all of *Comentarios*. Returning to his mercantilist views discussed earlier, Cabeza de Vaca categorizes the natives in *Comentarios* the same exact way as in *Naufragios*, constantly perceiving the collective over individuals and noting their living situations and distinctive customs in an effort to understand them based on what they could offer in terms of resources and utilization of the land:

On the banks of this river Paraguai there is a nation of Indians named Agazes; it is a people most feared in all that country, for besides being valiant they are well practiced in war and very treacherous...They are men of great size and gigantic limbs; they lead piratical lives in their canoes on the river, landing to pillage and capture the Guaranís, who are their principal enemies. They live by fishing and the chase, and do not cultivate the soil (Dominguez et al., 1891, 131).

Later on, describing a different group:

The natives of this country are of average height. They are quite naked, and pierce holes in their ears large enough to pass the fist through; in these they insert gourds of a medium size, afterwards replacing them by larger ones, distending the lobe of the ear til it hangs down to the shoulder. For this reason they are called Orejones, like the Incas of Peru. When they fight, they take these gourds or disk out of their ears and roll them up, or else tie their ears behind their heads. The women do not cover their nakedness. Every person lives separately with his wife and children. The occupation of these women is to spin cotton; the men cultivate the fields, returning to their homes in the evening, when they

find their meals ready. The women do no other work except at harvest time, when they assist in gathering the maize, and garnering it. From that place the Indians begin to be idolaters; they worship idols made of wood; but according to the reports brought to the governor those farther inland have idols of gold and silver (Dominguez et al., 1891, 201).

Again, in *Comentarios*, we see in these descriptions that Cabeza de Vaca primarily understands these communities in terms of their economic potential and their difference from each other, further emphasizing his concern to comprehend the differences between tribes with respect to their market and colonization potential.

Additionally, we see the same proclaimed “gentler” and “sympathetic” approach to the conquest in *Comentarios* that we see in *Naufragios*. On an expedition further inland to find villages that, according to the other natives, possessed an abundance of gold and silver, the Spaniards began to run out of provisions and ran the risk of becoming stranded without food if they continued further inland. Despite being within a few days distance from the supposed village filled with gold, silver and resources, Cabeza de Vaca decided that the risk was not worth it:

The first guide we had taken had assured us that on the fifth day we should find provisions and reach an inhabited country with plenty of commodities. Having put faith in these promises, both Christians and Indians had improvidently consumed all they brought with them, though every man had been supplied with two arrobas of flour. The governor had, in their opinion, to consider that there were barely six days’ provisions left, and at the end of that time there would be nothing for the people to eat. Under these circumstances they thought it would be very dangerous to advance further without means of subsistence, the more so because the Indians are not as a rule precise in their indications, and it might happen that, instead of sixteen days estimated by the guide, the time might be greater, and that they might all die of starvation... They were, therefore, of opinion that the security and lives of the Christians and Indians depended upon their return to the port of Los Reyes, where they had left their vessels (Dominguez et al., 1891, 220).

Not only does this decision show a continuation of Cabeza de Vaca’s conservative and administrative prioritization of safety and caution for the expedition and its men over the reckless pursuit of wealth and fortune, but this example is even more significant because in the Río de la

Plata, Cabeza de Vaca carries the title of *adelantado* and so is entitled to receive a twelfth of everything he discovers and acquires (Dominguez et al., 1891 96). When we consider this in comparison to his role as treasurer in the Narváez expedition, we see that even when he could be tempted to surrender to the strictly feudal mentality like Cortés and Narváez, he still does not irresponsibly and selfishly prioritize the acquisition of land and fortune over the lives and safety of his men. This incident in *Comentarios* parallels the incident in the beginning of *Naufragios*, and in this sense we see another way in which he remains the same man that he was at the beginning of his first expedition. This further demonstrates that Cabeza de Vaca did not have any kind of personal transformation that led him to become more sympathetic or to lead a peaceful and “humane” conquest.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have opened up a discussion and argued for a new understanding of the complex identity of Cabeza de Vaca in particular and conquerors in general. While I have addressed many of the problematic misconceptions about Cabeza de Vaca’s identity that lead to earlier interpretations of the texts, his identity, motivations, and approach to the conquest are exceedingly complex and require more than one chapter to fully explore and clarify. In understanding Cabeza de Vaca, we as scholars must not sugar coat and romanticize his writings, nor should we separate them from the historical context in which they took place. To understand him we have to understand who he was not. Resisting the urge to cast him as anything other than the archetypal conqueror rather than placing him on a scale renders the reader vulnerable to misinterpreting and minimizing his intentions.

Living nine years with the natives did not separate Cabeza de Vaca from his Spanish identity and neither did he disavow it. His constant resistance to relinquish his imperialist agenda

and Spanish superiority proved that he was not indifferent to the natives despite his intimate contact and understanding of them. Instead of reading his benevolent self-portrayal as sympathy for the natives we can look more closely at the texts and understand his mercantilist perspective. Not only does his prioritization of the viability of the expeditions and productive settlements explain his resistance to reckless force and violence, but it also is a characteristic that is consistent in both works, which further refutes the claims that he underwent a transformation. Lastly, the stark absence of religious and healing episodes in *Comentarios* highlights his earlier exploitation of religion as merely a tool for his escape in *Naufragios*, and calls into question the widely accepted understanding of the role of his Christianity in his identity and the text.

CHAPTER TWO. STRATEGIC NARRATIVES

In the previous chapter I discussed how Cabeza de Vaca's literary style can easily inhibit the interpretation of his character as a conquistador and foster a problematic reading of the text. It is clear that reestablishing and clarifying Cabeza de Vaca's identity as a Spanish conqueror is important because it prevents us from falling susceptible to reading the text as a literary piece and seeing him as something he is not, and never wanted to be, which is indigenous American.

In this chapter I take a closer look at the discourse and narrative in both *Naufragios* and *Comentarios* with the intent to demonstrate how narratives in the text work to circumvent colonialists' guilt and write colonial domination in a passive form. I interpret and apply the concept behind Mary Louise Pratt's anti-conquest (1992) to explore the ways in which Cabeza de Vaca writes himself out of being responsible for acting as an agent of colonization and colonialism and establishes innocent motives for his presence while at the same time legitimizing the conquest. I also examine how he pushes this anti-conquest narrative even further to portray an unrealistic extreme of the natives as being reliant on him and the Spaniards in some instances using a concept I have developed and call the counter-conquest. Through analyzing these narratives we can better understand what Cabeza de Vaca intended to communicate to the reader and also understand how the reader is able to arrive at a sympathetic interpretation of Cabeza de Vaca as the protagonist in the texts, while clarifying his actual colonialist motivations.

Pratt defines the term "anti-conquest" as "the strategies of representation whereby the European bourgeois seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony" (1992, 9). She developed this concept to explore the underlying desire in the conquest to have it both ways: serving the needs of European expansion while at the same time avoiding and even challenging older imperial rhetoric of conquest (Reitz, 1995, 364).

Essentially, the concept of the anti-conquest refers to the European tactic of claiming innocence for their presence in foreign lands while consolidating their hegemonic control, thus allowing the colonizer to be justified in their presence and circumvent the guilt of colonization. White adds that the narrative of the anti-conquest further “avoids any overt reference to the act of conquest” and presents a narrative in which “active forms of domination are replaced with passive forms” that involve the rewriting of the colonial process in terms of reciprocity (2001, 48). Reciprocity is an essential part in the construction of the anti-conquest concept because the anti-conquest exchange is always presented as benign and reciprocal. As Douglas Lorimer mentions, Europeans depicted themselves as lonely suffering victims of their demanding journey and “as innocent survivors, they propose a civilizing, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial relationship with the indigenous peoples they encountered” (1996, 430).

In contrast to the proposal of a mutually beneficial relationship that the protagonist proposes in the anti-conquest, in *Comentarios* and *Naufragios*, the narratives surrounding Cabeza de Vaca at times center on a relationship through which supposedly only the natives benefit from the Spaniards presence. In this chapter I introduce a concept developed on the basis of Pratt’s anti-conquest that I call the “counter-conquest” which allows us to better understand and explain these representations in his works. Whereas reciprocity is the dynamic upon which the anti-conquest is centered, the counter-conquest narrative is centered more upon the dynamic of commensalism. In this context, commensalism is the interaction and relationship between two parties in which only one of the parties benefits, while the other neither benefits or suffers from the interaction or exchange. The counter-conquest then lies “beyond” and is an extreme of the anti-conquest in that it represents a relationship in which the innocent European’s presence is no longer simply justified with the natives because of a mutually beneficial and reciprocal

relationship, which is the anti-conquest. Instead, the counter-conquest is a narrative that presents a relationship where the natives exploit and are dependent on the European's presence. It is through this narrative that the European is able to justify their presence. The protagonist in the counter-conquest still presents as the same innocent and justified actor as in the anti-conquest but also presents as a subject who is relied on and taken advantage of. Both concepts also share the same intent and purpose: allowing the protagonist to rewrite the colonial process in a way that lets them secure their innocence, justify their presence, and avoid guilt as they impose their colonial mission. However, the representations through which the anti-conquest and counter-conquest achieve this narrative is what distinguishes them.

One of the distinctions Pratt notes in her book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* is that travel writing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries contained sentimental narratives that contrasted heavily with the colonial writings in the centuries prior. What is interesting about Cabeza de Vaca's writings is that, although they were produced centuries prior to the works Pratt analyzes, they evoke similar sentimental emotions from the reader. The failure of the Narváez expedition in particular creates the perfect stage for Cabeza de Vaca to develop an anti-conquest narrative in *Naufragios*, as there is nothing more innocent and vulnerable than a protagonist who is a lost survivor of a shipwreck and lives nine long years in the brutal elements with natives.

While *Naufragios* isn't an extensive text, features of the anti-conquest narrative can be found within it, and closely parallel some examples that Pratt discusses. In Chapter Three, in her section on the mystique of reciprocity, she uses an example from Mungo Park's *Travels in the Interior of Africa* where Park describes his arrival at a town in search for food and shelter:

This happened to be a feast day at Dalli, and the people were dancing before the Dooty's house. But when they were informed that a white man was come into town, they left off

dancing, and came to the place where I lodged, walking in regular order, two and two, with the music before them. . . They continued to dance and sing until midnight during which time I was surrounded by so great a crowd as made it necessary for me to satisfy their curiosity by sitting still (Park, 1799, 116).

Pratt comments on this excerpt from Park and explains that:

The structure of this episode could be described as a mutual appropriation. Park's arrival interrupts the local ritual, which then reconstitutes itself around him. He appropriates and is simultaneously appropriated by the ritual, required to play a role to satisfy people's curiosity, in exchange for satisfying his own. His role is a passive one, however, in which his own agency and desire play little part. . . . This is not conquest, but anti-conquest (Pratt, 1992, 78).

In *Naufragios* we find a somewhat analogous scene in chapter 15 where the natives implore the Spaniards to partake in healing acts:

. . .because they cure illnesses by blowing on the sick person, and with that breath of air and their hands they expel the disease from him. And they demanded that we do the same and make ourselves useful. We laughed about this, saying that it was a mockery and that we did not know how to cure. And because of this, they took away our food until we did as they told us. . . .In short, we found ourselves in such need that we had to do it, without fearing that anyone would bring us grief for it. . . .after we had made the sign of the cross over them, said to the others that they were restored and healthy, and on account of this they treated us well, and refrained from eating in order to give their food to us, and they gave us skins and other things (Adorno and Pautz, 1999, 1; 113, 115).

In this example we see Cabeza de Vaca appropriate using the sign of the cross and partake in the ritual being required to play a role to satisfy the natives in exchange for his survival. Just as Park sat still out of "necessity" to satisfy the curiosity of the villagers, and in exchange they sheltered and fed him (Pratt, 1992, 78), Cabeza de Vaca performs healing rituals according to native protocol out of necessity in exchange for food and shelter as well. As a representation, both scenes are centered on the presentation of reciprocity, where both parties mutually benefit from an exchange. Unlike in Parks example however, Cabeza de Vaca initially expressed resistance and was later threatened with starvation if he continued to refuse.

While descriptively both the natives and Cabeza de Vaca seemingly benefit mutually from this exchange, representatively Cabeza de Vaca argues that the exchange was unequal. Setting the stage for a counter-conquest narrative he says, “In short, we found ourselves in such need that we had to do it, without fearing that anyone would bring us grief for it.” (Adorno and Pautz, 1999, 1; 113). It is with this line from the excerpt that he transitions into forming a counter-conquest narrative in which he is taken advantage of by the natives through an unequal exchange. The fear Cabeza de Vaca is mentioning in this line is the fear that once he returned to Spain, he would be seen as a traitor to his Christian religion having participated in savage customs. As Ramón Sanchez notes, *Naufraios* presents a captivity narrative and Cabeza de Vaca’s account had to convince his readers that he did not betray his culture, meaning he did not betray the Spanish monarch and Christian faith (1992, 267).

While the counter-conquest appears to be linked to the captivity narrative, in which roles are similarly subverted (the Indian becomes the master and the European the controlled and enslaved subject), they are two separate concepts. The two must be thought of as being on two different planes with one existing as the textual account and descriptions of captivity, and the other as the representation of captivity. In the captivity narrative the protagonist writes a descriptive account of their reality and experiences as a captive of the natives. The counter-conquest on the other hand is found only on the representative plane, as it refers to the strategic representations through which the protagonist constructs the narrative. A captivity narrative can be analyzed and evaluated with the construct of the counter-conquest but it isn’t a requirement for a counter-conquest narrative to present in a captivity text as we will see later on.

When looking at the excerpt from *Naufraios* quoted above we see the proposal for an exchange between Cabeza de Vaca and the natives that requires Cabeza de Vaca to participate in

the healing acts in exchange for food and essentially his survival. Keeping in mind the construct of reciprocity, we can easily judge the exchange from a western perspective, the way that Cabeza de Vaca doubtlessly perceived it, and claim that the exchange between the two parties was unequal, with the natives actually ending up with something essentially less valuable, being empty gestures from the Spaniards. However, instead of representing a narrative in which the proposed exchange was equal or reciprocal, Cabeza de Vaca inverts the exchange and creates a narrative of unequal exchange in which he has to offer more than do the natives. Cabeza de Vaca narrates to the reader a scene in which his survival (life or death) was the only thing equivalent in value to exchange for him sinning against his Christian religion by partaking in the native healing acts. What Cabeza de Vaca does in this scenario is to escalate the consequences and magnitude of his exchange as being of greater value than what really was being exchanged by the natives. We know this is a represented narrative because Cabeza de Vaca tells us, not only in this same excerpt, but also later on in *Naufragios*, of his disbelief in the natives' healing practices. "They perform cauterizations with fire, which is a thing among them considered to be very effective...And after this, they blow upon the area that hurts and with this they believe that they have removed the malady" (Adorno and Pautz, 1999, 1; 115).

He himself knows that the actions of healing he was originally asked to perform in exchange for the natives would have been nothing more than shallow and meaningless actions of touching and blowing that equated to no real significance or medical care to them as Spaniards. He never believed in or considered these acts to have any merit, yet he presents a narrative to the reader that depicts him as being forced to commit a grave blasphemy as a Christian and sin by partaking in these healing acts in order to ensure his continued survival. What originally was an

unequal exchange on the native's part is consequently reclaimed by Cabeza de Vaca and represented to the reader as unequal exchange on his part.

Returning to Sanchez's point about Cabeza de Vaca having to prove that he did not betray the Spanish monarch and Christian faith, one could argue that he could have easily participated in these actions for his survival and simply decided to omit them from the *relación*. However, he makes the decision to recount his actions because this narrative is essential to the development of the counter-conquest representation of himself that he creates throughout the text. Cabeza de Vaca's construction of the exchange as unequal here furthermore goes beyond just establishing his innocence and vulnerability amongst the natives and evading guilt for partaking in these atrocious acts in the eyes of the Spaniards, but he is now represented to the reader as a victim in the exchange, being forced to perform these rituals that go against his faith that he values so highly in exchange for his very life. His presence as a Spaniard in this narrative isn't something that allows him to engage in reciprocity with mutual benefit with the natives, but instead he suffers because of it. "In short, we found ourselves in such need that we had to do it, without fearing that anyone would bring us grief for it" (Adorno and Pautz, 1999, 1; 113). His narrative branches off from the anti-conquest narrative and surpasses the intent of portraying him as the neutral innocent actor that Pratt describes and makes him the victim and even the exploited subject in the exchange. What Cabeza de Vaca accomplishes in his portrayal of this scene is to create a narrative of the counter-conquest. Whereas the unequal exchange that benefits the European is represented as acts of reciprocity in the anti-conquest, in the counter-conquest the exchange is presented as unequal and largely unilateral, favoring the native.

Another instance in *Naufragios* in which Cabeza de Vaca constructs a narrative of innocence and reciprocity is when he tells us of his time that he served as a trader for the natives.

After leaving the island of Malhado and ending up with the Charrucos, Cabeza de Vaca took up the role of trader because the constant hostilities and continuous wars prevented the natives from traveling and engaging in trade between groups. He describes his new role in the text:

And because I became a merchant, I tried to exercise the vocation as best I knew how. And because of this they gave me food to eat and treated me well, and they importuned me to go from one place to another to obtain things they needed, because on account of the continual warfare in the land, there is little traffic or communication among them...wherever I went they treated me well and gave me food out of want for my wares, and most importantly because doing that, I was able to seek out the way by which I would go forward. And among them I was very well known; when they saw me and I brought them things they needed, they were greatly pleased (Adorno and Pautz, 1999, 1; 121).

Cabeza de Vaca says he was importuned to travel between groups to trade and in return he would be given food. Although he offers a service in exchange for provisions, which he presents as a reciprocal relationship, Cabeza de Vaca in reality gained more out of the exchange than did the natives. In this passage he momentarily breaks from the rhetoric of reciprocity and tells us he “was able to seek out the way by which [he] would go forward”, implying that his role as a trader allowed him to explore and learn the land enough that he was able to find a route of escape from his native captors. Undoubtedly Cabeza de Vaca benefited more from this arrangement than the natives, having over time acquired priceless knowledge of the landscape that would eventually lead to his freedom and return to Spain. His role as a trader then, represented as reciprocal and mutually beneficial for both parties, fits into the narrative of the anti-conquest that Pratt suggests.

Constructing the counter-conquest

As the text continues, Cabeza de Vaca repeatedly constructs a narrative of the counter-conquest by representing himself in the text as the exploited subject of the natives. In *Naufraios* the serious implementation of the healing practices begins with Castillo’s curing of the natives’ headaches, where after which the natives offered them bows and arrows (Adorno and Pautz,

1999, 1; 159). “During the eight months that the Spaniards spent with the Avavares, people came from all over to be cured, most complaining of maladies of the head and alimentary tract. Cabeza de Vaca explained that he and his companions were taken to be “children of the sun” (*hijos del sol*), and that during this time, all four members of their party became healers” (Adorno, 1991, 173). As Cabeza de Vaca and the remaining expedition members grew in fame for their magical healing abilities, the crowd and number of people they traveled with grew exponentially as well. Along their journey with each arrival at a new village Cabeza de Vaca describes how they were greatly welcomed by natives who had heard of the Christians’ abilities, and after being cured by the Christians the natives would then offer them most, if not all, of their belongings and food:

At sunset we arrived at a hundred houses of Indians, and before we arrived, all the people who were in them came out to receive us with so much shouting that it was a fright and vigorously slapping their thighs....So great was the fear and agitation that these people experienced that with some trying to arrive more quickly than others to touch us, they crowded us so much that they nearly could have killed us....They spent that entire night dancing and performing *areitos* among themselves. And the next morning they brought us all the people of that village for us to touch and make the sign of the cross over them, as we had done to the others with whom we had been. And after this was done, they gave many arrows to the women of the other village who had come with theirs...And when we arrived at other Indians we were very well received as we had been by the previous ones. And thus they gave us some of the things they had and the deer they had killed that day (Adorno and Pautz, 1999, 1; 195-7).

At this point in *Naufraios*, I no longer consider the text to belong to the genre of captivity narrative, because from this point on Cabeza de Vaca and the other Spaniards are no longer captives nor slaves. They are now highly regarded and authoritative figures who are worshiped as children of the sun and thus the roles they hold are no longer the same subverted roles we saw at the beginning of the text, with the natives taking the role of the master and the Spaniards taking the role of the conquered and enslaved. Nonetheless, Cabeza de Vaca continues to represent a narrative in which he was required to be submissive to the natives.

Soon after this point in their journey Cabeza de Vaca tells us of a new practice the natives implemented with the other native groups they would come to encounter:

And among these people we saw a new custom, and it is the ones who were with us took from those who came to be cured their bows and arrows and shoes and beads if they brought them. And after having taken them, they placed those people before us so that we might cure them. And once cured, they went away very content saying they were healed...Departing from these people, we went to many other houses, and at this point another new custom commenced, and it is that receiving us very well, those who came with us began to treat the others very badly, taking their possessions and sacking their houses without leaving them any single thing. About this we were much distressed to see the bad treatment that was given to those who thus received us, and also because we feared that the practice would be or would cause some altercation and scandal among them. But since we were powerless to remedy it or to dare to punish those who did it, for the time being we had to endure it until we had more authority among them (Adorno and Pautz, 1999, 1; 197).

Adorno comments on this scene:

Cabeza de Vaca is careful to express his chagrin at this wholesale sacking and tries to assure his readers how much he and his companions had opposed it, since it was wrong to do so much ill to “those who had received us so well”. At the same time, he recalls a greater apprehension, namely that the pillaging might have provoked conflict between the visiting and host groups. Yet, he explains, his own band of four was powerless to change it, or even to dare to punish those who did it. So they decided to suffer it until such time as they had the authority to change it. He explains that the victims consoled the Christians, saying that their properties were thus put to good use and that, ahead, they would be compensated by others who were rich in possessions (Adorno 1991, 178).

As Adorno correctly observes, in this section Cabeza de Vaca makes his disapproval of and disappointment in the natives known to the reader. He tells us that he does not agree with the robbing and pillaging of the other groups by the natives but lacked the authority to stop it. I argue that this is merely another strategic representation in Cabeza de Vaca’s narrative.

In a textual construct, “innocence lies less in self-effacement than in submissiveness and vulnerability” (Pratt, 1992, 77) as we see this in chapter 19 of *Naufraios*, as Cabeza de Vaca writes himself as a receptor, not an initiator of the issue. Through this he is able to establish his innocence and avoid responsibility for any guilt of wrong doing, even though without him or his

participation and continuation in the healing acts, the mistreatment of the natives would presumably cease. What we see in this section is a submissive Cabeza de Vaca who, like in the example from Mungo Park above, appropriates the native's actions and remains submissive and quiet out of a need to satisfy the natives desires and in exchange they continue guiding him along the journey to Pánuco. While earlier in the text Cabeza de Vaca presented a relationship based on reciprocity in which they performed healing acts in exchange for goods and guidance along their journey, the relationship has now been transformed because of the new custom that the natives begin. As Adorno (1991) mentions, the excuse he gives to the reader is that he did not have the authority to put an end to the pillaging and that if he would have attempted to stop it, it could have caused a conflict between the groups of natives. The latter argument is a weak attempt to exonerate himself from any responsibility in the matter and truly has no logic behind it, because there was already mistreatment and conflict between the groups described, so there would be no reason for him not to try and stop the raiding out of fear that there would be a creation of conflict or tensions. The initial argument he makes that he didn't have the authority to put a stop to their mistreatment, however, deserves to be analyzed further.

Dynamic Representations of Authority

In this section of the *relación* Cabeza de Vaca represents himself as someone who is the cause and at the center of the healing and curing events taking place yet in this instance also claims that he and his partners were powerless and had no authority over their followers. According to Pratt, it is the protagonist of the anti-conquest who is “surrounded by an aura not of authority, but of innocence and vulnerability” (55), and this is exactly the representation we get from Cabeza de Vaca in this section. Reading just a few paragraphs further into the text, however, we can find a different account of his relationship with the natives. Shortly after his

descriptions of the new customs the natives started, Cabeza de Vaca and the Spaniards decide to leave this region with the intention to head south to Pánuco, where they knew the Spanish settlement would be. According to Cabeza de Vaca the natives wanted to lead them along a different route that would pass by other villages the near sierras:

But because this was off our route, we refused to go to them, and we took the course through the plain near the mountains, which we believed were not far from the coast. ...And since the Indians saw that we were determined not to go through the area where they led us, they told us where we wanted to go there were no people, nor prickly pears, nor any other thing to eat.... And the next day we departed, taking with us many of them. And the women went carrying the water, and so great was our authority among them that none dared to drink without our permission (Adorno and Pautz, 1999, 1; 203).

The contrast between the “chagrin” of the “powerless” Spaniards expressed just prior to this passage of independent “authority” is significant. Cabeza de Vaca represents himself as innocent and vulnerable in the face of the actions of mistreatment against the other native groups they came upon, yet he seemingly now has the authority to contradict all of the natives’ suggestions and singularly decide to take a route that he thought would lead him to Pánuco so he could escape back to Spain. As he mentions in the text, the natives warned him that the route he wanted to take didn’t have sufficient resources for their survival, yet he possessed enough authority to command many of them to embark with them along that hostile route where there supposedly was no food nor water. Cabeza de Vaca then again breaks from his submissive discourse again and quantifies his own authority, describing it as “so great that none dared to drink without his consent”. Commanding large groups of people to travel with him into dangerous lands and having them terrified of him to the point where they wouldn’t drink water without his approval suggests that he not only had some authority with the natives, but in fact an immense authority over them.

His justification that he couldn't control the natives he traveled with because he lacked the authority is merely a strategic narrative representation he wishes to sell to the reader. At this point, Cabeza de Vaca most definitely held enough authority to command the natives; however, it is reasonable to understand why he would resist stopping the pillaging and mistreatment of the natives, because he above anyone else was benefiting from it. Not only does his narrative in this chapter fit the mold of the anti-conquest and construct him as the innocent and vulnerable protagonist amongst the natives, but his text also contains representations from the counter-conquest because he portrays himself to be subject to the mercy and exploitation of the natives, powerless and without authority. After the Spaniards left the natives in pursuit of their own route, they came upon a village that had received word of them:

And we arrived at a village of about twenty houses where they received us weeping and without great sorrow because they already knew that wherever we went all the people were sacked and robbed by those who accompanied us... We stayed there that night, and at dawn the Indians who had left us the previous day fell upon their houses. And since they took them unprepared and vulnerable, they took from them all that they wanted without there being opportunity to hide anything about which they wept greatly. And the attackers, to console them, told them that we were children of the sun and that we had to power to cure the sick and kill them and other lies even greater than these, since they know how best to do it when they feel that it suits them (Adorno and Pautz, 1999, 1; 203-5).

Here he further describes his experience as someone whose presence was being exploited by the natives to their advantage. Cabeza de Vaca suggests that the natives took it upon themselves to amplify his and the other Christians' fame by fabricating stories and lying to the other groups because it would allow them to take things from the other groups. Cabeza de Vaca in this narrative represents himself as a voiceless objectified victim that the natives take upon themselves to use and exploit other native groups with. In this sense, from Cabeza de Vaca we get a narrative that exonerates him from any responsibility in the act of the pillaging while highlighting his innocence and vulnerability, but at the same time we also get an inverted

narrative of the conquest, being the counter-conquest, in which the European is presented as subjected to be exploited to the benefit of the natives. The pathway of exchange in this later representation is one that is unilateral or commensualistic with solely the natives gaining from the Spaniards' presence. In reality we know, however, that Cabeza de Vaca did benefit from the disorder of the healing acts not only because it garnered him provisions for his survival and allowed him to spread the Christian religion and proselytize natives, but most importantly because it endowed him with supreme authority, control, and the followership of the natives that he used to bring him to the Spanish settlement in New Spain.

Reciprocity in Río de la Plata

As I mentioned in Chapter One, the circumstances upon which Cabeza de Vaca enters his second expedition significantly contrast with those in the 1542 *relación*. Cabeza de Vaca now holds the title of *adelantado* and is accompanied by a 400-man expedition with a surplus of material resources that he would lead to the town of Asunción in the Río de la Plata. Given that this new position as *adelantado* was now one of higher status, endowed with total legal and military authority over Asunción, and tasked with discovery and conquering of lands and wealth unknown in the name of His Majesty, one would assume that the creation of an anti-conquest or counter-conquest narrative would be nearly impossible to implement; however, this is not the case.

From the very start of *Comentarios* we can see Cabeza de Vaca's experience as a castaway in North America present in the text through his consistent emphasis on reciprocity. As a castaway in *Naufragios* starting with nothing in a foreign land, his everyday struggles and eventual climb to authority depended on his ability to achieve reciprocity between himself and the natives. In *Comentarios* from the start of the expedition's journey overland from Brazil to

Paraguay, it is written that with every native tribe he encountered, Cabeza de Vaca prioritized presenting the natives and native chiefs with presents and payment for their goods. In chapter seven after encountering the Yguazu natives Hernandez writes:

At about two leagues beyond this crossing the Indians came with great delight, and brought the army provisions, so that they were never short of food, and had sometimes even more than they could take, and left it on the road. *This caused the governor to give the Indians much, and to be generous with them, especially with their chief, to whom, besides paying the price of the commodities which they brought, he gave many presents, and did them many favors and treated them so well that the fame went through the land and the province, and all the natives laid aside their fear and came to see and to bring all they had, and they were paid for it as aforesaid.* (Dominguez et al., 1891, 109; my emphasis)

In this same chapter, there is another description of the reoccurring exchange:

From this place they went on, leaving the natives so well *satisfied* that they carried the news from place to place of *the good treatment used towards them*, and showed everything they had received, so that wherever the governor and his people had to pass, the natives were friendly and came to meet them laden with provisions, *receiving payment according to their satisfaction.* (Dominguez et al., 1891, 111; my emphasis)

Although Cabeza de Vaca is actively on an expedition of conquest for Spain, this narrative in *Comentarios* is one that subdues the reader into seeing it as a consensual, “humane”, or mutual “peaceful conquest,” as discussed in Chapter One. Cabeza de Vaca in these scenes is represented as a kind and innocent protagonist who happily partakes in reciprocity with the natives. These sections in the text suggest to the reader that Cabeza de Vaca treated the natives extremely well and not only paid them appropriately for their goods but also gave them additional presents and did favors for them in exchange for their guidance and provisions. What stands out the most in these portrayals are the repeated descriptions, not just in this chapter of *Comentarios*, but throughout the entirety of the work, that the natives always left satisfied with what Cabeza de Vaca provided them. Although it is written that he paid them fairly, it’s obvious that this exchange between the two groups was ultimately unequal. What is written here is the myth of

reciprocity and equal exchange. It was not simply a trade of food for European knives and scissors as the natives saw it but the true trade was knives and scissors in exchange for food and provisions along with the pacification of the natives that would allow him and his expedition to reach Asunción and continue their colonial domination. The text, however, is devoid of any reference to the act of direct conquest and doesn't mention anything other than the exchange of goods between parties. What we get in the text is the application of European aesthetics and a rewriting of the colonial process in terms of reciprocity through the trade of European commodities. Through the constant references to his generosity and the emphasis on the natives' satisfaction, a representation in the narrative is created suggesting to the reader that the natives welcomed him and that their acceptance and satisfaction with his gifts served as their consent for his presence among them. What the Spaniards and Cabeza de Vaca continuously failed to understand in their interactions is that different cultures have different notions of reciprocity. His constant giving is carried out with the expectation that the other has an obligation to reciprocate, which wasn't the perception of the South American natives as I will discuss later.

In addition to creating a narrative of the anti-conquest in *Comentarios*, Cabeza de Vaca also creates a strategic representation where he presents the natives as reliant on the Spaniards' presence, similarly to what we saw in *Naufraños*. An outstanding example of this occurs in Chapters 19 through 26, where after reaching Asunción, Cabeza de Vaca receives complaints from the Guaraní tribes against another native group called the Guaycurús. The chiefs of the Guaraní native groups that came to complain to Cabeza de Vaca claimed that the Guaycurús had deposed them of their land and killed much of their families. What strikes the reader in this section of the text is that natives are going to Cabeza de Vaca, a foreigner, to complain about issues with other natives and to ask for his help. However, because the natives that were

complaining to Cabeza de Vaca were previously converted Christians and allies who lived amongst the Spaniards at the settlement in Asunción, they were able to claim protection and restitution of their property with Cabeza de Vaca. Upon hearing the complaints, Cabeza de Vaca started an inquiry into the affair and ordered that a report be made to determine if war could “justly be made against the Guaycurús” (Dominguez et al., 1891, 136). It was later decided that together with the collective native groups the Spaniards would wage war against the Guaycurús. Having established the actions that were to be taken against the Guaycurús, Cabeza de Vaca ordered two hundred arquebusiers and crossbowmen to be readied for war. Joining them at an agreed upon meeting place were Guaraní natives reportedly numbering some ten thousand men, ready and painted for war; together they went about marching to the location of the Guaycurús until disorder befell them:

The governor and his army were marching through the skirts of a thick forest, and night was approaching, when a tiger passed through the midst of the Indians, causing a great panic and confusion among them, so that the Spaniards took to their arms, and, thinking the Indians were in revolt, fell upon them, calling on Santiago. In that affray several Indians were wounded, and their companions, seeing the attack made upon them, fled to the mountains.... Alvar Nuñez, seeing the Indians had fled, and anxious to put an end to the disorder, dismounted and rushed into the forest after them. He called to them that it was nothing more than a tiger had caused the confusion, that he and his Spaniards were their friends, and that they were all brothers and subjects of His Majesty, and that all should advance together and drive the enemy from the country (Dominguez et al., 1891, 143).

After the confusion had settled amongst both parties, Cabeza de Vaca makes a clear attempt to absolve himself from having anything to do with the war:

The governor then summoned the chiefs by name, and told them to follow him in perfect security, and have no fear. “If the Spaniards were about to kill you,” he added, “you were yourselves to blame, for you took up arms, and made them believe you intended to kill them; let it be clearly understood that the tiger was the cause of this panic, and let us all be friends once more. *You know that the war we are about to engage in is in your interest and on your behalf only, for the Guaycurús have never seen the Spaniards, or had any trouble or grievance with them.* We are proceeding against them to protect and defend you.” (Dominguez et al., 1891, 144; my emphasis).

In the following chapters, the text narrates the war and victory of the Spaniards and Guaraní tribes, with the fatalities of the war being one thousand Guaraní and two Spaniards. While together they were successful in defeating the Guaycurús, remaining in the text are comments that minimize the self-dependency of the Guaraní. During the battle scenes, the Guaraní were described as “paralyzed with fear,” useless, and it’s suggested later on that “If the governor had not been present at this fight the victory would have been doubtful” (Dominguez et al., 1891, 146-8).

This section of chapters that narrate the war are fairly complex and need to be analyzed. These chapters utilize specific strategies of representations and present Cabeza de Vaca and the Spaniards as innocent above all in the situation while simultaneously justifying their presence and participation in the war against the Guaycurús. What stands out the most from these sections is that Cabeza de Vaca claims that this war has nothing to do with him and that he is merely there as the hero who saves the natives. Furthermore, later on it is suggested that without the help of the Spaniards the Guaraní would have lost the battle. It might be easy to believe what is written in the text and think that Cabeza de Vaca was acting out of good faith in helping the Guaranís against the Guaycurús; however, looking closely at the text we can see that what is written is a highly slanted narrative, crafted with the intent to showcase the Spaniards as humanitarian figures and heroes.

As it was written in chapter Twenty, the Guaranís were well within their rights to ask for help from the Spaniards as they were now “vessels of his Majesty” (Dominguez et al., 1891, 136). However, Cabeza de Vaca complains about his involvement directly to them and states that it has nothing to do with him which is a misrepresentation of his role as governor and of the situation in general. The issue with the Guaycurús most certainly involved, if it was not brought

about by, Cabeza de Vaca himself. In the text we learn that the wrong-doings and murders the Guaranís complained of had only occurred since Cabeza de Vaca's arrival into the country (Dominguez et al., 1891, 136). Furthermore, as governor of that land, it was his duty to protect and serve the people and land in the name of the King. His denial of any obligation to help the Guaranís is a misrepresentation of his duties, which conveniently lends to a charitable reading of his good will with the natives. Not only would driving out the Guaycurús bring security and stability to the colony at Asunción, but it would also fortify his alliance with the cohabitating Guaraní; however, the text avoids mention of this and any reference to colonization, strategically representing the war as just an inconvenience to Cabeza de Vaca and the Spaniards.

While two Spaniards did die, over one thousand Guaraní died in the battle. Returning to the preparation section of the text, we know that Cabeza de Vaca only went with two hundred men while the Guaraní had over ten thousand men. It was also the Guaranís who supplied provisions in large enough quantities for both themselves and the Spaniards to fight the war (Dominguez et al., 1891, 138). One could argue that, in comparison to the Guaraní, the Spaniards gained relatively more than they lost from the war at the end of the day. They defeated a potential threat to their colonization efforts, didn't have to supply provisions for the war, and only lost two men. Nevertheless, it is again presented as a great inconvenience and burden to them for which they receive no benefit. Instead of the Cabeza de Vaca we saw earlier who was described as taking pride in giving the natives more than what was fair, here we see a seemingly contradictory Cabeza de Vaca who is rather bothered by fulfilling the request of the natives.

Although these two representations seemingly present two contrasting Cabeza de Vacas, they do not necessarily work against each other in the text. In the first instance, as I have mentioned, we see a strategic representation and rewriting of the colonial process in terms of

reciprocity through trade, where Cabeza de Vaca is described as greatly satisfying the natives and overcompensating them for their goods. Through this he is able to suggest to the reader that he has the consent and approval from the natives for his presence and it also allows him to fulfill his role as an innocent actor of conquest in the narrative. In the latter instance, however, we see someone who is indisposed to helping the natives. The continuous effort made to remind the reader that the Guaraní's battle is not the Spaniards' battle, and that Cabeza de Vaca nevertheless fulfilled the request to assist them, creates a representation that disarms the reader by contributing to a humanitarian view of Cabeza de Vaca's actions. It depicts the Spaniards' presence among them as justified, innocent, and useful.

We can further argue that this representation goes beyond just attempting to establish Cabeza de Vaca's innocence and justify his presence, and further portrays a representation of the natives as being dependent upon the Spaniards; thus we return to the narrative of the counter-conquest. While together the Spaniards and the Guaraní were successful in defeating the Guaycurús, there are comments in the text that minimize the abilities and independence of the Guaraní in the process. During the actual battle scenes, the Guaraní were described as being "paralyzed with fear" and useless, and it is suggested later on that "If the governor had not been present at this fight the victory would have been doubtful" (Dominguez et al., 1891, 146-8). Essentially, what these comments attempt to do is to invalidate the capabilities of the Guaraní to be self-reliant while also suggesting that they were unable to protect themselves and were incapable of surviving without the Spaniards.

Thinking outside of the text, realistically we know the Guaraní inhabited that land and were beyond doubt capable of surviving amongst the other native tribes long before the Spaniards arrival. Although, as the text mentions, they didn't have problems before Cabeza de

Vaca arrived at Asunción, the Guaraní are represented in the text as helpless against the Guaycurús without the Spaniards. This narrative is particularly powerful because it goes beyond the intent to create a neutral justification of the Spaniards' presence through simple acts of reciprocity and instead offers a representation of the natives as reliant and dependent on the Spaniards and Cabeza de Vaca's involvement in their affairs. In his narrative, they are the ones who beseech the help of the Spaniards, and Cabeza de Vaca makes it clear that he has nothing to gain from helping them. Again, instead of a mutual reciprocity where both parties benefit, this narrative presents a commensualistic relationship where only one party receives a benefit from the work and presence of the other. The Spaniards in this case are represented as being exploited by the natives, who reap the benefits of their presence. Since the natives are portrayed as the only ones benefiting from the presence of the Spaniards and not the other way around, we have a narrative of the counter-conquest. Here again is an example of how the narrative that surrounds Cabeza de Vaca strategically represents a falsely unequal exchange in which the Spaniards end up benefiting less or being taken advantage of.

In chapter 31, after returning back to Asunción after the war, Cabeza de Vaca sent messengers to the Guaycurús. They carried the message that he wanted to make peace with them if they would submit to becoming Christians and vassals of His Majesty, so that he might regard them as allies and treat them well. According to the text, the Guaycurús agreed to become vassals of His Majesty, affirmed that they would stop molesting the Guaranís, and promised their obedience. Upon hearing this Cabeza de Vaca was pleased and distributed gifts and "peace was cemented" (Dominguez et al., 1891, 154). The Guaycurús, now a part of Cabeza de Vaca's expanding colonial domain, were permitted to take advantage of the market infrastructure at Asunción that Cabeza de Vaca had established.

Every eighth day they came laden with venison and wild boar, roasted on barbacoas.... They also brought much fish and plenty of other provisions, such as grease, linen mantles woven of a kind of teasel, dyed in bright colours; and skins of the tiger and tapir, deer and other animals. When they came, the markets for the sale of all these commodities lasted two days. The natives of the other side of the river bartered with them; it was a very great market, and they (the Guaycurús) behaved peace fully towards the Guaranís. These gave them, in exchange for their commodities, maize, manioc, and mandubis; these last are like hazel nuts or chufas, and grow near the ground; they also supplied them with bows and arrows. Two hundred canoes crossed the river together for this market, laden with all these things; and it was the finest thing in the world to see them cross (Dominguez et al., 1891, 155)

The text continues to describe the market filled with natives as “very gay and jolly”, mixing and bartering between groups and engaging in “fits of laughter” with one another (Dominguez et al., 1891, 155). In contrast to the previous ten chapters’ vilification of the Guaycurús, in Chapter Thirty-one Cabeza de Vaca is represented as being able to easily pacify the Guaycurús and obtain their allyship. This representation in the text works to secure his portrayal as a harmless actor and further justifies his presence among them. He not only gets the Guaycurús to stop waring on the Guaraní, but he is also able to make them allies with the Guaraní and allows them into the market, where both groups benefit from trade with each other. This narrative sells the message to the reader that only with and because of Cabeza de Vaca, peace and happiness are achieved amongst the natives. The text then presents a utopia that is a direct result of Cabeza de Vaca’s colonial efforts. This created “utopian innocent vision of a European global authority” is the anti-conquest (Pratt, 1992, 38). In addition to the benefit of the commodity exchange, we also see a euphoric representation of the natives who are pleased, satisfied, and even have fun participating in the market with each other. It is representations like these that lead readers to mistakenly argue that he led a “peaceful conquest” and was sympathetic to the natives.

Even though the market and colony structure are central in the presentation of this scene and are products of colonization and the subjection of the Guaycurús to the Spaniards, there is never any direct reference to any act of colonization, the enslavement of people, or the appropriation of land with relation to Cabeza de Vaca. The only time we see a reference to acts of colonization is in chapter Seventy-eight, after Cabeza de Vaca is imprisoned and Domingo de Irala replaces him as acting governor. The interpretation and documentation for his imprisonment remain controversial yet “distill into two major positions: accusations against him for the arrogance of his rule versus his own claims of attempting to enforce royal laws and decrees established for better governance of the Indies” (Adorno and Pautz, 1999, 1; 388). According to the text in *Comentarios*, Cabeza de Vaca was deposed and imprisoned by the other already established royal officials at Asuncion because they didn’t like his strict enforcement of the rules and laws set forth by the crown regarding the fair treatment of the natives (Dominguez et al., 1891, 239). In contrast to his side of the story are the great number charges brought upon him that allege abuse and destruction of the Indian populations (Adorno and Pautz, 1999, 1; 396) of which he would eventually be found guilty and receive a sentence of banishment to a penal colony on the Barbary Coast in 1551 (Tuer, 2011, 140).

Outside of the text, although Cabeza de Vaca was the only one to face charges for the abuse and unfair treatment of the natives, in the text we get essentially the opposite presented to us, describing the other officials’ mistreatment of the natives:

While the governor was in this situation, the officers and Domingo de Irala gave public permission to all their friends and partisans to go into the villages and huts of the Indians and take by force their wives, daughters, hammocks, and other of their possessions, a thing contrary to the service of His Majesty and the peace of the country. While this was going on they would scour the country, strike the Indians blows with sticks, carry them off to their houses, and oblige them to labour in their fields without any remuneration... (Dominguez et al., 1891, 249).

Here we see the narrative of a traditional conquest present in the text in relation to Domingo de Irala. In contrast to the narrative of leadership under Cabeza de Vaca, this new narrative makes no attempt to sugar coat violent acts associated with conquest and colonization. What we see in this representation is an inverse narrative to the one that surrounds Cabeza de Vaca; it is parallel to the descriptions of the Spanish conquerors in New Spain at the end of *Naufraios*. In a similar manner to Cabeza de Vaca's descriptions of the natives in *Naufraios* escaping and hiding from the Spanish conquerors' wrath by moving inland, we see the same account here in *Comentarios*. It was Domingo de Irala's mistreatment of the natives, not Cabeza de Vaca's that "...caused the country to be deserted. The natives withdrew to the mountains and concealed themselves in places where the Christians could not find them" (Dominguez et al., 1891, 249).

As Cabeza de Vaca is later put in prison, he cannot run to the rescue of the natives and argue for their better treatment from the Spaniards, like he did in *Naufraios*. However, through this narrative he is still able to evade any guilt associated with colonization because he strategically contrasts himself to Domingo de Irala. As mentioned previously, all of Cabeza de Vaca's representations in *Comentarios* have been centered around him being reciprocal, fair, and a humanitarian ally to the natives while always avoiding mentions of the act of conquest. Describing the cruelties of Domingo de Irala indirectly helps Cabeza de Vaca's own representation as a peaceful leader in the text, because to the reader he only appears to be opposed to what Domingo de Irala is doing. In comparison, he appears to be a much more pacific actor, one whose specific presence can only be seen as innocent, beneficial, and justified.

Conclusion

It is clear that, in both works, Cabeza de Vaca's discourse and narrative is one that circumvents the guilt of conquest and documents colonial domination in passive forms. Applying

the concepts behind Pratt's anti-conquest enables us to discover the strategic representations in the text that Cabeza de Vaca uses to write himself out of responsibility for acting as an agent, of colonization and colonialism, and to establish his innocence while at the same time legitimizing his presence in conquest. I have argued that reciprocity (or the lack of it) is the dynamic that above all organizes Cabeza de Vaca's narrative. Whereas the unequal exchange that benefits the Europeans is represented as acts of reciprocity in the anti-conquest, in the counter-conquest it is the reciprocal exchange that is presented as unequal and favoring the native. The represented exchange in both constructs is always significantly different from the exchange that is present in the described account, and also different from what we know about the true exchange from outside of the text. Outside of the text and realistically, we are aware of a more complete picture of the true exchange that takes place rather than what is presented to us through the narrated representations and descriptive accounts, largely because these narratives avoid reference to acts of conquest.

On the descriptive plane we get narrated accounts of exchanges that occur throughout the text. The accounts that describe exchanges are then represented in certain ways on the representative plane, depending on the intended purpose of the protagonist. The reality and true picture of the exchange, however, doesn't appear in either of those realms. On the descriptive plane, reciprocity is portrayed as being accomplished. Cabeza de Vaca uses acts of reciprocity to survive in *Naufragios*, and he implements them in *Comentarios* as a tool to help him facilitate his colonizing mission. In *Naufragios*, he begins performing healing acts in exchange for food and shelter; in *Comentarios*, he pays the natives generously for their provisions. On the representative plane, however, we can use the constructs of the anti-conquest and counter-conquest to examine how these exchanges are represented.

Analyzing the text through the construct of what I call the counter-conquest enables us to find representations in the text where Cabeza de Vaca goes beyond seeking to establish his innocence and instead portrays himself as someone who is used and taken advantage of by the natives. Through this narrative we can better understand what Cabeza de Vaca intended to communicate to the reader and also understand how the reader is able to arrive at a sympathetic and forgiving interpretation of Cabeza de Vaca as the protagonist in the texts. The anti-conquest serves to justify European presence through the establishment and guise of a mutually beneficial and reciprocal relationship. The counter-conquest, in the same vein, is an extreme of the anti-conquest that strategically represents narratives through which the protagonist is also able to establish their innocence and rewrite colonial domination in a passive form, *because* their presence is portrayed as purely beneficial to and taken advantage of by the natives. While Pratt shows in the anti-conquest that the European's presence is justified by engaging in mutually beneficial exchanges, in the counter-conquest, European presence is justified through commensualistic relationships.

The construct of the counter-conquest, as we have seen, is able to illustrate how Cabeza de Vaca creates a representation in a narrative in which he is objectified and taken advantage of to the native's benefit. He constructs a narrative in *Comentarios* that depicts the Guaraní as dependent on and helpless without the Spaniards' presence. In *Naufragios*, he portrays himself as a powerless objectified subject which the natives exploit to their own advantage long after he no longer is a captive of the natives. Both the anti-conquest and counter-conquest share the same intended outcomes of justifying colonial presence and circumventing the guilt of colonialism by rewriting the colonial process in passive forms. They differ in regard to the representations through which they achieve these narratives.

Pratt applies her anti-conquest construct to eighteenth and nineteenth century travel writings. She asserts that the narrative of the anti-conquest avoids and even challenges older imperial rhetoric of the conquest, which would make it seem that the anti-conquest would not be applicable to Cabeza de Vaca as an actor in sixteenth century conquest himself. However, we have seen that he in fact employs the anti-conquest represented much to his advantage. I propose that both texts analyzed in this chapter use the anti-conquest representation to avoid the harsh rhetoric of the conquest. It allows Cabeza de Vaca to separate himself from the common perception of conquerors at this time. We must remember that Cabeza de Vaca was a twice-failed conqueror who barely escaped back to Spain after the first shipwrecked expedition, and was shipped back to Spain as a prisoner after the second. One could argue that these texts served as a way for him to redeem his reputation and be seen as a romanticized version of a conqueror by contrasting himself to the infamous reputation of the sixteenth century conqueror. As discussed above, Cabeza de Vaca doesn't sugar coat the acts of the other Spanish conquerors in either *Naufragios* or *Comentarios*. The reader cannot help but notice the contrast between the treatment of the natives when the narrative surrounds Cabeza de Vaca and the when the narrative surrounds the other conquerors. There is no better way for him to redeem himself in the eyes of the reader than to recast his failures as attempts at fair and just treatment of the natives. These texts most definitely served as a way for him to control the narrative of his experiences and guide the public's perception of him.

These strategic representations in *Naufragios* and *Comentarios* are skillfully created and remain highly effective even in modern times, as we have seen scholars characterize him as sympathetic and peaceful, as discussed in the previous chapter. The construct of the counter-conquest allows for a new viewpoint on the writings of Cabeza de Vaca that highlights the

strategic and self-serving nature of the work. Closely looking at the details in the text, however, we can find blemishes in the narratives that clue us to a different and somewhat contradictory account of what is being represented. In the following chapter I will expose and highlight breaks in the text where we see examples of native resistance to colonization that argue for a new reading and rebalancing of the narrative in the text. This will allow us to gain a better holistic understanding of Cabeza de Vaca and his relations with the natives.

CHAPTER THREE. CONSIDERING NATIVE AGENCY

As discussed in Chapter Two, both *Naufragios* and *Comentarios* are carefully and strategically written with the intent for both texts to serve Cabeza de Vaca in specific ways. These works do a remarkable job in making Cabeza de Vaca appear as an exception to the typical colonial depiction of the violent conquistador and they purposely help guide the public's perception of him as well. Because of this, there is a preference to read Cabeza de Vaca as someone who underwent a personal transformation from the stereotype of a greedy conquistador to someone with an array of "good" traits (Rabasa, 2000, 35). This widely accepted image of a peaceful and benevolent Cabeza de Vaca is also commonly associated with the idea that he had been transformed through his interactions with the natives.

Central to the discussion in this chapter will be a reexamination and critique of what I see as an uncritical acceptance of this favorable reading of Cabeza de Vaca. Because until now there has been an absolute lack of attention paid to indigenous resistance and agency in the texts, readers accept him at his word and champion Cabeza de Vaca as a "saint of the conquest" (Rabasa, 2000, 54). In doing so, scholars end up reproducing and contributing to the colonial myth themselves. Overall, there is a desire in the literature surrounding Cabeza de Vaca to place him in a binary where there only exist good and bad conquerors. As argued in Chapter One, in order to understand any conquistador, and especially Cabeza de Vaca, the reader must resist restricting them to a binary and instead consider placing them along a spectrum. I argue that the earlier interpretation, when reanalyzed in consideration of native voice and resistance, allows us to obtain a more accurate and complete understanding of Cabeza de Vaca and his expeditions that present a depiction of him and his story that contrasts with what is widely held in the literature.

In this chapter I examine the very few instances in which there are rhetorical slippages in Cabeza de Vaca's narrative where we can see native resistance and agency. Scholars like Todorov have commented on Cabeza de Vaca and likened him to other benevolent actors such as Bartolomé de las Casas (Todorov, 1984, 249); however, as Rabasa mentions:

Cabeza de Vaca could never have assumed the position Las Casas takes in the 1550's of a total condemnation of the Spanish enterprise in the New World. Cabeza de Vaca certainly strikes us as a conscientious and law-abiding servant of the Crown. We should not, however, project an anti-imperialist position or be seduced by his heroic, colorful narratives of colonial adventures, and especially not by his similarly vivid and colorful ethnographic sketches of servile or hostile Indians. Because of the self-serving nature of his narratives, resistance has no place in his representation and interpretation of the Indians.... he never justifies rebellion (Rabasa, 2000, 80-1).

If Cabeza de Vaca is not a Las Casas by any means, then there is no space for him in the widely accepted conquistador binary system the literature imposes. While Las Casas opposed and condemned the Spanish enterprise in the Americas (Casas, 1992), never once do we see Cabeza de Vaca justify native resistance. As Rabasa mentions, resistance has no place in the text for Cabeza de Vaca. He does an excellent job at diminishing, manipulating, and silencing native voices and resistance in the text, and he makes it easy for readers to overlook the cracks in the narrative where these appear. Focusing in on native resistance requires us to look at the parts of the text which few studies have investigated thus far - those that reflect unfavorably on Cabeza de Vaca. Though few, and briefly mentioned, there are blemishes in the text where he breaks his discourse of representation and allows us as academics to clarify and rebalance the discussion around Cabeza de Vaca, to return power and agency back to the natives in the texts.

It takes a village

Naufragios, as Adorno discusses at length in her article "The Negotiation of Fear" (1991), presents a unique power dynamic that evolves throughout the *relación*. In *Naufragios* we are hard pressed to find any examples of resistance to colonization or rebellion from natives as

the narrative resides in a story of Spanish shipwreck, loss of material civilization, evolution into a shaman, and the integration into the native's world. In contrast, in *Comentarios* we see Cabeza de Vaca dwelling at length on his efforts to enforce colonial law (Rabasa, 2000, 32). Adorno (1991), however, walks us through three different stages of the negotiation of fear through which Cabeza de Vaca was able to navigate his way back to Spain in *Naufragios*. This article gives a great deal of credit to Cabeza de Vaca for being wise enough to take advantage and negotiate his way back to Spain, starting off with nothing to eventually becoming someone of great authority and prestige among the natives; but this is a common interpretation of the events in the *relación* in the general literature on Cabeza de Vaca.

In Hickerson's article "How Cabeza de Vaca Lived with, Worked among, and Finally Left the Indians of Texas", she argues directly that Cabeza de Vaca's journey across North America was the outcome of "an intelligent plan" executed with "informed and skillful diplomacy" (Hickerson, 1998, 216). The belief that Cabeza de Vaca himself possessed the capabilities to independently transform himself from the shipwrecked survivor to a "child of the sun" is, however, problematic. This belief contributes to the myth that the Spaniards had some kind of natural intellectual superiority and were able to easily trick and take advantage of seemingly ignorant and oblivious natives. It additionally ignores the natives' role in the creation and contribution of the fantasized and heroic Cabeza de Vaca we see at the end of *Naufragios*.

In *Naufragios* I argue that the natives play a significant and drastically overlooked role in the creation of Cabeza de Vaca as a shaman. Cabeza de Vaca relied heavily on the natives not only for his survival but also for his social evolution amongst the natives. Nonetheless, this is not a common reading. For example, according to Hickerson, "Cabeza de Vaca can justly be given credit for the strategy that enabled four refugees to travel from the Texas coast to New Spain"

(Hickerson, 1998, 211). The first aspect she accredits to the success of his plan is due to his geographical knowledge. She boldly claims that “Cabeza de Vaca had a realistic understanding of his whereabouts in relation to the Caribbean, the Gulf of Mexico, and the eastern approaches to New Spain” (Hickerson, 1998, 211). Not only is it clear that even from the initial shipwreck that Narváez and his expedition were utterly lost, but furthermore Cabeza de Vaca himself didn’t know where he was during the entirety of his expedition. Additionally, there were no preexistent maps of the areas Cabeza de Vaca would come to traverse at this time, so it would not have been possible for him to have a “realistic understanding of his whereabouts”. During his entire time in North America, never does Cabeza de Vaca travel without the guidance and direction of natives who show him the way. Cabeza de Vaca was completely lost geographically and to credit his successful arrival at Pánuco as due to his geographical knowledge of maps prior to the expedition is without basis in fact.

Cabeza de Vaca’s role as a shaman is also often credited to be the most important thing that leads him to return home. It most definitely was something that allowed him to increase his authority with the natives; however, I do not believe he initially had a clear intention or plan of using healing to become the great shaman Cabeza de Vaca we see at the end of the *relación*. In fact, it is not at all clear that he completely understood the factors influencing the performance and outcome of him becoming a shaman. As discussed in the previous chapter, participating in healing was something he originally resisted. He resisted performing these acts to the point where he was threatened with starvation unless he cooperated. From this perspective we can argue that Cabeza de Vaca originally had no understanding of the importance the natives held with regard to healing and it also shows that he had no initial intention or inclination to use this activity as a negotiation tool with them.

It is only as he notices that he is rewarded for his healing acts that he then begin to embellish and put on more performances. Later, as the surviving Spaniards and Estebanico begin to travel with the Avavares, they began to grow in fame for their healings. Word spread to the other native nations and their fame and authority grew until they eventually became regarded as “children from the sky.” Adorno (1991) talks about Cabeza de Vaca’s rise to becoming the famed shaman amongst all the natives and gives a lot of credit to Cabeza de Vaca for his performance as a healer. In her section “People from the Sky” she briefly touches on and interprets the meaning of “people from the sky” as a way the natives were able to explain things that they could not understand (Adorno 1991, 183). She further writes “Certainly “coming from the sky” continues to have a magical connotation, because both the ritual gourds and the never-before-seen black and white men are associated by them with extraordinary powers” (Adorno, 1991, 183).

As she correctly notes, the foreigner’s presence, healing acts, and possession of gourds together contribute to them being associated with extraordinary powers. “The offering and receipt of the gourds confirms the association made by the natives between the special powers of the gourds and those of the Spaniards” (Adorno, 1991, 177). Quite often glossed over is the significance of the gourds and what it contributes to how the natives perceive and regard the Spaniards:

...However, this magical power did not mean that the Spaniards were the principal parties in the negotiations between the marauding groups and their victims, but rather the catalysts to the exchange: they helped produce the desired pillaging and could be counted upon not to covet its rewards. In other words, the role the Spanish party played was not unlike that of the sacred gourds whose use they had taken up; *the four strange men lent authority to the native groups just as the gourds had lent authority to the Spaniards* (105). (Adorno, 1991, 182, my emphasis).

The important thing Adorno mentions here is that the gourds greatly increased the authority of the Spaniards. It is here we can see how the Spaniards sequentially grew in fame and notoriety with the contribution of the gourds from the natives. It is doubtful that any of the Spaniards fully comprehended the significance of the gourds to the natives and even if they did, it was at the natives' will that they were given the gourds, which they could have done for their own gain as well. As Adorno (1991) states, an argument could be made that the natives offered them the gourds with the specific intent that it would amplify the Spaniards' notoriety to then facilitate the pillaging of the natives further along. As we discussed in the last chapter, Cabeza de Vaca describes himself as a victim of sorts, being objectified by the natives and used to allow pillaging of neighboring village.

...And since they took them unprepared and vulnerable, they took from them all that they wanted without there being opportunity to hide anything about which they wept greatly. And the attackers, to console them, told them that we were children of the sun and that we had to power to cure the sick and kill them and other lies even greater than these, since they know how best to do it when they feel that it suits them (Adorno and Pautz, 1991, 1; 203-5).

Clearly Cabeza de Vaca acknowledges that the natives glorified the Spaniards so that they could personally benefit from them. When read closely, it's obvious that the natives were not as naive and unaware as Cabeza de Vaca wants the reader to believe. According to Cabeza de Vaca, he had fooled the natives and they accepted his Christian preaching and power. The natives arguably understood the "game" Cabeza de Vaca was playing, maybe better than he did, and found a way they could take advantage of him and reap the benefits. They benefited from elevating Cabeza de Vaca, but so did he.

Regardless of whether the natives intentionally fueled Cabeza de Vaca and the Spaniards' elevation in status, the focus point of my argument is that it is clear the natives had a significant part in the creation of the Cabeza de Vaca who many see as the self-made shaman who emerged

in a resilient manner (Hickerson, 1998; Adorno, 1991). This argument is not to discredit Cabeza de Vaca in finding his way back to Spain. He was able to do something extremely difficult and highly unlikely for anyone. However, in several literary readings (Hickerson, 1998; Docter, 2008) he is perceived to have achieved this feat independently due to his superior will, intelligence, and wisdom. This view of Cabeza de Vaca exacerbates the perception of him as some type of superior hero of the conquest. These kinds of readings do nothing more than glorify him as a Spaniard colonizer and add to the myth of Spanish excellence and superiority (Rabasa, 2000, 34).

With a close reading of the text, we can begin to demystify the heroic portrayal of Cabeza de Vaca and diminish the fantastic aspects of his journey. By giving Cabeza de Vaca all the credit for becoming a shaman of great prestige, we miss out on interpretations that show us that he wasn't as perceptive and intentional as previously thought, which forces us to re-examine how much agency he actually had in his own journey. One could argue that if he had initially continued to resist the natives, he would have never made it out of Florida, let alone have cultivated any authority with the natives to begin with. We can see that the natives really weren't as accepting of and blinded by his proselytization and healings as its commonly believed (Cebollero, 2007; Docter, 2008; Adorno, 1991). Without the contributions from the natives of things like the sacred gourds and the lies they spread on his behalf, Cabeza de Vaca would have most likely not have become the same Cabeza de Vaca presented in this *relación*. Ultimately, I argue that he had little agency or control in becoming who he claims to have become, and that he either stumbled upon using healing or co-opted the natives' healing role attributed to him as a tool to escape. In short, he got very lucky with the help and contributions from the natives.

Uncovering resistance

In *Naufragios*, Cabeza de Vaca doesn't tell us of any resistance to his healing/religious preaching in the text but at the same time he also doesn't write about having relations with women either. I say this only to note that although he doesn't mention either of those two things, we cannot say for sure that neither of them occurred and that he just decided to omit them from the text; absence of evidence is not evidence. Margo Glantz points out "...Cabeza de Vaca observó las costumbres sexuales de los indios y su manera de reportarlas entraña ya un esbozo de erotismo" (1993, 421). Glantz also notes that it was common for native shamans to have several wives and argues that the text skillfully evades this topic of discussion "...para evitar que se contravenga lo concebido como honesto o decente, según los códigos europeos" (1993, 421). As I have shown before and as Rabasa (2000) mentions, we must not forget that the text is self-serving. Cabeza de Vaca has no problem writing about sexual topics as long as he isn't mentioned as a participant, which is consistent with another theme I will discuss later on in this chapter. Just because there isn't any described resistance against Cabeza de Vaca in *Naufragios* doesn't mean there wasn't any. In *Comentarios*, however, we do find plenty of examples of indigenous resistance against colonization. Not only do the examples of indigenous rebellion in the text allow us to analyze Cabeza de Vaca's comments and reactions to them but we can also look at these instances of resistance as challenging the idea that he led "the most successful and the most peaceful of conquests" (Adorno, 1991, 191).

I discussed at length in the second half of Chapter Two how Cabeza de Vaca avoids language and rhetoric of conquest in relation to himself but includes it when he refers to other actors of conquest. The same silence characterizes *Comentarios* with respect to examples of resistance and rebellion, as they mysteriously always occur outside of Cabeza de Vaca's presence. As I demonstrated above, Cabeza de Vaca successfully conceals these instances of

native pushback by encasing them with his anti and counter conquest narrative; however, he isn't able to occlude them completely all the time. The first mentions of rebellion take place during the Governor's arrival at Asunción where he tells us how the Agazes broke the previous peace agreement they had with the Spaniards:

A few days before the governor's arrival at the Ascension the Agazes had violated the peace, having attacked and ravaged certain villages of the Guaranís, besides keeping the town of Ascension daily on the alert. When the Agazes knew of the governor's arrival, their chiefs, named Abacoten, Tabor, and Alabos, accompanied by a large number of their people, arrived in their canoes, and presented themselves before him, saying they wished to swear allegiance to His Majesty, and to be friendly with the Spaniards; they declared that if they had not kept the peace hitherto, that was owing to the audacious conduct of some foolish youths, who had begun hostilities without their leave, causing it to be supposed that the chiefs had broken the peace, but that they had been well punished for it; and they entreated the governor to receive them into his amity, and make peace between them and the Spaniards, promising they would keep it (Dominguez et al., 1891, 132).

It is very congenial to Cabeza de Vaca's self-portrayal that there were problems between the Spaniards and the Agazes, but upon his arrival, his presence alone seemingly brought the chiefs to come and surrender their loyalty to him, apparently just because of who he was. Furthermore, the incident of difficulty is downplayed and described as being caused by "foolish youths" who acted independently rather than being an expression of widespread resistance by the Agazes. Later in the same paragraph we learn in the text that Cabeza de Vaca explicitly explains the terms of their agreement and orders that the Agazes be treated well and receive provisions. Through these actions, he claims that he was able to restore peace and bring about their submission (Dominguez et al., 1891, 132). The presentation of gifts and provisions is a crucial aspect in the text because he repeatedly relies on material exchange as his tool for negotiating peace with the natives in *Comentarios*. This form of negotiation ultimately proves worthless in the pacification of the natives because it doesn't prevent future resistance, as I will show.

Upon arriving back from the war with the Guaycurús, Cabeza de Vaca is informed by Gonzalo de Mendoza of how the Agazes broke the peace agreement again, saying that “that very night which he had started his campaign against the Guaycurús, (the Agazes) had come armed to set fire to the town, and make war upon the Spaniards” (Dominguez et al., 1891, 150). Primarily what we should take note of in this example is that when the Agazes returned to attack the settlement at Asunción, again Cabeza de Vaca was not present. In this same chapter it is mentioned that it is believed the Agazes were waiting for Cabeza de Vaca to leave so that they could attack when the settlement was less populated and armored (Dominguez et al., 1891, 151). Nonetheless, their return and premeditated attack suggest that peace had never actually been solidified between the parties, at least from the native’s perspective. Furthermore, the return and attack raises doubt as to whether the incident described just prior to the governor’s arrival was truly caused by rebellious “foolish youth” who acted independently without consent from the chiefs. Given these factors, it appears as if the truth lies somewhere between the natives lying to Cabeza de Vaca and blaming the attack on youth and Cabeza de Vaca fabricating this part of the narrative to minimize the true scale and motivation behind the first attack to make it appear in the text as unintentional. Although he describes at length in Chapter 17 that he clearly explained the peace agreement and conditions and that the natives understood well and agreed to follow the terms, it’s obvious that those words were empty and had no influence over the natives. The Agazes (and most of the native groups in fact), act independently of the Spaniards and were not lulled by Cabeza de Vaca’s words or his gifts. This is often an overlooked and important piece of information that shows us that his presence was not welcome and that their acceptance of his provisions in fact did not serve as their consent to be colonized.

After learning of the Agazes' acts, Cabeza de Vaca ordered an inquiry to be made by the Spanish officials in order to determine how they should proceed:

Then, having discussed and considered the affair thoroughly, they were all of one accord, that war should be made with fire and sword to punish the Agazes for the wrongs and injuries they had committed, and were still committing, in the country. This opinion was unanimous, and signed by all. In order still further to establish the criminality of their acts, Alvar Nuñez ordered a judicial inquest to be held, and when this was terminated he added it to four others previously entered against them before his arrival. The Christians formerly resident in that country had slain over one thousand of these Indians because of the losses they were constantly inflicting upon them (Dominguez et al., 1891, 151).

Looking at Cabeza de Vaca's justification of declaration of war on the Agazes, we can infer three key things. First, as I will continue to show, when faced with serious affairs he never fails to mention that he asks for and concurs with the opinions of all the officials upon determining a solution. This allows him to not only avoid mentioning what his own opinion is but it also lets him distribute and share the blame and responsibility of the actions decided upon across the other officials as well. Secondly, Cabeza de Vaca justifies making war upon them due to the "losses they were constantly inflicting upon them." It is here we start to see the characterization of the peaceful conqueror begin to break down. This is an opportunity to observe exactly how far Cabeza de Vaca will go until he chooses to enact force and violence upon the natives. At this point, the persistent losses, both financial and human, at the settlement outweigh the peaceful engagement with the natives, and when he calls for action against the Agazes, he is no longer acting as a peaceful conqueror.

Lastly, as described in the text, Cabeza de Vaca desired to further criminalize the Agazes with an additional judicial inquest so that he could more strongly justify making war upon them. Criminalizing the natives would further bolster his justification for making war on them. The clear statement that the decision that the decision was made upon his individual request is important because it indicates to the reader and to the Spanish crown that he prioritized making

sure that his retaliation was just and in accordance with colonial law, the legal *ordenanzas* (ordinances), and fair treatment of the Indians. This reasoning would conveniently end up serving him in dispelling the accusations he would later come to face in Spain about his mistreatment of the natives. Overall, when considering both the first downplaying of the initial Agazes attack before his arrival at Asunción along with his desire not to only declare war upon them but further criminalize them, we see that he fails to offer the reader any justification or understanding of the native's rebellion. A further argument could be made that he even attempted to occlude and minimize the initial rebellions in an attempt to make himself appear as a great peace maker.

Another instance in which we see a contrast to Cabeza de Vaca's narrative of peace in the country is in chapter Thirty-four, with the creation of a reconnaissance expedition of Spaniards and natives that was set to reconnoiter a route from Las Piedras seventy leagues north of Asunción. To recruit natives to join the expedition that was to be led by Captain Vergara, Cabeza de Vaca seemingly convinced local natives that those joining the expedition would not only receive pay and presents but also "advance their own interest" by putting them in good favor with the crown (Dominguez et al., 1891, 160). Of the eight hundred natives that joined the expedition, the most notable one was a chief known as Aracaré:

Twenty days after the departure of the three Spaniards from the city of Ascension to reconnoiter the road, they returned and said, that having taken the chief Aracaré as their principal guide, they started from the port of Las Piedras with 800 Indians, more or less, and marched for about four days into the interior, following the guidance of Aracaré, a man much feared and respected by the Indians. He had, however, ordered all the fields where they passed to be set on fire, and this was a signal to their enemies to come and attack them, besides being contrary to the order usually observed in exploring a new country. Moreover, Aracaré openly told the Indians to return, and not to show the country to the Christians, who were evil, and he spoke in this fashion to them, inciting them to rebel (Dominguez et al. 1891, 161).

The Spaniards of course begged the natives to stop burning and to stay with them, but they refused and left the Spaniards abandoned and lost without any guides to assist them (Dominguez et al., 1891, 162). Three chapters later, on the return to Asunción from another reconnaissance expedition from Las Piedras some Spaniards cross paths with Aracaré, who caused again more trouble and showed himself to be the enemy of the Spaniards:

The governor having learned of the outrageous conduct of Aracaré, which had now become notorious, ordered an act of accusation to be drawn up against him, and to be notified to this chief - a somewhat dangerous commission, because Aracaré came out with arms in his hands, followed by a number of friends and relations, with the intent to kill the Spaniards sent to him. The process, however, was duly served according to law, and Aracaré was sentenced to death and executed, the natives being made to understand the just cause for which this had been done (Dominguez et al., 1891, 164).

This example of resistance is similar in some ways to the previous one I discussed but has some distinct features as well.

With the case of Aracaré, in contrast to the rebellion from the Agazes, it is the first time we hear the voice (literally and metaphorically) of individual natives and we get a clearer idea of their resistance. From the descriptions of what Aracaré said, it is apparent that he and the natives associated with him viewed the Spaniards as evil and he further expressed that they shouldn't show the Spaniards their land. The exact reasons why they didn't want to show the Spaniards their land and perceived them as evil can be inferred but are not explicitly stated in the text. Regardless, we can assume that Aracaré and the eight hundred natives had been watching the Spaniards, had a clear idea of their intentions, and were opposed to what they had already seen and what they perceived would come of them with continual Spanish colonial expansion. Again, we see here that Aracaré and the other natives are not passive at all in their reaction to colonization. While this example focuses on one chief's words and actions in the rebellion, it's

also important to note that he didn't act alone, and that the rebellion was collaborative amongst them.

Similar, however, to the previous case of the Agazes, we see premeditation in this example of rebellion which demonstrates a higher level of understanding and planning behind the act. Aracaré, being a notable chief, volunteered to join the expedition and led it through the interior for quite a while without the Spaniards detecting any malintent:

Eight days after the departure of the ships, Captain Vergara wrote that the three Spaniards, together with 800 Indians, had set out from the port of Las Piedras, in the 24th degree, below the tropic, to prosecute their journey by land, and that the *Indians were in good heart, and pleased to show the road*. He further wrote that, having recommended the three Spaniards to the care of the Indians, he had resumed his navigation up the river for the purpose of exploring it (Dominguez et al., 1891, 161; my emphasis).

Based on what is written in the text, it appears that Aracaré very cleverly intentionally waited to start a revolt until the expedition was deep into the interior (twenty days in) so that the Spaniards would be venerable, helpless, and lost. Furthermore, it is noted that setting the fields on fire served as a signal to other enemies of the Spanish to attack, which suggests that the sentiments and act of revolt from Aracaré and the eight hundred natives were shared and previously corroborated by other native groups. These coordinated actions further give an idea of the magnitude of resistance.

Like before, in this example we see no justification or understanding of these rebellions on the part of Cabeza de Vaca. He proceeds to handle the resistance in a similar manner as before. His response to the rebellion was to have an accusation drawn up against Aracaré and ultimately to execute him. While no inquiry was made with the other officials Cabeza de Vaca, as noted in the excerpt above, made sure the process was duly served "according to law." It is interesting that the reasons for Aracaré's execution were later explained to the natives. However, these explanations do not appear in the text, so we can only speculate what kind of explanation

was given to them that would subdue them after having witnessed the execution of a native leader.

Shortly after this case of resistance, yet another case is detailed, showing an even larger scale unification and collaboration amongst the natives. Shortly after Domingo de Irala returned from exploring the Paraguay river, he received approval from the governor and officials to gather more resources and continue exploring further into an area he claimed showed promise of riches. Brigantines were built without delay, and Cabeza de Vaca sent Captain Gonzalo de Mendoza up the Paraguay to load the vessels with provisions from friendly natives nearby. A few days after Gonzalo de Mendoza set out on his voyage, he wrote to inform the governor that he arrived at the port of Giguy and that he was able to obtain some provisions but also mentioned that some of the Spaniards he was with informed him of troubles with the natives:

...interpreters had fled from the natives and taken refuge in the brigantines, because an attempt to kill them had been made by the friends and relatives of an Indian who was in revolt and was raising the country against the Christians and against our Indian allies, advising them not to give us provisions, and that many Indian chiefs had come to beg for assistance and help to protect their tribes against two chiefs named Guaçani and Atabare, who with all their relatives and friends were making war upon them with fire and sword, burning their settlements and ravaging their lands, threatening to kill them and destroy them utterly if they would not unite to drive out the Christians (Dominguez et al., 1891, 170).

Mendoza also wrote that shortly after the Spaniards noticed that the natives were no longer bringing provisions; they found out Guaçani and Atabare had blocked the roads so that the friendly natives couldn't reach the Spaniards on the shore (Dominguez et al., 1891, 170). After the first letter a few days later, Mendoza wrote again to Cabeza de Vaca explaining in greater detail the rebellion led by Guaçani and Atabare:

Mendoza wrote again to the governor, informing him how the Indian chiefs Guaçani and Atabare were making a cruel war against the friendly natives, over-running their land, slaying and robbing them, as far as the port where the Christians were collecting provisions, and that the Indian allies were much harassed, and were daily beseeching him

(Gonzalo de Mendoza) for aid, and saying that if he did not soon help them, all the Indians would rise in revolt... (Dominguez et al., 1891, 171).

In the meantime, Cabeza de Vaca, having received the first letter detailing the affair, called for an inquiry with the officials as to determine the best way to handle the situation:

...and they answered, that since the Indians were making war against the Christians and His Majesty's vassals, their opinion was (and it was recorded in writing and signed with their names) that he should march against them, and, after demanding peace, should exhort them to give in their submission; failing which...they would be held responsible for any evil consequences that might ensue, that then war should be waged against them as enemies, for the defense and protection of the friendly natives (Dominguez et al., 1891, 171).

After receiving further details of the affair with the arrival of Mendoza's second letter, Cabeza de Vaca commissioned Domingo de Irala to go and protect the native allies and put an end to the war:

...urging him to renew friendly relations with the Indians by every means in his power, because it was advantageous for His Majesty's service. Indeed, as long as the country was disturbed by war, surprises, revolts, murders, and robberies, troubles would never cease. By bringing about a peace, he wrote, they would be doing their duty towards God and the king. At the same time he sent a quantity of provisions for gratuitous distribution among the Indians... adding all that he could think of to strengthen peace and concord (Dominguez et al., 1891, 174-5).

Like the previous case of resistance with Aracaré we can see another example where specific natives are mentioned by name. What is interesting about this is the contrast to his tendency in *Naufragios* to resist naming individuals, while in *Comentarios*, commentary on rebellions and resistance always includes the names of specific individuals in leadership positions. Pinpointing specific actors who cause trouble or are at the head of the rebellion suggests to the reader that these named actors were unique in their motivations. The Spaniards and Cabeza de Vaca attempt to evade culpability and discredit the rebellion with the implication that it was just those specifically named natives who had problems with the Spaniards and the complaints weren't widely shared. Besides the text showing us the strong desire of Guaçani's and Atabare's groups

to drive out the Spaniards, we also learn that they were strategic in their actions, and intended to unite with the friendly native tribes to do so. One of the tactics that is most notable is their plea for the other natives to stop providing provisions to the Spaniards. Their efforts to stop the provisions highlights their understanding of the Spaniards' reliance on the natives and their goods. Without the help and involvement of the natives, the Spaniards would not have been able to survive, let alone take part in colonial expansion, and we see that the natives were well aware of this.

In contrast to Aracaré and the eight hundred natives' collective show of rebellion, in this example there is also an inter-native dynamic present, with the friendly natives presented as hesitating to revolt against the Spaniards. Guaçani's and Atabare's tribes not only block the travel routes of the "friendly natives" but also threaten to kill and raid them if they do not join with them and drive out the Spaniards. This shows just how accurately they perceived the Spanish to be a threat. While the friendly natives hold out in rebelling against Mendoza at the port, in his second letter to Cabeza de Vaca we do get the sense that if they continue to suffer losses from Guaçani's and Atabare's tribes the other natives would eventually unite with them and all would revolt against the Spaniards. The inter-native dynamic is interesting, and could lend to the impression that the opposition to the Spaniards was something isolated and not widespread amongst the natives. However, I believe there is more to be interpreted about the size and consensus behind the rebellion, and the explanation of why the natives at the port of Giguy resisted joining the united revolt against the Spaniards.

While it is advantageous for Cabeza de Vaca to mention the support of their "native allies," in this case we do not have any quantified descriptions in the text about the size of either the friendly or rebellious native groups as we did with Aracaré's revolt. Nonetheless, we can infer

that the natives in rebellion more than likely greatly outnumbered the “support” from their “native allies”. This is supported by the comments about Guaçani and Atabare “raising the country” “with all their relatives and friends” against the Christians, in addition to knowing that the friendly natives were outnumbered and were losing against the others (even with the help of the Spaniards). Although some natives at this point in the text are called “allies of” the Spaniards, I argue that this term overexaggerates the reality of the relationship between them to the reader, and “friendly to” would be a better suited term. As described before, they were cordial with the Spaniards initially and participated in trade with them, but they also expressed that they were soon to join the revolt once being friendly was no longer advantageous for them. These (un-named) natives could actually have not been opposed to rebelling at all, yet just remained friendly with the Spaniards because they were benefiting from them in that moment. Their willingness to consider joining the rebellion demonstrates that their interaction with the Spaniards was only brought about because of the benefits brought to them by trading. Thus they really shouldn’t be considered as allies.

By now patterns of Cabeza de Vaca’s reaction to these cases of rebellion should be apparent. His first reaction was to call for an inquiry. In this instance the text even indicates that the agreed upon opinion was recorded in writing and signed with everyone’s names, further emphasizing to the reader and in defense of Cabeza de Vaca, that the actions to be taken were decided and agreed upon by all officials including himself. What is different in this case, however, is the seeming willingness to attempt to negotiate peace with Guaçani and Atabare. In the case of Aracaré, Cabeza de Vaca only had acts of accusation drawn up against him and didn’t make any conciliatory offerings. This time, he and the officials claim to first demand that peace be made, and if not “...war should be waged against them as enemies, *for the defense and protection of the*

friendly natives” (Dominguez et al., 1891, 171; my emphasis). Here again (see Chapter Two) Cabeza de Vaca creates a narrative of the counter-conquest. In this line of text above, we see the same strategic narrative that attempts to justify making war on the natives that revolt by labeling it as being in the defense and protection of the friendly natives which completely avoids acknowledging or mentioning the root cause of the rebellion and once again attempts to portray the Spaniards as the rescuing heroes of friendly natives.

Cabeza de Vaca also commissions Domingo de Irala to go and attempt to quell the uprising, which tells us a lot more about what Cabeza de Vaca’s outlook and intentions truly were in regard to the affair. Looking outside the scenes of native rebellion in the text, we know that Cabeza de Vaca and Irala strongly disagreed on the way Asunción should be governed and we have even seen how Cabeza de Vaca doesn’t sugar coat how Irala mistreats the natives once Cabeza de Vaca is no longer acting as governor². Choosing to send Irala (who was the one to also execute Aracaré) and knowing his behavior towards the natives suggests that Cabeza de Vaca might have preferred to make peace with Guaçani and Atabare, but that he had no problem ending the uprising in non-peaceful ways in the case of resistance. We can infer that what Cabeza de Vaca described proposing to the natives was nothing more than an ultimatum gilded as an offer of peaceful resolution, because he was more than willing to send someone like Domingo de Irala, who would have no problem forcefully pacifying the natives and putting an end to the rebellion.

Luckily for Cabeza de Vaca, Irala, with the help of an abundance of provisions, was able to make peace. What is salient in this resolution is that the text describes Cabeza de Vaca sending

² Towards the end of Chapter Two on pg. 52, I include an example of Domingo de Irala’s treatment of the natives. Chapter four of Tuer’s dissertation “The Transcultural Dynamics of Spanish-Guaraní Relations in the Río de la Plata: 1516-1580” also offers a general overview of the disagreements and issues between Cabeza de Vaca and Irala in relation to the governance and treatment of the natives at Asunción.

an abundance of provisions with the intent to add “all that he could think of to strengthen peace and concord” with the “native allies” (Dominguez et al., 1891, 174-5). Exchange, as I mentioned above and in Chapter Two, is an extremely prevalent act in *Comentarios* that Cabeza de Vaca constantly misinterprets as indicating acceptance and allyship from the natives. I argue that offering provisions was what kept the friendly natives from joining the revolt; it is also a priority in how Cabeza de Vaca responds to hearing of these events. Guaçani and Atabare are described, according to the text, as accepting the conditions of peace Irala presented to them and then going before Cabeza de Vaca to ratify the peace agreement, after which “he gave them presents and dismissed them very happy and contented” (Dominguez et al., 1891, 174). Miraculously, here again, the presence of the governor can pacify everyone, even leaders of a rebellion who killed fellow natives that refused to join in rebellion with them. While the presentation of gifts might temporarily pause the natives’ rebellion as in the first example with the Agazes, it never serves as a long-term solution.

Conclusion

While in this chapter I have discussed a few points in the text where we see examples of resistance from the natives, the entire text of *Comentarios* is constructed to give the reader the impression that Cabeza de Vaca and his party were there on peaceful, conflict-free terms. References to making peace are mentioned more than eighty-two times in the short one-hundred-and-sixty-page text. Looking at the breaks present in the overall peaceful narrative of *Comentarios* we can see distorted examples full of omissions. However, there is enough there to demonstrate that Cabeza de Vaca might not have been as peaceful as previously thought (Docter, 2008; Adorno, 1991). Rabasa summarizes what I have demonstrated in this chapter when he says that “Cabeza de Vaca’s record in the Río de la Plata leads us either to question the sincerity of

his conversion to a “peaceful conquistador” in the *Naufragios* or to speculate that he returned to his old *Naufragios* conquistador ways—in either case, a very superficial conversion to peaceful colonization, if there was any” (Rabasa, 2000, 69).

One interesting and revealing challenge presented during the analysis of these cases of resistance was physically tracing Cabeza de Vaca’s physical location over the course of the narrative. Uprisings and revolts occurred at the settlement when he was not present, but also all around Asunción, again in his absence. Just like with the case of sexual relations I mentioned earlier, the topic of native resistance is only entertained as long as it doesn’t revolve around Cabeza de Vaca. Cabeza de Vaca seemingly manages to be omnipresent and yet nowhere to be found physically in the text when rebellions arise. This pattern should make us very doubtful that he never experienced any expressions of resistance. The text often describes that in his presence peace and concord are always achieved.

Another misleading representation that was carefully crafted in the text was the downplaying of the revolts and the representation of a divided native population. As I have just described, uprisings occurred everywhere the Spaniards were and went. Although Cabeza de Vaca would like us to believe that only specific actors or small groups were at the heart of these cases of resistance, we see in *Comentarios* that is not the case. Resistance was widespread and not just local and isolated. Furthermore, it’s easy to portray a divided native nation calling some natives “allies” and others “enemies”. However, as I have argued, these proclaimed allies never were true allies, but only acted friendly out of self-interest in receiving payment for their goods from the Spaniards.

Aside from demystifying our peaceful hero, the second intention of this chapter was to rebalance the power dynamic and return agency and voice to the natives. In *Naufragios*, Cabeza

de Vaca is credited almost independently for surviving the journey from Florida to Mexico. This was by no means a small feat. However, crediting him alone with having a specific plan along with the knowledge of how to execute his return is misleading. Cabeza de Vaca was wise, and canny, but undoubtedly was also very lucky. He could not have survived or become a shaman of such prestige without the help from the natives. Not only could we see how the natives physically and socially ushered him throughout the entire journey but we can also see how they were not oblivious to what was going on. I have demonstrated that they have agency in the text and can be seen directly involving themselves in the creation and parading of this foreign shaman with the intent to benefit from him. On a basic level, in both texts the natives are also the ones who keep the Spaniards alive; without them there would be no Cabeza de Vaca to write about. The Spaniards' reliance on the natives was something that the natives were aware of and we see them exercise control over it and manipulate it in the text, for example, when Guaçani and Atabare close the roads so no more provisions could be brought to the Spaniards in *Comentarios*, and when they threaten to take provisions away from Cabeza de Vaca at the beginning of *Naufragios*.

Central to the discussion in this chapter was a reexamination and criticism of the uncritical acceptance of this favorable reading and interpretation of Cabeza de Vaca. Because there has been a lack of attention in the literature to indigenous resistance and agency in the text, readers too easily accept Cabeza de Vaca at his own word, and champion him as a saint of the conquest. In this way they end up reproducing and contributing to the colonial myth themselves (Rabasa, 2000). In this chapter I have shown that there was native resistance to Cabeza de Vaca and that its resolution wasn't completely peaceful. I have shown that in the text lie misrepresentations and characterizations of the natives as being oblivious and unaware people

who blindly believe the words of Cabeza de Vaca. In analyzing the text for native agency and voice we can return power and control back to the natives by reading them as smart people in control of their own actions and, at some points, in control of the Spaniards.

CONCLUSION

To many, Cabeza de Vaca and the narrative of his journeys in the Americas represent unparalleled adventures and positive representations of a conqueror's peaceful potential. He is championed in Texas as a historical pioneer for being the first European to explore the southwest and is highly regarded in Spain as a spiritual and pacific leader; the majority of the academic literature surrounding him also supports this narrative. The intention of this thesis has been to analyze *Naufraios* in conjunction with his lesser studied work, *Comentarios*, in order to offer a new and holistic perspective of the texts to add to the literature on Cabeza de Vaca.

The first chapter of this thesis tackles the issue of scholars imposing a hybrid identity onto Cabeza de Vaca during his first expedition. Many argue that his lived experience with the natives changed him and thus altered his identity to a point where he no longer perceived himself as a Spaniard conqueror and ceased to behave as one. What I have shown in the first chapter is that these readings of Cabeza de Vaca and his narrative are founded on misrepresentations and fail to accurately isolate and take into consideration Cabeza de Vaca's motivations of conquest. Dominating archetypal representations of a conqueror contribute to defining public and scholarly perceptions of what a "true" conqueror is, and this perception unfortunately contributes to the way in which Cabeza de Vaca's unique intentions and motivations are understood in both narratives. This, in combination with the captivating literary narrative from Cabeza de Vaca, has led many readers and critics to conceive his identity as pacific and even saintly.

Although thoroughly exploring the identity of Cabeza de Vaca would require much more than the single chapter provided in this thesis, reading him separate from comparisons of other archetypal conquerors allows us to receive different interpretations of him from the text. Misreading of his benevolent self-portrayal as sympathy for the natives can be resolved by

looking more closely at the text and understanding his mercantilist perspective. This mercantilist perspective further explains his prioritization of the viability of the expeditions and productive settlements, as well as his resistance to reckless force and violence. Through this lens we can see how Cabeza de Vaca's priority was never the forceful violent enslavement of natives and acquisition of their riches and land. His mercantilist outlook is also a characteristic that is consistently present throughout both *Naufragios* and *Comentarios*, which further refutes the claims that his first experience in the Americas with the natives somehow changed him.

A notable difference between *Naufragios* and *Comentarios*, however, is the frequency of religious rhetoric. Cabeza de Vaca was famous for his magical healing episodes and his religious allusions and references related in *Naufragios*; hence many scholars associate his seemingly strong religious beliefs as a reason for his pacific treatment of the natives. However, the stark absence of religious reference and mentions of healing episodes in *Comentarios* highlights his exploitation of religion as merely a tool for his escape in *Naufragios* and calls into question the widely accepted understanding of the role of his Christianity in his identity and in the text.

Although Cabeza de Vaca lived amongst natives for several years, his narrative shows a consistent resistance to relinquish his imperialist agenda and Spanish superiority. This suggests that, despite his intimate contact with and understanding the natives, he never considered disavowing his Spanish identity much less considered himself as a hybrid Spanish-Indian.

Chapter Two looks at and analyzes the discourse and narrative in both *Naufragios* and *Comentarios*, concentrating on narratives in the text that work to circumvent colonialist guilt and write colonial domination in a passive form. Applying the concepts behind Mary Louise Pratt's anti-conquest, this chapter explores the ways in which Cabeza de Vaca writes himself out of being responsible for acting as an agent of colonization and colonialism, and thus establishes his

innocence while at the same time legitimizing the conquest. Building upon Pratt's concept of the anti-conquest, Chapter Two highlights narrative in both *Comentarios* and *Naufragios* that centers on a relationship through which, according to Cabeza de Vaca, only the natives benefit from the Spaniards presence.

Whereas reciprocity is the dynamic upon which Pratt's anti-conquest is centered, what I establish as the "counter-conquest" is centered upon the dynamic of commensalism. In this context, commensalism is the interaction and relationship between two parties in which only one of the parties benefit, while the other neither benefits or suffers from the interaction or exchange. The counter-conquest then lies "beyond" and is an extreme of the anti-conquest in that it presents a relationship in which the "innocent" European's presence is no longer merely justified with the natives because of a mutually beneficial and reciprocal relationship. Instead, the counter-conquest presents a relationship where the natives exploit, take advantage of, and are dependent on the European's presence. It is through this narrative that the European is able to justify their presence. Both concepts share the same intent and purpose: allowing the protagonist to rewrite the colonial process in a way that allows them to secure their innocence, justify their presence and avoid guilt as they impose their colonial mission. However, the representations through which the anti-conquest and counter-conquest achieve this narrative are what distinguish them. This construct of the counter-conquest enables us to find representations in the text where Cabeza de Vaca goes beyond seeking to establish his innocence and instead portrays himself as someone who is used and taken advantage of by the natives.

This strategic narrative also serves as a way for Cabeza de Vaca to redeem himself and be seen as a romanticized version of a conqueror, in contrast with the infamously violent reputation of the sixteenth century conqueror. It does so by highlighting his two failed attempts at conquest

as based in his fair and just treatment of the natives. Combing through these narratives we further see that these strategic representations and attempts to avoid the harsh rhetoric of the conquest only appear to be used when the text is centered on Cabeza de Vaca. When describing the acts of other members in the expedition, however, the text reverts to traditional imperial rhetoric of the conquest. This allows Cabeza de Vaca to separate himself from the common perception of conquerors at this time, so that he could further secure his image as a benevolent actor in the eyes of the reader.

Having shown that both texts from Cabeza de Vaca are self-serving, the third chapter of this thesis is a reexamination and criticism of the acceptance of this favorable and pacific reading of Cabeza de Vaca by scholars. Because there has been a lack of attention to indigenous resistance and agency in the texts, readers accept Cabeza de Vaca's self-portrayal and champion him as something of a saint of conquest. In this way, they ultimately end up reproducing and contributing to the colonial myth. Focusing on native resistance and agency requires us to look at the parts of the text, which are unfavorable to Cabeza de Vaca. Very few studies thus far have examined the native perspective. This approach allows us to clarify and rebalance the discussion around Cabeza de Vaca, and to return power and agency to the natives in the text.

Cabeza de Vaca writes himself as someone who has supernatural powers in *Naufragios*; some academics (Hickerson 1998) appear to actually believe him and ultimately attribute to him abilities or knowledge that he didn't have. Because of this, a great deal of credit is given to Cabeza de Vaca for his ability to gain ascendancy over the natives and eventually escape back to Spain. While surviving, let alone returning back to Spain, was a great feat, Cabeza de Vaca alone was not responsible for his outcome. Not only was he enslaved for the majority of the journey, but he also relied heavily on the natives not just for his basic survival needs but for their

geographical and cultural knowledge as well. Unintentionally, Cabeza de Vaca happened to stumble upon healing acts, which he initially refused to participate in, as a way to build relations with the natives. Only with the addition of the magical gourds and the glorification of the Spaniards on behalf of the natives did Cabeza de Vaca become the magnificent Cabeza de Vaca he describes in the text. In fact, it is with the help, consent, and contribution from the natives that he was able to make his way back to Spain, rather than because of any supreme intelligence or abilities as others have argued. By giving Cabeza de Vaca all the credit for becoming a shaman with such great prestige we miss out on interpretations that show us that he wasn't as perceptive and intentional as previously thought. This forces us to re-examine how much agency he had in his own journey and how much agency the natives had in determining his fate.

Cabeza de Vaca takes great pains to conceal instances of native pushback by encasing them with his anti- and counter-conquest narrative; however, he isn't able to occlude them completely all the time. The second half of the third chapter discusses and analyzes the instances in *Comentarios* where native resistance to colonization is present. Although native resistance is not discussed much at all in the literature on Cabeza de Vaca, this chapter exposes that there was in fact native resistance, and that the resolution wasn't always completely peaceful. Isolating the instances of resistance also reveal a Cabeza de Vaca that is seemingly omnipresent and yet physically nowhere at the same time. In the text it always states that in his presence peace and concord are achieved; however, he is physically absent in the text when resistance and rebellions arise. Considering the strategic nature of the text we can infer that he also experienced resistance from natives firsthand and chose to omit these instances from the text.

Cabeza de Vaca presents two extremely interesting works that have been positively received by scholars. However, from this alternate reading we can begin to demystify the hero

we want Cabeza de Vaca to be and diminish the fantasy of his journey. Cabeza de Vaca was not a peaceful and innocent actor of conquest who was transformed through a deep understanding of the natives, but instead a uniquely motivated actor in the conquest and a strategic writer who knew how to captivate and turn an audience.

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