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Becoming Indian: The Origins of Indigeneity Among Chicana/os In Texas

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BECOMING INDIAN
THE ORIGINS OF INDIGENEITY AMONG CHICANA/OS IN TEXAS

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BECOMING INDIAN
THE ORIGINS OF INDIGENEITY AMONG CHICANA/OS IN TEXAS

A Dissertation Presented to the Graduate Faculty of
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To my dear friends, thank you for being there for me over the years and for the wonderful times we spent together. There are still more good times to be had.

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Ann and the Clements Center for all the support they gave me throughout my graduate studies; without them, my research would be incomplete. To Sharron and Mildred who were always happy to assist whenever I walked into the office, thank you. To my committee—Professors Smith, Countryman, Flores, and Chavez, thank you for all of your guidance and sage words.

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This study explores the idea of Mexican-American indigenous identity, or indigeneity. I argue that modern Mexican-American indigeneity progressed from the Chicana/o movement’s notion of belonging as a primordial people of Aztlan to the full-fledged embrace of Native American identity. This idea of being indigenous is traced to the colonial writers and thinkers, *criollo* patriots, *mestizo* nationalists, and the indigenists intellectuals of twentieth-century Mexico. The evolution of ethnic Mexican indigeneity culminated with cultural extremists in the first half of the last century who assumed a neo-Aztec identity. They in turn gave way to the neo-Mexika identity that emerged in the second half of the twentieth-century in conjunction with the Mexikayotl ideology—“the essence of being Mexican.” Mexikayotl merged with a traditional dance form called *danza azteca-chichimeca* and made its way to the United States during the Chicano movement where it took root among culturally sensitive Mexican Americans. Chicanas and Chicanos embraced indigenous identities, such as Mexika and Coahuiltecan, and rejected the Latino and Hispanic homogenizing identities. In effect, this work is an intellectual history of the introduction, progression, and evolution of Indian identity among Chicana/os in Texas.
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This is dedicated to my family and all my relations.
INTRODUCTION

If you were to ask Mexicans who identify as indigenous people where their identity originates, a common response would likely be that they have always somehow known it either from family history, a historical understanding of their ancestral Indian heritage, or their appearance. Those sentiments reflect the pervasive idea among some Mexicans that they are in fact indigenous. However, while an overwhelming majority of ethnic Mexicans have indigenous ancestry, most do not consider themselves Indian. So, where does the idea arise among some Mexicans and Chicana/os that they are direct descendants of *mexicas* (Aztecs)? In this investigation framed around the idea that Chicana/os are “Indian” people, I argue that the rise of indigeneity among ethnic Mexicans in the United States is tied to the Chicano movement’s openness in accepting Indianness and rejecting the previous generation’s affinity for whiteness. By assuming an Indian identity, cultural Chicana/o activists signaled their receptivity to other ways of viewing themselves counter to the socio-cultural and religious paradigm of the other members of their ethnic group.

On the surface, this does not seem like a novel argument, for it has long been common knowledge among Chicana/os that the movement gave rise to Indian consciousness in varying degrees. But to my knowledge, there has been no deep historical analysis of Chicana/o indigeneity. Where does this affinity for things Aztec, and to a lesser degree—Maya, come from? While sociological and psychological explanations could address this point, those would
still fail to historicize this phenomenon. A handful of anthropological studies have emerged in recent years dealing with Aztec dance, but they are highly subjective and justificatory. This dissertation is in conversation with those studies and attempts to offer a more critical view of Chicana/o indigenism. This work elucidates the deep history of Mexican indigenism, how it influenced Chicana/os during the civil rights movement, and how it has thrived over the years. In my estimation, Chicana/o indigeneity became the natural progression and successor of the movement’s cultural nationalism, an important topic that Chicana/o scholars abandoned many years ago. A major reason for this shift in focus was the result of coalition building with other “Hispanics” in order to gain political advantage as members of a larger constituency with whom they did not necessarily share a similar ancestry. For political leaders and business interests, a shared Spanish colonial heritage and language justified their push for the umbrella label.

The debate about what ethnic Mexicans should call themselves is as old as the emergence of the people themselves. The present study offers one perspective of that debate, that of indigenous identity. In regards to the Hispanic label relative to Chicana/os, this trend is traceable to the late seventies during the decline of the Chicano movement. Some scholars call this period in ethnic Mexican history when radical positions were largely abandoned in favor of centrist politics the “Hispanic Generation.”¹ This was a period when advertising targeting the “Hispanic market” increased significantly. Companies developed special products specifically directed at this newly created consumer group with items such as Mattel’s “Hispanic Barbie Doll” and the Coors beer company’s “Decade of the Hispanic” campaign. Adding weight to the term, government agencies began using the label in 1980. Of these, the Bureau of the Census was particularly responsible for the terms acceptance, mainly because Mexican-American policy groups advocated for it. These groups argued that by using a more inclusive label would solve
the issue of census undercounting a decade earlier in 1970. This and other factors played a role in the rise of the term Hispanic and the decline of Chicana and Chicano.

Figure 1: MES Flyer, ca. 1998, Author’s Collection.

Not all Mexican Americans readily accepted the shift in ethnic labeling, especially since it was glaringly obvious that “Hispanic” minimized indigenous ancestry. These Chicanas and Chicanos (Chicana/os) were not necessarily interested or deeply involved in Native revitalization, but it is safe to say that those who were rejected the term outright. The author’s first encounter with this radical position was through leaflets, flyers, and brochures that were
distributing Aztec dancers in Dallas who also explained that they identified as “Mexikah.” A prevailing motto found in most of that literature read: “We are not Hispanic! We are not Latino! We are Native people!” (see Figure 1). A variant of the phrase read: “Tehuatzin ti Mexikat! You are Mexican! Not Hispanic! Not Latino!” The literature was the work of husband and wife team Michelle “Ilwixochitl” Melendez and Kurly Tlapoyawa who, together, founded the Mexika Eagle Society (MES). The MES was dedicated to “preserving the culture, language, and traditions of Mexicans and promoting self-determination.”

Melendez and Tlapoyawa were originally from New Mexico, but lived in Fort Worth in the late nineties where Melendez worked for the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. On several occasions she managed to get some of Tlapoyawa’s “Mexika” commentary published in the paper. Both of them came from families who had been active in the Chicano movement in New Mexico. That background influenced their involvement in Chicano activism when the movement made a brief resurgence in the early nineties. After being introduced to Aztec dancing and the Mexika identity, Tlapoyawa melded classic Chicano critique with his newfound ideology. For instance, in a commentary published in the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* entitled, “Do ‘Hispanics’ Know Who They Are?,” Tlapoyawa’s opening line read: “Hispanic Heritage Month is a celebration of ignorance.” Although, his strong opinions were not representative of the movement that some scholars describe as neo-Aztecism and neo-Indianism, they reflected a general attitude shared by many involved in the resurgence of Chicana/o nationalism.

A key component of this resurgent Chicana/o nationalism is a highly ritualized folkloric dance known as the “*danza Azteca-Chichimeca*.” Through the “*danza*” (as dancers simply call it) most Chicana/os have found their indigeneity. Aztec dancing exists throughout the U.S. Southwest, and has made its way across the country to places like Chicago, Minneapolis, and
even New York City. It has become so ubiquitous that you are likely to find some iteration of 
danza wherever a large community of ethnic Mexicans exists. That said, ethnic Mexicans have 
explored their indigenous identity in other ways. The dancing opens to other ways of expressing 
indigeneity, such as temazcallis (sweat-lodges), “medicine meetings” (ceremonial use of peyote), 
and even Lakota-style Sundance rituals. Those familiar with Native spirituality will notice the 
obvious culling of traditions from various peoples. This process occurred early resulting from 
transnational, inter-tribal, cultural borrowing.

Another factor motivating this study is the ever-present issue of identity and the politics 
associated with it. Identity politics has played a major role throughout Chicana/o scholarship 
and has resulted in the production of countless texts exploring what it means to be Chicana/o, 
Mexican American, Latina/o, Hispanic, mestizo, and many others. Of these labels, the mestizo 
label, applied in ideological form, serves as the framework from which all other identities are 
built. This mestizo ideology, whose roots lie in the nineteenth-century, was popularized by 
Mexican Indigenist scholars Jose Vasconcelos and Manuel Gamio in the early twentieth-century. 
The ideology has dominated much of the cultural scholarship about Mexico on both sides of the 
U.S.-Mexico border.

The mestizo framework has also driven most of the Chicana/o discourse from the 1970s 
to the present. And although there have always been a handful of voices within the Chicana/o 
community advocating for an indigenous analysis of identity, they have been drowned out by 
those in favor of the politically expedient Hispanic and Latina/o labels. Tellingly, outside of 
academia, the number of Mexican Americans who still call themselves Chicanos and Chicanas—
a term that etymologically and ideologically implies indigeneity—has drastically declined over 
the years. In contrast, among a certain subset of culturally sensitive Chicana/os, the term mexica,
or rather “Mexika” (pl. Mexikah), has emerged as the preferred label of identity. These Mexikah feel like they have made the logically natural step of identifying with the group that epitomizes the quintessential representation of Mexican identity—one whose modern context has some very interesting roots.

The Mexika identity in question was popularized by ethnocentrists and cultural nationalists in Mexico in the mid twentieth-century. The identity eventually made its way north to the U.S. Southwest, a place that, like their Chicana/o predecessors, Mexikas still call Aztlan. And, although, Mexika is the identity of choice among Chicana/o indigenists, it is not the only one used to express Native identity. For instance, since the late 1970s, a growing number of Chicana/os have gravitated towards Native identities that are indigenous to the historical territory once called Coahuila Y Texas. Basing their identity on family ties and historical nexus, some Tejanos trace their heritage to Texas Mission Indians, such as the Coahuiltecans and Apaches.

This study touches on the interaction and intersection between these various strains of indigenous expression among ethnic Mexicans, and places special attention on the way these identities—the Coahuiltecans and Mexika—have evolved in Texas. Despite their connection to historical peoples, these are unequivocally modern identities which only make sense when placed in context. Thus, this study exposes the deeper history of indigenism and Indian identity in ethnic Mexican culture by surveying the development of indigenismo in Mexican thought—beginning with the colonial era up to the postrevolutionary period. It also explores the influence of indigenismo on the identity politics of ethnic Mexicans in general, and the trends that gave rise to indigeneity among Chicana/os in the late twentieth-century. Thus, by tracing the history of Mexican indigenismo and Chicana/o Indianness, I argue that modern ethnic Mexican indigeneity is a natural progression from the Chicana/o movement’s notion of belonging as a
primordial people of Aztlan to the full-fledged embrace of Native American identity pitted against the Eurocentric policies of exclusion and alienation.

**A Note on Analysis**

There is a caveat that necessitates explanation. During the course of the investigation, I discovered that the motives and actions of certain actors who were instrumental in the development of modern ethnic Mexican indigeneity were highly problematic. This will become clear in the discussion of the indigenist strains that emerged in the twentieth-century. Intentional or not, some of their actions can be construed as charlatanry and might even call into question the premise of the study. Therefore, it is useful to keep in mind a few points moving forward.

First and foremost, this study does not postulate nor validate claims of unbroken cultural continuity among the ethnic identities in focus, the Coahuiltecans and Mexikah. There are clear breaks in time from the pre-invasion era to the modern period. And secondly, this study addresses the topic in a longue durée inspired analytical approach similar to that of the “long civil rights movement” proposed by historian Jacquelyn Down Hall. Hall traces the origin of African American civil rights back to periods much earlier than those promoted in the dominant narrative which usually begin with *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954.

In a similar fashion, this study tracks the evolution of American (in the hemispheric sense) indigeneity back to the intellectuals who first proposed it, the Spanish writers and thinkers of the colonial period. This means that *criollos*—Spaniards who were born in Mexico and who later came to view themselves as inheritors of the Aztec empire—are part of the overall conversation. Conversely, officially recognized indigenous peoples and communities are not the center of the discussion here. That is because the focus of this study rests mainly on the groups
and individuals who either sought an idealized Aztec/Mexika identity or one that was based on Texas Mission Indians, such as the Coahuiltecs.

**A Note on Terms**

_Ethnic Mexican_

As used here, “ethnic Mexican” follows the widely accepted definition developed by Chicano historian David G. Gutiérrez who traces its origin to the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo after the U.S.-Mexico War (1846-48). In his historical analysis, Gutiérrez describes the first generation of Mexican Americans within the borders of the post-war United States as representing “a primordial ethnic group by virtue of the fact that, at the stroke of a pen, they had instantaneously been rendered an ethnic minority of a much larger society.” This idea of a Mexican-American primordial condition, or indigeneity—if you will, is not original to Gutiérrez, it figured prominently in the seminal works about Mexican Americans in the Southwest. Gutiérrez, however, was the first to elaborate on the idea of a collective Mexican-American ethnicity that included those born on U.S. soil as well as Mexican immigrants regardless of legal status. To be clear, “ethnic Mexican,” as used in Chicana/o scholarship, sometimes includes all Mexicans when speaking in general of Greater Mexico. For the purposes of this study, it will be limited mainly to persons residing within the borders of the United States (U.S.). For simplicity and clarity, when referring to Mexicans who are not U.S. residents or citizens, the term Mexicana or Mexicano will be used.

As Gutiérrez rightfully explains, the reason why “ethnic Mexican” works as a collective label is largely due to the fact that “Mexican Americans increasingly became a situational or circumstantial ethnic group as a result of the persistent racism and discrimination they
Although most of the native inhabitants of the ceded territories by Mexico eventually became U.S. citizens after the signing of the treaty, they continued to remain simply “Mexicans” in the eyes of others. This led to a circular pattern of racism and discrimination, but also to a proudly reinforced self-conscious identification as a distinct group—Mexicanos. Additionally, the continued influx of immigrants from Mexico, especially in the twentieth-century, contributed to the “distinctiveness” of ethnic Mexicans through the constant reinforcement of “Mexican cultural practices and the use of the Spanish language in existing Mexican American communities.” Despite objections by some indigene-centric Chicanas/os who scoff at being called Mexican because they assume that their projected indigeneity shields them from being categorized as ethnic Mexicans, the reality is that others, including Native Americans, continue to view them simply as Mexicans. Therefore, unless otherwise noted, the term “ethnic Mexican” will also include those individuals among the Chicana/o community who perceive themselves as simply indigenous or Native American.

Indigeneity

The origin of the term “indigeneity” itself is very difficult to trace. It is not found in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), but the U.S. version of the OED defines “indigeneity” simply as the noun version of the adjective “indigenous,” and it is defined as: “Originating or occurring naturally in a particular place; native.” Moreover, the term indigenous is actually a variant of the much older French term dating to the sixteenth-century, “indigene,” which basically means “native” (adjective) and “a native” (noun). Hence, the term “indigen-centric” that is used throughout this study basically means “native-centric.”
In the modern context, the term indigeneity is strongly associated with a study on indigenous peoples conducted by the United Nations (UN). In 1971, Jose R. Martinez Cobo was appointed as the first Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities by the UN. His job was to research the plight of minority and indigenous people worldwide, and his efforts led to the production of a special report entitled, “Study on the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations.” Commonly known as the “Martínez Cobo Study,” this was the UN’s first major step in the incorporation of indigenous rights to their international charter. The report has been useful for both indigenous peoples and nation-states in addressing and resolving issues, and scholars have used it as a cornerstone in the study of indigeneity and the emergent analytical framework of decolonization. As important as the Martínez Cobo Study was (and continues to be), it is necessary to note that the term “indigeneity” itself does not appear in it at all, only the word “indigenous.” Although not definitively defined anywhere, indigeneity—the term and concept—is strictly an academic construct that is now used to vaguely describe indigenous identity and or the people themselves.

In fact, most of the scholarship related to the term deals with it in a very matter-of-fact way. Trying to find two scholars who define the term exactly the same proved extremely difficult. Making it even more troublesome, the term’s descriptive parameters are routinely massaged and tweaked to accommodate pet arguments and theories. Professor of Law, Jeremy Waldron, nicely expresses the difficulty that the term presents:

You won’t find [indigeneity] in the Oxford English Dictionary … Like its near-synonym “aboriginality,” the word “indigeneity” forms an abstract noun from a term we use to apply to certain peoples living in the world. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “aboriginality” as “The quality of being aboriginal; existence in or possession of a land at
the earliest stage of its history.” In a similar way, “indigeneity” is derived from “indigenous,” which means “Born or produced naturally in a land or region; native or belonging naturally to (the soil, region, etc)” from indu, an old Latin root meaning “within” (like the Greek endon) and gignere, meaning “to beget.”18

Interpreting Waldron’s description, the term indigeneity can be defined as “the quality of being indigenous” which itself describes the quality of being born or produced naturally in a land or region. It is also necessary to keep in mind that the terms “indigenous” and “indigeneity” should not be confused with another much older term, “Indianness” which is defined as: “The fact, quality, or state of being American Indian.”19 It should be apparent why the former are not completely synonymous with the latter. “Indigeneity” clearly is applicable to any indigenous group of people around the world, while “Indianness” obviously refers strictly to indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere.20

Waldron looks at indigeneity from the perspective of New Zealand/Aotearoa and the Maori people as it pertains to multiculturalism, land rights, and the significance of calling anyone—group or individual—indigenous. Although Waldron admits that he is not interested in the term’s etymology, only its “abstract concept,” he is representative of the majority of scholars who have touched on the subject, virtually all of whom have avoided defining the concept of indigeneity in a concrete and definitive way. Thus, in keeping with the trend, the term “indigeneity” will be subjectively defined in this study as: the state, quality, or condition inherent to a people, or individual, that exemplifies their position as original inhabitants born, or produced naturally, in a given land or region, including their descendants and relations. Or put another way, “indigeneity” will be used here as shorthand for “indigenous identity.”21

It is also necessary to distinguish between the two almost identical terms, “indigenism” and “indigeneity.” As noted above, indigeneity basically refers to indigenous identity which is
effectively linked to the quality or condition of an individual’s primordial state as an autochthonous person. In simple terms, indigeneity refers to someone’s identity as a Native person and is not confined to only the Americas—it applies to any Native person around the world. Indigenism, like its related term, is equally difficult to define precisely. The term can refer to various ideologies associated with indigenous peoples. Scholars and activists use it for purely descriptive reasons or employ it to convey political connotations. For instance, indigenism may refer to the intersection of complex issues affecting indigenous peoples globally as well as those that deal with universal human rights laws and principles. In this context, Native activists use human rights as an instrument of resistance against individual states who threaten political, cultural, and economic incursion.

The term’s Spanish counterpart, “indigenismo”—as used by the Mexican intellectuals who developed it, simply referred to the problematic assimilationist policies of the state that sought the eventual disappearance of living indigenous cultures. This would occur as Indians joined the national culture while their indigeneity slowly disappeared. The ideology also promoted liberal and enlightenment values over those deemed backward and retrograde, such as traditional indigenous customs and culture. In an effort to redeem the term, some Chicana/o scholars define the indigenismo as “the emphasis on positive values associated with Indian cultures.”22 This idea is discussed further below.

To be clear, the term indigenism, as it is used in this study, refers to the set of ideas that promote an indigenous worldview. This worldview can be construed both positively and negatively depending on the actors involved and the agendas they have set forth. Similarly, the term “indigenist” used here refers to anyone who advocates for indigenism regardless of the persuasion of their particular positive or negative stance. The important thing to understand is
that Chicana/o indigeneity specifically refers to the recognition of Indian identity by individuals in that ethnic group. Even though it is a biological fact that most ethnic Mexicans are predominantly indigenous, the reality is that most do not see themselves as Native people.

Interestingly, as far back as the sixties, historian Jack D. Forbes—Native American scholar of Powhatan-Renapé and Lenape descent—acknowledged that Chicana/os have 70 to 80 percent indigenous ancestry. Supporting his assessment, genetic studies conducted within the last ten years have demonstrated that indeed ethnic Mexicans have an overwhelming amount of Native American DNA. Driving the point home, one of the studies focused solely on “mestizos” and concluded that: “Amerindian haplotypes predominated in the sample with a proportion of 93.3%, followed by European (6.0%) and African haplotypes (0.7%).” In other words, the average Mexicano is overwhelmingly biologically indigenous.

**Mexika and Mexikayotl**

The term “Mexikayotl” is a spelling variant derived from Crónica mexicáyotl (1598), an invaluable late sixteenth-century book by Fernando Alvarado Tezozómoc that documents the history of the Mexica-Tenochca people. According to one of the earliest comprehensive Nahuatl dictionaries, Diccionario de la lengua nahuatl o Mexicana (1885), by Rémi Siméon, the term mexicáyotl basically means: “Things relative to Mexico, the state of Mexico, the Mexican nobility, etc.” In its modern context among Mexican indigenists who call themselves Mexika, the term has come to mean mexicanidad: the quality or characteristic of being Mexican, also known as Mexicanness or Mexicanity. Scholars from Mexico have collectively labeled the groups who have emerged from this indigenist ideology “el movimiento de la mexicanidad,” and in that strain, the phrase “Mexikayotl movement” (MM) serves the same purpose here.
The term Mexika—variously spelled Mexikah, Mexica, and Mexihca—is the plural form of “Mexikatl” which is Nahuatl for “a Mexican person.” It has become the default identity of indigenists who follow the modern Mexikayotl tradition or belong to Aztec dance groups. Although “Mexikah” (with an “h”) is the proper Nahuatl plural form, the Hispanicized “Mexikas” (with an “s”) is more commonly used and will also be used in this study. The term itself is derived from the name of the main ethnic group of the Aztec alliance, the Mexica, and the names of the Federal District and the country of Mexico get their name from it as well. For some indigenists, the term Mexika is used as an umbrella term that describes all Mexican tribal groups, or as Tlapoyawa explains: “Mexikah is simply a way of saying “Mexican Indian” in Nawatl.” Further still, among the more purist adherents, the term is applied only to those who are actively engaged or immersed in Mexikayotl. There is a lot of variance in its usage and should be viewed through a spectrum that includes social, cultural, and political motivations.

Neo-Aztec and Neo-Mexika

The term “neo-Aztec” and its derivatives, “neo-Aztecism” and “neo-Aztecs,” have various interpretations depending on the focus of the subject, but in general they refer to post-invasion cultural sensibilities of Mexico’s Aztec past. In particular, the term usually refers to an affinity towards things pertaining to a romanticized version of Aztec society and culture. The earliest manifestations of this phenomenon date to the end of the sixteenth-century when criollos began admiring the grandeur of a civilization that their forbearers destroyed just a few generations earlier. One of the earliest scholars to address this cultural phenomenon was the Mexican historian Edmundo O’Gorman. Drawing from O’Gorman, American historian John Leddy Phelan introduced the subject to the English-speaking audience, noting that “Creoles …
gradually adopted the Aztec world of pre-conquest times as the ‘classical antiquity’ of Mexico.”\textsuperscript{30} In recent scholarship, the term has been applied to ethnic Mexicans who have an Aztec, or “neo-Mexika,” view of themselves.

The term “neo-Mexika” is my variant of the original, “neo-Mexica,” that first came into usage in the early 2000s in online forums and discussion boards.\textsuperscript{31} In these public message boards, ethnic Mexicans that were critical of Chicana/os calling themselves Mexica (Mexika) began to use it pejoratively against them for adopting an indigenous identity that has been defunct since the conquest. Scholars looking into this trend started using it without clearly defining it; in some cases using it to refer to “danzantes” (Aztec dancers) and in others to describe Mexikas as historical “revisionists.” Neither of those two uses captures the whole picture. As it will be used here, neo-Mexika will refer to those individuals who advocated for and actively worked toward restoring Mexico to its ancient indigenous glory.

Methodology

First and foremost, this is an intellectual history of ethnic Mexican indigeneity with a special focus on Texas. A few scholars have approached the subject through the lens of Benedict Anderson’s “imagined community,” although useful, does not figure prominently in this study. After careful analysis, it appears that modern Mexican indigeneity is historically tied to “criollo” nationalism. Therefore, David A. Brading’s groundbreaking work on the subject informs the context of this dissertation.\textsuperscript{32} His insight into the origin of Mexican nationalism is crucial in discussing the evolution of Mexican indigenism and the various forms it took on its way to the twentieth-century. Brading argues that the origins of Mexican nationalism can be traced to
Spanish “Creole patriotism” which, through the invocation of myths and the exaltation of insurgent heroes, initiated the tradition of *indigenismo*.

This study is also heavily influenced by the work of Forbes—possibly the first scholar to associate Chicana/os with indigeneity, as well as the work of historian John R. Chávez who was one of the first Chicano scholars to seriously entertain the notion of ethnic Mexican indigeneity. More recently, some Chicana/o authors have also recognized the importance of moving beyond the nod towards Indianness one usually finds in the scholarship, to an actual serious exploration of Indian identity in relation to that of the Chicana/o. For instance, Juan Gómez-Quiñones, a prominent Chicano historian, published *Indigenous Quotient/Stalking Words: American Indian Heritage as Future* where he argues in favor of using an indigene-centric analytical framework to counter Western-centric scholarship which often dismisses the experiences of Native people—Chicana/os included.

Gómez-Quiñones’s book is divided into two essays. The first offers a critique of Western historiography and its hegemony over the indigenous people of the Americas. The second essay develops an indigenous based framework of analysis that addresses the issues raised in the first. The second essay also advocates for an ideologically autonomous epistemology that privileges indigenous knowledge. Gómez-Quiñones frames his analysis around the term “Indigenitude,” which he defines as “the quality of being Indigenous,” and “Indigenism,” or the “thoughts and ideas of the pro-Indigenistas of the late twentieth century in both the United States and Mexico who upheld the social welfare and intellectual heritage of the Indigenous as high personal and public values.”

Gómez-Quiñones’s redemption of the term “Indigenism” is similar to the positive example of *indigenismo* cited above. He uses it in reference to the contemporaneous set of ideas
that embody an indigenous worldview that essentially seeks to correct past injustices and wrongdoings by colonial and republican states. Navigating all of these terms can be overwhelming, and Gómez-Quiñones’s acknowledges the problems and limitations that all of these terms—Indian, Native, Amerindian, Primal, and even Indigenous—present to scholars. Fully aware of this dilemma, he provides a working hypothesis that, coupled with the definition of indigeneity I provided above, will help expand my proposed analysis:

Being Indigenous is the conscious experience of Native descent and lived culture historically situated in the Americas; of a historical memory related to awareness of a Native group membership; and of an ethos that recognizes exploitation and discrimination, past, present and future.35

By restricting his definition to a history “situated in the Americas,” Gómez-Quiñones limits the discussion of indigeneity to the Western Hemisphere. Yet, his definition echoes that of scholars looking at indigenous people in other parts of the world, particularly on the consequences of colonization, namely “exploitation and discrimination.”

Above all, Gómez-Quiñones is promoting ethnic Mexican indigeneity while implying internal colonial theory as well. Here, a brief explanation of the theory is useful. Chávez synthesizes the theory thusly: “… internal colonialism seeks to explain the subordinate status of a racial or ethnic group in its own homeland within the boundaries of a larger state dominated by a different people.”36 Early in the development of Chicano scholarship, internal colonial theory underscored much of the work that dealt with ethnic Mexicans. The seminal Chicano text by Rodolfo F. Acuña, *Occupied America : The Chicano’s Struggle Toward Liberation* (1972), is perhaps the best example of this trend.37 In some Chicana/o circles, it is known as the “Chicano Bible.” After a brief popularity in the early seventies, the theory lost favor largely because of
criticism from the academy. This resulted in its eventual abandonment in favor of Marxist and other social theories.

Even though internal colonialism does not figure prominently here, it informs my analysis of Chicana/o indigeneity. On this matter, Chicano sociologist Tomás Almaguer is worth quoting: “Chicanos were the indigenous people of what is today the Southwestern states …”38 That comment by Almaguer is from an article discussing the application of the theory on the ethnic Mexican people of the Southwest. The undeniable connection between race, class, and occupation; the colonization of a geographic space; and its impact on the self-perception of the colonized reveals the relevance of the internal colonial model. Furthermore, any study of ethnic Mexican indigeneity has to contend with the complicated subject of colonizer versus colonized in relation to Mexican Americans. Are they a colonized group, the colonizers themselves, or a combination of both? There are no simple answers, and perhaps this explains why academics have found it easier to reject internal colonialism in favor of other theories that more or less dismiss Chicana/o indigeneity outright.39

As the number of ethnic Mexicans who assert and embrace their indigeneity increases, the dismissiveness of scholars has become even more obvious. For example, a common response from academicians regarding ethnic Mexican claims of indigeneity, specifically in reference to “danzantes” (Aztec dancers) is that they do not qualify because they are simply “mestizos,” and that what they do only amounts to, at best, recovering some aspects of Indian culture or, at worst, simply “playing Indian.”40 Take for example an exchange that occurred at the 2014 “International Latina/o Studies Conference–Imagining Latina/o Studies: Past, Present, Future,” which took place at the Palmer House in Chicago, Illinois. An attendee reported that after asking some of the presenters if they had consulted with local danza circles during their
research, the response from the presenters was dismissive: “they (referring to the danza community) are not considered indigenous or qualify to claim ‘indigeneity’ as an identity because ‘what they are doing is more, only, recovery of some aspects of the culture, not truly indigenous’.\(^{41}\) As a result, academics who deny the validity of ethnic Mexican indigeneity contribute to the negative attitude that permeates the social discourse about the very idea.

In the non-academic sphere, xenophobic critics also call into question ethnic Mexican indigeneity. These people often resort to vitriolic and ad-hominem attacks while ridicule the very idea of ethnic Mexican indigeneity. One of the ways they have done this is by using insulting terminology, such as the word “pretendian.”\(^{42}\) This term originated with Native scholars, such as Vine Deloria Jr. and the controversial Ward Churchill, who used it to criticize the “Hollywood Indian” media stereotype.\(^{43}\) In recent years, xenophobes and racists have also applied such terms to ethnic Mexicans in an attempt to deny them, particularly immigrants, a sense of belonging in the U.S. The fact that Mexican and Chicana/o people assert their Indianness undermines the claims made by racist nativists that they (white people) are the only legitimate inhabitants north of the Rio Grande. Ironically, nativism is not exclusive to Anglos and Americans. The problematic sentiment is also partially responsible for the rise of indigenist discourse in Mexico and, by extension, among cultural nationalist Chicana/os.

Lastly, I would be remiss as a scholar if I did not disclose some facts about my intimate connection to the subject at hand. I am of ethnic Mexican descent, and I grew up with a strong Chicano identity that provoked a profound interest in the history of my indigenous ancestors. As an adult, my curiosity turned into a way of life after meeting and joining a local Aztec dance troupe/cultural community (calpulli) in my hometown.\(^{44}\) It was through this calpulli that I was
exposed not only to *danza*, but also to the *temazcallis*, to the “medicine ceremony,” and to the revisionist pseudo-history promoted in Mexikayotl ideology. In this discourse, inventions and misinformation are projected onto the past without much evidence and are often justified by an authority figure, such as an elder or a leader within the community. Some of these claims include the outright denial of multiple god worship—a proposition that ironically promotes a Western monotheistic approach to indigenous spirituality. Other claims include the denial of human sacrifice and anthropophagy which are dismissed as Spanish fabrications meant to demonize indigenous people and their culture. Also worth noting is the outright invention of words, phrases, and toponyms that are not found in the historical record. All of these issues are addressed in the pages that follow. In sum, this dissertation is an attempt to shed light on the Mexikayotl movement’s emergence, its unconventional ideas, and the way cultural nationalist Chicana/os adopted it in opposition to colonialist and Eurocentric identities.
Strongly recommendation to continue reading...


17 I will not analyze the Martinez Cobo Study here, but those interested in international law as it pertains to indigenous people can follow the link cited above.


20 Ibid. “Indianness” has a secondary definition that refers to people from the Indian subcontinent; “The fact, quality, or state of being Indian.”

21 Besides the lack of a concrete definition in most of the literature regarding “indigeneity,” the term is frequently employed as a synonym for “indigenous identity” without explanation.


25 The authorship of the *Crónica mexicayotl* has long been a source of debate, with some scholars contending that the actual author was Domingo Francisco de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin. For more on this, see Sylvie Peperstraete and Gabriel Kenrick Kruell, “Determining the Authorship of the Crónica Mexicayotl: Two Hypotheses,” *The Americas* 71, no. 2 (October 8, 2014): 315–38.

26 Rémi Siméon, *Diccionario de la lengua nahuatl o mexicana: redactado según los documentos impresos y manuscritos más auténticos y precedido de una introducción*, séptima edición en español (México: Siglo Veintiuno, 1988), 271. Original Spanish: “Lo relativo a Mexico, estado de Mexico, nobleza mexicana, etc.”

27 The “Mexikayotl movement” should not be confused with an existing group from Los Angeles, California that goes by the name the “Mexika Movement.”

28 There are various interpretations about what Mexica means, but the one that many Mexikas adhere to is the following: “In the year Ze Tekpatl (1064 AD) eight Nawatl speaking groups left the area known as Aztlan and migrated south into the valley of Anawak, seeking to establish a new settlement. They were led by a man named Mexihli-Witzilopochtli. During this journey, several groups splintered from the migration and broke off, while those who remained committed to the original goal of the journey adopted the name Mexikah (Meh-Shee-Kah.)
Literally, the term Mexikah is translated as “the people of Mexihtli.” However, in its modern context we view Mexikah as a politically charged, culturally assertive term that we can use to identify ourselves as NATIVE people fighting for indigenous self-determination.” Kurly Tlapoyawa, “FAQ,” Mexika Resistance, accessed June 18, 2014, http://mexikaresistance.com/faq/. For more on this, see Kurly Tlapoyawa, We Will Rise: Rebuilding the Mexikah Nation (Victoria, B.C.: Trafford, 2000), 9–17.

29 Tlapoyawa, We Will Rise, 117.


34 Ibid., 63, 65.


38 Almaguer, “Toward the Study of Chicano Colonialism,” 11.

39 For an insightful explanation on how the internal colonial model was abandoned and an analysis on the merits of the theory, consult Chávez, “Aliens in Their Native Lands.”

The identities of specific scholars who hold these views will not be disclosed here, but the interested reader can follow the cited link and read the comments section of the blog post for more on this issue.

The term is a portmanteau of “pretend” and “Indian” and is used to denote someone who is “a wannabe American Indian.” It is usually reserved for whites and blacks. It is also a colloquialism that exists mainly on the internet. I first came across the term in 2006 on a xenophobic forum in relation to the pro-immigration “Mega Marchas” that occurred in several major U.S. cities – including Dallas, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Some of these marches were headed by danzantes and mexicas. Mal Maleficium, “Pretendian,” Urban Dictionary, accessed October 16, 2014, http://www.urbandictionary.com.


The Nahua term “calpolli” or “calpulli” (pl, calpoltin, calpultin, or calpolti)—also spelled with a “k” as in “kalpulli”—loosely translates to “longhouse” and is used today by danzantes to denote a danza or Mexika community/organization. Siméon defines it as: “Big house, great hall, neighborhood, suburb, village, settlement, district …” Original Spanish: “Casa grande, vasta sala, barrio, suburbia, aldea, poblado, distrito …” Siméon, Diccionario de la lengua nahuatl o mexicana, 62.
Chapter 1
ANTECEDENTS OF INDIGENOUS MEXICAN IDENTITIES, 1492-1810

Introduction

For the origins of indigenous Mexican identities among modern ethnic Mexican people, one must start at the very beginning of the fateful encounter between Americans and Europeans in 1492. The world-changing consequences of that event continue reverberating to the present. Analyses of Columbus abound and will not be treated at length here; however, a brief revision of that subject is necessary in understanding the process that produced indigeneity. That entails pithily deconstructing the European gaze directed towards Americans during the early years of contact. The debate over what the proper appellation for that event—was it a “meeting of cultures,” an “encounter,” “exchange,” “invasion,” “conquest,” or “discovery”—is acknowledged but not addressed here. In keeping with the tradition set by Mexikas, the term “invasion,” as opposed to “conquest” (as in “the conquest of Mexico”), is an apt description that describes that experience. Those two terms are used interchangeably throughout the text.

In discussing how one set of people perceives another, consider how humans, as a social species, naturally gravitate towards like-minded individuals and conglomerate into groups that share similar traits. These traits include physical appearance, cultural habits, philosophical musings, ideological tenets, and spiritual beliefs. Groups will use any one of these traits as a means of distinguishing themselves and cast judgment on those who are from the out-group, the
Identities are born and shaped this way. On an individual level, a person’s identity is largely shaped by the influences of their surroundings, and those that are not alike are seen as belonging to a different group. The concept of identity itself is a recent development in social science dating to the middle of the twentieth-century with the work of the Erik H. Erikson.¹ Contemporary scholarship stresses that:

… a person’s identity is in fact something multiple and potentially fluid, constructed through experience and linguistically coded. In developing their identities, people draw on culturally available resources in their immediate social networks and in society as a whole. The process of identity-construction is therefore one upon which the contradictions and dispositions of the surrounding social-cultural environment have a powerful impact.²

Given the explanation above, the emergence of a distinct novohispano identity—with ties to Europe but defined by its immediate environment—makes sense. Historically speaking, this phenomenon is one that has reproduced itself innumerable times over the course of human existence. It helps explain the appearance of the many distinct cultural groups around the world since the dawn of our species. These cultural groups are referred to as ethnicities which in short are defined by communal characteristics that include: “lingual, ancestral, regional, religious, etc., which are seen to be the basis for a distinct identity.”³

This process was at work since the very beginning of American and European contact, the first example of which comes from the Norse of the thirteenth-century. The very first mention of indigenous Americans by Europeans is found in the Nordic “Vinland Sagas” which were written about three centuries before Columbus.⁴ The Norse called the indigenous people they encountered in Greenland and other areas of that part of North America “Skraelings.” There
is no conclusive definition or etymology of the term, but scholars agree that it was used as a pejorative to describe the indigenous people as an out-group. Historically speaking, the Norse encounters with arctic Natives are inconsequential, for it was Columbus who had the lasting impact. Attesting that fact is the label Indian, or “indio,” which Columbus erroneously applied to the Native inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere.\(^5\)

The people who first met Columbus when he made landfall on the Bahamian island of Guanahani (which he renamed San Salvador) were Lucayan Tainos, an Arawak people whose linguistic and cultural family tree extended down to parts of Central and South America.\(^6\) On arriving at Guanahani, Columbus labeled the indigenous inhabitants of the islands “indios” out of ignorance of the fact that he had actually stumbled on a continent previously unknown to Europeans. Thereafter, the term *indio* (pl. *indios*) was adopted almost universally and used as shorthand for any and all of America’s indigenous inhabitants. The process of *othering* and dehumanizing Native peoples followed almost immediately, and denying the humanity of the *indios* justified the atrocities committed in the name of European and religious superiority. Over time, the term *indio* was racialized and its meaning devolved into a derogatory label associated with ignorance, backwardness, and slave worthiness.\(^7\)

The idea of *othering* can be traced throughout human history, but the specific way of framing the indigenous other in America was borrowed from an older tradition among Mediterranean peoples, especially the one that divided Christian Europe from the Islamic world and Native African societies. Indigenous Americans fit into the European system of racial categorization and demonization, because Europeans perceived them as deficient and subhuman, a view that justified their massacre, oppression, and enslavement. The precipitous decline of
indigenous populations in the Western Hemisphere was so dramatic that there is controversy over if it justifies being termed a “genocide” or “holocaust.”

Scholars disagree about the population size before European invasion as well as the number killed as a result of the conquest and colonization, but the devastation incurred by the Native peoples is undeniable. Some estimates place the death toll at roughly ninety-percent by the seventeenth-century.\(^8\) Whether one agrees that the estimates are accurate, too high, or not high enough, there is no debate over the atrocities that were committed, first by the Spanish and later by other European colonizers—such as the English, Portuguese, French and Dutch.

With the prevailing ruling American societies beaten and subdued, the process of rebuilding and remaking them in the image of the victors followed. A curious occurrence surfaced during the process of building a new society on the ruins of the old one, some of the victors slowly assumed the identity of the vanquished. In clearer terms, the Spanish who invaded, conquered, and settled the Americas, began conceiving themselves as the inheritors of Anahuac’s previous greatness. As the new rulers of the lands that the once mighty Aztec governed, Spaniards inserted themselves as the next phase in the historical continuum of Mexico. Thus, the descendants of the conquistadors and the first settlers started considering themselves as “native” Americans deserving of special privileges.\(^9\)

This notion of being “native” gave rise to a particular patriotic sentiment among American born Spaniards. Dutifully, they swore allegiance to the Spanish monarchs, but when pressed on the matter, their love of the American homeland was paramount. These types of sentiments, although organically generated at the local level, spread readily throughout the colonies and the writings of colonial thinkers made them salient. It is through the work of the early colonial writers, coupled with the rise of patriotism, that indigenist sentiments first came to
light in the early colonial period. Before indigenism materialized, though, reasonable voices protesting the ill treatment of “los indios” demanded immediate attention.

**The Early Spanish Chroniclers**

As early as 1516 (only a quarter of century after initial contact), Bartolomé de las Casas—the outspoken Dominican friar, published the *Memorial de Remedios para las Indias*. By all accounts, this was the first vociferous protest against the horrific treatment of Indians by the hands of Europeans. Las Casas states that the purpose of the *Memorial* is to present the “remedies that seem necessary in order that the evil and harm that exists in the Indies cease.”

Where Columbus ponders on the superficial racial Other, Las Casas contemplates on the indigenous abstractly through a theological and philosophical lens. Perhaps the first to do so, he accomplishes this through his ethnographic work found in the *General History of the Indies* (1561) and the *Apologetic Summary History of the People of These Indies* (not published until 1874). Among Las Casas’s most important contributions stands the famous Valladolid debate (1550–1551) with Juan Ginès de Sepúlveda who argued that the Native people were naturally inferior, should be forcefully pacified, and were destined to serve Christian Europeans in perpetuity. Las Casas countered that indigenous people were free in the natural order and that, according to Catholic theology, they deserved the same treatment as everyone else.

The work of Las Casas is important because he gave an early voice to the indigenous others, the subalterns, who could not speak nor defend themselves against their rapidly changing world. He was not alone. There were other sixteenth-century chroniclers that, despite their Eurocentrism, documented indigenous history, language, and culture and engaged in invaluable ethnographic work. These chroniclers were mainly members of mendicant religious orders, such
as the Franciscan friars Andrés de Olmos, Bernardino de Sahagún, Gerónimo de Mendieta, and the Dominican Diego de Duran. Unfortunately, the important work of some of these authors went unpublished for several centuries.\textsuperscript{12}

Of those that were published in this period, the \textit{Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España} (1575–77) by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún (Franciscan) is perhaps the most well known.\textsuperscript{13} The \textit{Historia General} was a massive project that took almost thirty years to complete, of which the \textit{Florentine Codex} is the most famous and extant manuscript in the tome. The codex consists of 2,400 pages and is organized into twelve books. It has approximately 2,500 illustrations that were drawn by indigenous artists using American and European techniques. Considered the first American anthropologist, Sahagún pioneered various techniques in the study of living peoples and their societies, especially ethnography. He also encouraged saving a record of the information in its native language, and thus, the alphabetic text of the \textit{Florentine Codex} is bilingual. Both Spanish and Nahuatl appear on opposing folios which are complemented by illustrations produced by the Native informants in a European style. Among the many things the codex documents, it relates the history, religion, and culture of Aztec society, including the invasion and subsequent conquest of Mexico from the Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco point of view.

The work of Sahagún and his Native informants is invaluable, but not without its problems. Scholars now acknowledge that the \textit{Florentine Codex} is a narrative that is steeped in European influence, and a perfect example of that is found in the supposed omens that predicted the fall of Tenochtitlan and the Aztec empire. Upon closer inspection, the omens are heavily influenced by Plutarch’s \textit{Lives}, Lucan’s \textit{Pharsalia}, and the \textit{History of the Jews} by Josephus. All of these texts were “part of the classical curriculum, taught in early colonial Mexico in the Franciscan College of Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco, where the story of the omens first appeared in
the 1540s.”

Historian Marvin Lunenfeld, one of the first scholars critical of the conquest’s meta-narrative, divided the omens in two categories—“apocalyptic” and “presentiment.” In his estimation, the “apocalyptic” prophesies present “the coming of the end of days in sufficiently generalized terms as to cover any catastrophe, while those of “presentiment” illustrate “with seeming accuracy the arrival of Europeans.”

By looking at seven different indigenous groups—the Tainos, Tarascans, Aztecs, Incas, Maya, Micmac, and Sioux—Lunenfeld argues that: “aboriginal populations explained dramatic breaks with established tradition by maintaining, in fact, all had been preordained by their own gods. Predictions thus can be understood as a way the Native elites attempted to fit new phenomena into acceptable patterns.”

With regard to the Aztecs, Lunenfeld selected a prophecy given to Fray Diego de Duran (Dominican) by Texcoco informants. Texcocans were rivals of the Mexica, and they partly blamed them for the demise of the Aztec empire and Anahuac as a whole. The story they tell is one of presentiment that paints Moctezuma as an insecure tyrant fearful of the omens foretold by his soothsayers and clairvoyants. As such, the result of the conquest is upstreamed to fit the reality of the Spanish invasion and subsequent conquest. The blame for the downfall of the Aztec Empire is placed squarely at Moctezuma’s feet.

In apologetic versions of the story, Moctezuma’s inability to protect his people and the empire from the Spanish intruders is interpreted through the paradigm of Aztec religion, philosophy, and historical understanding. As Lunenfeld explains, “Central Mexico contained small groups which had been conquered and absorbed many times, providing a fund of accounts which lent themselves to reuse. The Spanish could thus be comprehended as another conquering group not outside of previous experience.”

In this sense, Moctezuma is still a tragic figure, albeit a redeemed one fulfilling his role in the inevitable fulfillment of prophecy. Taking this
thread one step further, Lunenfeld’s interpretation also applies to those Spaniards who viewed
themselves as the inheritors of Anahuac. Just as the Olmec, Teotihuacan, Maya, and Toltec
societies before them, the Aztec gave way to the latest rulers of the land—the Spanish.\textsuperscript{18} Thus,
the prophetic omens were accepted as fact, because they confirmed and legitimized Spanish rule.
As a result, countless stories depicting a fearful Moctezuma resigned to his fate and that of his
people continue unabated. It is refreshing, however, to see scholars take a more critical look at
the Spanish sources.\textsuperscript{19}

Another contemporary of Las Casas, the Franciscan Toribio de Benavente “Motolinía,”
like Sepulveda, was at odds with the notion that Native people had any rights worth respecting.
Motolinía one of the twelve Franciscans in the first formal religious expedition to arrive in New
Spain in 1524—they were collectively called the “Twelve Apostles of Mexico.” Benavente
“adopted the name Motolinía after hearing the Nahuatl word, which means ‘poor or stricken
one,’ being used by the indigenous people to describe him.”\textsuperscript{20} His published writings are a key
source for the history and ethnography of the Nahuas of central Mexico in the immediate post-
conquest period as well as the challenges of Christian evangelization.\textsuperscript{21} Motolinia perceived Las
Casas’ criticisms as an attack on Spain and the Catholic Church. Opposed to Las Casas’
campaign promoting the protection of the natural rights and humanity of indigenous people,
Motolinía supported their subjugation and did all he could to vilify the Dominican. While
Spanish chroniclers debated on the rights and humanity of indigenous people, descendants of
indigenous nobles were also busy putting ink to paper.
Early Indigenous Writers

By the late sixteenth-century, indigenous writers started documenting the history of their people from their point of view. Not beholden to religious figures of authority, like Sahagún’s Native informants had been, they could document the past more freely. Nonetheless, they still had to be careful not to cross the lines set by the Catholic Church if they wanted to avoid being labeled a heretic. Also worth mentioning is the collaborationist approach that many indigenous leaders directed towards the new order. It is now understood that much of the rhetorical responses by Native intellectuals were attempts to mediate “dispossession and disempowerment.”\(^\text{22}\) In their attempts, many Native leaders (writers included) found ways that reconciled their position of subordination with the dominance of their immediate familial ancestors. One of these methods involved producing literary works that narrated the history of their particular ethnic group—i.e. Mexica, Texcocan, Tlaxcalan, etc.—in triumphalistic fashion while placing blame for the fall of Mexico on their neighbors.

These narratives were also self-serving in that they allowed authors a way to announce their aristocratic pedigree on both their indigenous and Spanish sides. That is why writers, such as Diego Muñoz Camargo, Chimalpahin, Ixtlilxóchitl, and Tezozómoc, are usually referred to as “mestizo chroniclers,” because they straddled both sides of the emergent Spanish/Native (\textit{mestizo}) society. These same writers are often just described as “Indian,” because the point of view they presented, although heavily Hispanicized, was distinctively indigenous in nature. That is the line of thought in which they are presented here.

One of the earliest independent indigenous writers in colonial Mexico was Diego Muñoz Camargo. He is mainly known for \textit{Historia de Tlaxcala} (1585) which focuses on the post-conquest period and highlights the religious, cultural, and military history of the Tlaxcalan
people. Muñoz-Camargo was the illegitimate offspring of Diego Muñoz (a conquistador) and an unidentified indigenous woman. He was raised in Mexico City as a child, and through his father’s extensive properties in Tlaxcala, he became very acquainted with the province. As a nahuatlato, Muñoz-Camargo interpreted at the Tlaxcalan court and managed his father’s ranching estate before acquiring his own property. After marrying a Tlaxcalan “cacica” (Indian noblewoman), his wealth and prestige increased significantly. As an indigenous noble through marriage, Muñoz-Camargo extracted tribute and sometimes even abused his position of power. Although not emblematic of all Indian elites, Muñoz-Camargo’s example reveals how they drew from both Spanish and Native lineages for the source of their legitimacy and authority.

The next indigenous chronicler of interest is Domingo Francisco de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin—usually referred to simply as Chimalpahin. His respective Nahuatl names have been translated as “Runs Swiftly with a Shield” and “Rising Eagle.” Although he claimed noble indigenous descent, the connection was very distant and therefore meaningless in colonial Mexico. He is known for many works that have shed light on gender, politics, race relations, and Aztec society as well as his own time. The most important of his surviving works are the Relaciones and the Diario. Most of Chimalpahin’s work was compiled between the years 1589 through 1615, and is based on testimony from Indigenous persons. In one account, he even noted when two separate Japanese delegations led by Tanaka Shōsuke and Hasekura Tsunenaga visited Mexico in 1610 and 1614 respectively; writing in Nahuatl “in yehuuintin Japon tlaca pipiltin inmacehualhuan” (the vassals of the Japanese nobles). His other manuscripts supply lists of indigenous rulers and nobles, Spanish viceroys, and archbishops and inquisitors of Mexico.
Chimalpahin’s work is important, because it speaks to the continuing division between elite and noble pipiltin and the macehualtin (commoners) in the post-conquest period. His texts also elucidate on the growing awareness by Natives of the mutli-ethnic and cultural diversity that existed on a global scale. An example of this comes through Chimalpahin’s description of the Japanese as “Japon tlaca” (Japanese people) who’s skin was “iztalectic” (whitish) and “chipahuac” (light).28 His work came at a time when older terms used by nahuatlatos to describe themselves, like “nican ti tlaca” (we people here) were being replaced by “macehuales” (Hispanicized version of macehualtin). This was in response to the growing displacement of Native nobility by their mestizo descendants who were largely concerned with scaling the caste ladder upwards. Among indigenous people, the indio moniker never had any currency and nican ti tlaca—which basically meant indigenous—lost relevance because of mestizaje and movement; the term macehual, with its ancient association with “human,” gained favor at the turn of the seventeenth-century.

Fifteen years after Chimalpahin published Historia de Tlaxcala, another important indigenous author surfaced. His name was Hernando (Fernando) de Alvarado Tezozómoc, and is commonly referred to simply by his Nahuatl name.29 In 1598, Tezozómoc penned Crónica mexicana and its Nahuatl counterpart, Crónica mexicáyotl. In them, he chronicled the history of the Aztecs, from the Aztlan migration story and the first tlatoani (ruler), Acamapichtli, to the Spanish appointed caciques in the mid-sixteenth-century.30 A descendant of Moctezuma, Tezozómoc wrote the Crónicas to document his noble lineage and to offer an Aztec perspective on central Mexican history. The Crónica Mexicana was Tezozómoc’s Spanish account, and like a number of early colonial manuscripts, only a privileged few knew of its existence until it was published in the early nineteenth-century.31
Conversely, the *Crónica mexicáyotl* (the Nahuatl edition) was a more condensed version of the *Crónica Mexicana*. In 1949, Joaquín García Icazbalceta, Mexican philologist and historian, found the Nahuatl document in the Boturini collection (now held in Paris) and had it published with a side-by-side Spanish translation. Besides the historical and cultural significance of the document, its importance lies in the fact that this was the first instance of the term “*mexicáyotl*” appearing in literature relating to the study of Aztec society. This is not to say that it was unknown prior to the publication of *Crónica mexicáyotl*, because followers of the Mexikayotl movement (MM) had begun using it as early as 1947, but it was still a virtually an unknown concept at this time. After publication, the term *mexicáyotl* gained prominence, in particular with indigenists who started applying it their neo-Aztec version of Mexican nationalism.

Equally important is Tezozómoc’s place in the literature, because he was one of the earliest authors that provided an indigene-centric, post-invasion historical monograph on the aftermath of the conquest. Tezozómoc’s work influenced later writers in Mexico who paved the way for indigenism and the notion of Mexican indigeneity itself. One of these writers was Fernando de Alva Cortés Ixtlilxóchitl, a descendant of an indigenous leader who sided with Cortés during the invasion.

Known simply as Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, he was a direct descendant of Ixtlilxóchitl I and Ixtlilxóchitl II, previous *tlahoque* (speakers-rulers) of Texcoco. He was an heir that city’s *cacicazgo* (chieftanship) and, as a *mestizo* of means, received a Spanish education. Other notable people in his family tree included Cuitláhuac (the penultimate ruler of Tenochtitlan) and Moctezuma under whose rule the Aztec empire fell. For many years, scholars considered Alva Ixtlilxóchitl a person who was emblematic of the emerging Mexican identity in the early
seventeenth-century. That identity reflected the growing mixed Spanish/Indian heritage that colonials were beginning to embrace. Before this change, Spaniards considered *mestizos* either American or European based on the culture they had been absorbed into. In this model, the amount of Spanish ancestry was inconsequential. In simple terms, *mestizos* that lived in indigenous communities were *indios*, and those born into Spanish families were considered at the very least *criollos* if not *españoles*.\(^35\) This point is elaborated later in the chapter.

Being from Texcoco, an indigenous community, Alva Ixtlilxóchitl regarded himself as an indigenous person, a view that inflected his writings with a pro-Indian bias.\(^36\) The two texts that he is most known for are the *Relación histórica de la nación tulteca* (*Relación*)—completed in 1608—and *Historia chichimeca*—finished in 1640.\(^37\) Both of these works deal with much of the same material, but the latter of the two is considered Alva Ixtlilxóchitl’s best work in general. The *Relación* is an account of important events that occurred in New Spain as well as those of the Toltec civilization that preceded the Mexica-Aztec. It contains writing fragments, songs, and gives a detailed account of the major role that his great-grandfather Don Fernando Ixtlilxóchitl II played in the conquest of Mexico. Alva Ixtlilxóchitl lauded Don Fernando for his heroism and condemned the ungratefulness of the conquerors.

He was very critical of most Spanish chroniclers, but noted that Francisco de Gómara—a Spanish historian based in Seville who wrote about Cortés expedition into Mexico—was the best among his peers. In his criticism, Alva Ixtlilxóchitl followed the example set by Spaniards and claimed “that he himself held greater knowledge as a man of indigenous descendent.”\(^38\) By doing so, he set forth the notion that his proximity to the place and connection to the people of Mexico granted him greater authority to speak on the matter of the conquest and its aftermath.
His work and indigenous bias later influenced another religious writer and close friend of his, Franciscan friar Juan de Torquemada.

Native Americanism

Fray Juan de Torquemada is perhaps the first Spaniard to favor an American perspective toward central Mexico over the European triumphalist approach of his contemporaries. This is nowhere more evident than in his *Monarquía Indiana* (1615), published the same year Las Casas’s *Memorial*. Torquemada’s work is basically a dense mixture of his own ethnographic fieldwork among indigenous groups in Mexico. Interestingly, scholars believe that he also borrowed much of his text (often without attribution) from other writers, in particular the work of Alva Ixtlixóchitl. As historian Camilla Townsend points out, “Torquemada explicitly prided himself on having done extensive research among the ancient texts and writings of the indigenous peoples, and the book he later published includes long passages that come nearly verbatim from Alva Ixtlixochitl’s work.” Until the nineteenth-century, *Monarquía Indiana* was the only authoritative source available on the history of central Mexico, especially of the Mexica-Aztec. It played an important role in the formation of Mexican nationalism as viewed through the lens of *criollo* patriotism which culminated with the Guerra de Independencia de México, 1810-1821 (Mexican War of Independence).

In his work, Torquemada set out to demonstrate that American antiquity—now identified with the Aztecs—was comparable, if not equal to, the civilizations of ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt. He used classical antiquity to demonstrate that, “the Indians like all mankind, had made a slow progression from savagery to civilization.” Through his analysis of Aztec culture—their laws, history, government, arts and religion, he found similarities between the Aztecs and the
ancient Greeks. Comparing Moctezuma I to Alexander the Great, Torquemada commented:

“This king, whom for being an Indian our Spaniards call a barbarian, was in no way a barbarian, but a man of the most wise in the world.”

In all, despite his affinity for the Aztecs and indigenous America as a whole, Torquemada held fast to the idea that the devil had been in control before the Spanish intervened and saved the souls of the intelligent, but spiritually misguided, Natives. There was no easy absolution of indigenous sin other than to apologize for it.

The Aztec apologetics came mainly from criollo authors and thinkers writing many years after Torquemada, and it took over a hundred years for another influential writer to come along and further the cause of criollo patriotism. That writer was Jesuit Francisco Javier Clavijero. Born in Veracruz, Clavijero was the son of a criolla mother and a peninsular father. Like many of his fellow patriots, he also had direct family ties to Spain, a telling circumstance that was true of many criollo patriots.

In 1780, Clavijero published *La Historia Antigua de México*, a book that was heavily influenced by the work of Torquemada. The book begins with a description of Anahuac, and continues with the story of the Aztec peregrinations. Clavijero establishes the first chronology of indigenous civilizations and concludes with an account of the invasion, conquest, and ends with the imprisonment of Cuauhtémoc—the last tlatoani (speaker-ruler) of an independent Mexico-Tenochtitlan. He touches on all aspects of Aztec social organization, including religion, politics, warfare, and culture. As Torquemada and Las Casas before him, Clavijero was highly critical of the conquest and the actions taken by the conquistadors. He also promoted a positive view of indigenous societies that described them as mostly good and peaceful. According to historian David A. Brading, Clavijero and his fellow Jesuits were largely responsible for canonizing the
indigenous past, in particular Aztec history, and making it more palatable to the *criollos* that now identified with it. If Torquemada had reservations about the supposed demonic presence in Aztec thought and culture, Clavijero dispensed with the religious misgivings and set the stage for sensible Aztec apologetics. Additionally, with the sanitation of the Aztec past, Clavijero made it easier for *criollos* to appropriate the Mesoamerican past while stripping his indigenous contemporaries of their own history and weaving it into the grievance narrative that was slowly defining *criollo* identity.

As if cultural appropriation was not enough, *criollos* also began calling themselves *mexicanos*, a label that previously had been used exclusively in reference only to *nahuatlatos*—the Nahuatl-speaking people of central Mexico, including the Aztecs. In similar fashion, English colonists also adopted the label “American”—a term that was used solely to refer to American Indians—as a self referent to distinguish between themselves and the European born.43 Evidently, Europeans identifying as “natives” was a logical progression of permanent colonialism, and the attitudes that emanated from the feelings of patriotism reverberated through the eighteenth-century. Although novohispanos favored a native view of themselves, they also understood that their Spanish heritage was the source of their privileged position in the colonial caste system. The power struggle in that rivalrous environment helped shape the loyalties of people like Clavijero who sided with the place of his birth.

In addition to redeeming the Aztec past, Clavijero also addressed the unflattering and gross misconceptions that were circulating in Europe about America and its native inhabitants. What was even more egregious to him was the fact that many of these commentators had never even set foot on American soil. One such character was Georges-Louis Leclerc, better known as the Comte de Buffon, who’s *Histoire Naturelle* (1747) sparked impassioned responses by many
criollo patriots. In it, Buffon put forth the position that America was “a cold, damp continent where man and beasts were victims of their surroundings … indigenous animals did not develop to a size larger than that of a tapir … [and that] the American Indian was a pathetic specimen, more beast than man, generally incapable of improving his environment, sexually inadequate, and feeble of mind and body.” Interestingly, Thomas Jefferson also took great exception to Buffon’s remarks prompting him to write a lengthy and detailed rebuttal in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785).

Buffon’s work also influenced other European authors, such as Oliver Goldsmith, R. Brooke, and Peter Kalm, but the one who struck a nerve with proto-Mexican patriots was Cornelius de Pauw—a Dutch thinker who specialized in ethnology and philosophy. In his Buffonesque work entitled *Recherches philosophiques sur les Americains* (1768-69), de Pauw’s anti-Americanism, anti-colonialism, and total rejection of the “Noble Savage” trope that had prevailed just a few generations before were in full display. His image of indigenous Americans was so distorted and racially biased that he gave them no credit for any prior achievements or for any potential for future distinction as a people. De Pauw held that Native people “obey only the impulses of their instinct … Their unforgivable cowardice keeps them in the slavery into which it has cast them, or else in the savage way of life from which they have not to the courage to escape.” If those environmental arguments that denigrated indigenous intelligence in general by painting Indians as timorous and incompetent were not enough, de Pauw extended his disdain to *criollos* as well: “When they are about twenty … stupidity suddenly develops. Then the damage is done. They regress instead of advancing, and forget so much of what they have learned that one has to give up their education and abandon them to their fate.”
Clavijero launched a defense of novohispano society by calling into question the teleological aspect of European triumphalism. In response to de Pauw, Clavijero furiously replied:

I protest to … de Pauw, and to all Europe, that the minds of the Americans are in no way inferior to those of the Europeans; that they are capable of all the sciences, including the most abstract; and that if serious attention were paid to their education … among the Americans would be seen philosophers, mathematicians and theologians who could take their places with the most famous of Europe.\textsuperscript{48}

In his defense of indigenous societies—especially the Aztec—against the facile argument by de Pauw and others that their easy overthrow reflected poorly on them, Clavijero retorted:

The causes of the speed with which the Spaniards seized America have been partly indicated by Mr. De Pauw. “I confess, he says, artillery was a powerful instrument of destruction, which the Americans should have ceded to.” If horses, superior arms, and the better military discipline of the conquerors are added to the artillery weapons; if the discord that divided the conquered is attached, it will be seen that there is no reason to censor the cowardice of those people, or to marvel at the violent disorder suffered by the new world. Imagine, Mr. De Paw, that at the time of the thundering and cruel factions of Sila, and Mario, the Athenians had invented artillery and other guns, and assembled 6,000 men, and gathered a small part of Mario’s troops, they would have undertaken the conquest of Italy. Do you not believe that they would not have succeeded in spite of the power of Sila, of the courage and discipline of the Roman legions, or their sheer number, their machines, and fortified cities?\textsuperscript{49}

In these defenses of the Aztecs and their comparisons to the classical European societies of antiquity, the blueprint for Mexican nationalism based on assuming the role of the vanquished
and standing in opposition to Spain and Europe slowly took shape. By the end of the eighteenth-century, the trope of a Mexican nation—whose roots are tied to ancient Aztec grandeur and coupled with criollo patriotism—becomes a unifying symbol in the growing discontent among proto-Mexicans disillusioned with their position in relation to Spain.

**Criollos and Peninsulares**

The roots of *mexicano* identity lie with that of the *criollo*, and it is necessary to comment briefly on that term in order to better understand the patriotic sentiment that developed among American born Spaniards. This is important, because Mexican nationalism grew out of that pre-independence patriotism, and that in turn led to the nativist notion of *mexicanidad* and its indigenous parallel, Mexikayotl. The *criollo* identity emerged in New Spain in opposition to the identity of a Spaniard born in Europe who was called a *peninsular*—on account that they were born on the Iberian Peninsula. Historians have long commented on the antagonism between *peninsulares* and *criollos*, but the work of Brading is the most compelling on this subject. Brading brilliantly connected *criollo* patriotism to neo-Aztecism, and showed how the blending of those ideas gave rise to Mexican nationalism and indigenist thought among Mexican elites. The combination of these concepts developed a sense among *criollos* that they were the inheritors of the Aztec greatness prior to the conquest. This patriotism arose because of the resentment *criollos* felt towards *peninsulares* who looked down on them for being born in the Americas. Despite the fact that *criollos* prided themselves in being of pure Spanish blood, the antagonism and snubs they received from *peninsulares* helped foster a reaction against the Iberian born. Although not yet fully formed, the native cultural appropriation that runs through the course of Mexican history is detectable in this power struggle. Of course, cultural
appropriation was not unique to novohispanos. There is an eighteenth-century echo among the English colonists of North America and their self-perception in the lead up to the American Revolution.\textsuperscript{51}

Phillip J. Deloria has explored the topic of native cultural appropriation (although he does not call it that) in British America. He provides numerous examples of English colonists appropriating American Indian dress and culture for their own social and political aims. Of course, there is the famous example of the Boston Tea Party (1773) where demonstrators disguised themselves as Mohawks in defiance of the Tea Act. Radical examples like those were anomalous prior to the revolution. Before then, most examples of colonial Indian role-play manifested in more innocuous forms, such as the Tammany societies and the May Day festivals. As Deloria points out:

> When Indian garbed proto-Americans wound around the maypole, they celebrated not only the departed Tammany, but also his heir apparent—they themselves. The rituals worked in countervailing ways. Tammany’s death was a metaphor for disappearance of Indian people from the land, the destruction of the old cycle, the dawning of another era in which successor Americans would enjoy their new world.\textsuperscript{52}

Deloria further states that the celebrants did not consider themselves “successors so much as aboriginal Tammanys themselves.”\textsuperscript{53} Hence, by assuming the identity of a mythical Indian leader through a hybridized ceremony composed of European and American elements, these “proto-Americans” subsumed the fictional Tammany’s Indianness allowing them to now view themselves as natives to the land.
Although there are many parallels, there is a key difference between the Anglo and Hispanic strands. The *criollos* saw themselves as more than just Spaniards born on Mexican soil. They began to see themselves as the actual inheritors of the Mesoamerican past, in particular that of Aztec greatness. In contrast, English colonists used the mythos of the Indian to suit their purposes, but expressed no tradition of being the inheritors of a great Indian past. Furthermore, influential American writers, like New Spain’s Torquemada and Clavijero, acclaiming the greatness of a bygone indigenous era in English North America are anomalous. The novohispano affinity to the glorious Aztec is linked to Clavijero and Torquemada who exalted indigenous society. Although they did not proactively encourage *indigenismo* among *criollos*, their writings artfully tapped into the emerging patriotic zeitgeist of colonial Mexico.

**The Rise of Neo-Aztecism**

At the start of the seventeenth-century, an idea that had been fomenting for decades slowly rose to prominence among *criollos*—a sort of nostalgia for the romanticized glory days of the swashbuckling conquistadors and their exploits. A good way of understanding this romantic sentiment is to compare it to the adulatory rhetoric surrounding that of the United States of America’s founding fathers—a fervent reverence that borders on the religious. As far as sympathetic *criollos* were concerned, the conquistadors and their descendants deserved eternal fame, massive material wealth, and the perpetual admiration from all Spaniards. More importantly, *criollos* opined that conquistador descendants deserved the right to ruler over New Spain and have aristocratic land-rights that would carry over to their would-be *hidalgo* descendants. In the minds of many *criollos*, the tenacious audacity of adventurers like Hernan Cortes and Bernal Diaz del Castillo made Spain a major player on the European stage.
This seemingly contradictory position between *criollo* claims as native inheritors and conquistador descendants is explained two fold. On the one hand, *criollos*—as the beneficiaries of the conquest, celebrated the victorious conquistadors with whom they identified with in terms of biology and ruling power. On the other, *criollos* exalted the Aztec in recognition of their fortitude in defense of their homeland as well as their place in the historical timeline of the area’s empires. As descendants of the victors, *criollos* assumed that rulership of Anahuac was theirs, and that the establishment of New Spain made the transfer of legitimacy complete.

As these sentiments grew among politically and economically disenfranchised *criollos*, sympathetic authors began publishing material that expressed a resentment which punctuated the dispossession they personally experienced. This sense of loss and despair hung over, not just the *criollos*, but also among the *mestizo* descendants of elite Spaniards and the conquistadors. The *criollo/mestizo* versus *peninsular* atmosphere that already existed became increasingly exacerbated with the influx of colonists from Europe, prompting reactions from writers like Gonzalo Gómez de Cervantes who, in 1599, declared: “Those men who but yesterday served in stores, taverns and other low occupations are today in possession of the best and most honourable positions in the country, whereas the descendants of those who conquered and settled it are poor, humiliated, disfavoured and cast out.” Gómez de Cervantes decried the favoritism that placed *peninsulares*, even those of lowly status, above the descendants of the conquerors and first settlers.

Outcries such as these were the result of numerous factors colliding at that moment, one of which was the drastic reduction of indigenous workers in the *encomiendas*. For many *criollos*, their livelihood depended on the back-breaking work of the lowly, non-elite *indios* who had been reduced to working for Spaniards under slave-like conditions in order to provide the
usual demands of metals, maize, wheat, and agricultural products by the encomendero (the grantee). According to criollo critics, the solution was simple: find a way to allocate more indigenous workers to replace their losses. If that failed, they demanded greater representation in positions of public office to counter the imbalance of power between the native born and the interloping newcomers. By the start of the seventeenth-century, this antagonism was so widespread in Spanish America that Antonio de la Calancha, a Peruvian criollo, also decried his class’ devalued standing, saying: “Those born here are strangers in their country; upstarts are the heirs of its honors.”

Thus, Calancha—like his Mexican counterpart Gómez de Cervantes—lamented the preferential treatment automatically given to Iberian transplants in the Spanish colonies.

Cronica de Castas

The distrust between criollos and peninsulares was mutual, but for the Iberian born, prejudice towards criollos stemmed in large part because they were deemed genealogically tainted due to their American birth. This denigratory perception was a major item of concern for prominent criollos that as late as 1746 Dr. Andrés de Arce y Miranda, lawyer and theologian from Puebla, wrote about a very particular manifestation of this prejudice. Dr. Arce y Miranda had been offended upon seeing a set of paintings depicting inter-racial couples being shipped to Spain. He believed these images portrayed an impure Spanish lineage among criollos and reinforced the negative stereotype that people in Spain had of novohispanos. As an author, he was also concerned that Europeans would think that criollos “were all of mixed blood which only contributed to a dismissal of their works and writings.” This concern over “limpieza de
sangre” (purity of blood) was of major concern in early New Spain, creating a complex caste system that categorized individuals based on blood quantum.\textsuperscript{61}

Whether or not novohispanos were pure Spanish—a problematic assertion in itself—was of no consequence to \textit{peninsulares} who benefitted from the \textit{de facto} hierarchy produced by the colonial caste system. This caste system basically followed this basic order: \textit{peninsulares}, \textit{criollos}, \textit{mestizos}, \textit{indios}, \textit{mulatos}, and \textit{negros}. Other than the labels \textit{india/o} and \textit{mestiza/o} (terms that still endure today), most of these categories disappeared by the turn of the nineteenth-century and were virtually extinct by the time of Mexican independence. Nonetheless the paintings that so concerned Dr. Arce y Miranda are now known as the “casta paintings.” The paintings depicted the shockingly high number of separate categories describing mixtures upon mixtures of Indians, Africans, and Spanish. In all, the caste categories created by the Spanish surpasses the number fifty.\textsuperscript{62} Interestingly, the “casta paintings,” which were in vogue between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in New Spain, reveal that societal norms regarding inter-racial mixing were not as taboo as one would expect from a stratified society.

Historian Rebecca Earle posits that the paintings and the myriad labels did not reflect the realities of the caste society. Identity of an individual was fluid and changed over time depending on the community, the experience, and the public’s perception of any given individual. Additionally, most indigenous women who were married to Spaniards, especially elites, were automatically deemed “white,” as well as their offspring. Therefore, she argues, the paintings were more about creating a narrative of sexual pleasure to satisfy the exotic curiosities of Europeans. Through the use of imagery and narrative, \textit{peninsulares} correctly assumed that, despite their claims to pure Spanish ancestry, \textit{criollos} were principally a \textit{mestizo} population. Earle supports this notion stating that:
The term *mestizo* first appeared around the 1530s. Prior to that point, the children of Europeans and Amerindians were usually classified as either European or Amerindian; they were not accorded a separate status. Even when *mestizo* came into widespread use in the early seventeenth century, not all children of mixed Spanish and indigenous ancestry were labeled mestizos … the children of Amerindians and Europeans were often classified on the basis of the culture into which they were absorbed.  

Furthermore, Earle points out that this custom of cultural absorption probably accounts for the discrepancy between the greater numbers of recorded married “Spanish women” than the number of actual Spanish women who immigrated to New Spain in the sixteenth-century. Evidence of this is found in the documented instances describing a “black” baby born to “white” parents called a “Saltatras,” or a “Torna atrás” (throwback), an obvious reference to the diluted blood of the child’s “octoroon” (one eighth black) parent who was culturally white—usually the mother (see Figure 1).  

![Figure 1: Anon. “From Albino Woman and Spaniard, Torna-Atras,” ca. 1780’s, 33 x 39 cm, Private Collection, Mexico.](image)
By the eve of Mexican independence, the *mestizo* label had subsumed all of these strange and racially tinged categories and became the default biological descriptor of ordinary Mexicans. The other term that still held currency in this period was that of *criollo*, but that changed after the protracted struggle of liberation from Spain. With the birth of the new nation, *criollos*, many of whom already called themselves *mexicanos* abandoned the word in the public sphere.\(^{65}\) The etymology of the term *criollo* is interesting and worth mentioning here. It was originally used to distinguish between black slaves born in America and those brought from Africa. In time, the term came to refer to any non-indigenous person born in the Americas.\(^{66}\) Interestingly, another meaning of the term alludes to belonging to the land, or native to it (as opposed to being imported). This definition helps us understand how *criollos* came to view themselves as “native” Americans, an identity that was at odds with that of the *peninsulares*—a label that denoted foreignness. In this way, many *criollos* bought into the idea that the Aztec past was their inheritance and viewed themselves as the rightful rulers of the emergent Mexican nation. Once *criollos* internalized the notion that they were native, calling themselves *mexicanos* was an obvious step in the evolution of modern Mexican identity. Furthermore, by marking distinctions between Africans, Native Americans, and Europeans, Spaniards engaged further in the process of identity formation.

**Criollo Patriotism**

Criollo patriotism finally came full circle at the start of the nineteenth-century culminating with a violent separation from the “*madre patria*” (motherland). The *criollo* declaration of independence was characterized by “neo-Aztequism, Guadalupanism, and a
repudiation of the conquest,” all of which flowed directly towards criollo patriotism and a proto Mexican nationalism. In the years leading up to the Mexican War of Independence (1810-1821) people such as Fray Servando Teresa de Mier served as the principle proponents of this newfound nationalism. His writings ingrained among criollos the notion of a “Mexican nation.” Mier popularized the religiously motivated pseudo-history intended to destroy Spanish legitimacy in the Americas. For example, Brading points to Mier’s fantastical idea that Saint Thomas the Apostle had visited Mesoamerica in the form of the deity Quetzalcoatl and evangelized to the indigenous people, and that this theory demolished the ideological justification of Spanish domination. Not only did this kind of fanciful pseudo-history serve its political purpose in Mexico, it fostered a new quasi-religious mythology that allowed for autochthonous variants of Christianity to emerge in other parts of the Americas.

Mier did in fact deliver a sermon during the commemoration of the Virgin of Guadalupe’s apparition on December 12, 1794. In it, he connected Saint Thomas to the virgin and declared that the apparition had occurred 1,750 years before and not in 1531. Furthermore, he stated that the painting of the virgin was actually on Saint Thomas’s cloak, who had preached in the Americas long before Spanish conquest, and that the cloak had only recently been discovered by Juan Diego, calling into question the narrative of the virgin’s miraculous apparition. Mier’s sermon, with its bold revision of Mexican history and identity, was seen as provocative and borderline blasphemous by the Archbishop of Mexico, Alonso Núñez de Haro y Peralta, who excommunicated and exiled him to Spain for ten years. Archbishop Núñez de Haro’s concerns were prescient, for in just sixteen short years after Mier’s discourse, criollo leaders, like Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, used the Guadalupan image as a symbol of Mexico in their opposition to Spanish rule. Ironically, many of the insurgents—mostly the descendants of
the Spanish conquistadors and early settlers—now viewed themselves as the direct inheritors of
Cuauhtémoc’s struggle to “liberate the Mexican nation from the chains imposed by the conquest.
Nonetheless, the Indian past was thus clearly identified as the Mexican past.”

Conclusion

When Europeans first arrived in the Americas they found a world already inhabited by
numerous ethnic groups whose culture, language, and history differentiated one from the other
just as it did in other parts of the world, like Asia and Europe itself. However, to many
Europeans, it was easier to lump all indigenous people of the Americas into one vast
homogenous group from which they could counter balance their own identities. Through the
essentialization of Native peoples into one uniform entity of *indios*, Spaniards could then racially
stereotype Native people as lesser than, regardless of ethnic origin or hierarchical status. This
allowed for Spanish indifference towards contemporary indigenous people as they appropriated
the historical continuity of the conquered land while grafting their colonial culture onto that of
the previous dominant force of the country—the Aztecs. Before doing so, the negative stigma
associated with the indigenous culture and spirituality necessitated sanitation and excision of its
supposed demons. Juan de Torquemada advanced a more positive view of the Americas and its
indigenous inhabitants, but he also subscribed to the belief that demons and Satan himself had
been in firm control of the New World and its inhabitants. In his view, it was the religious
orders, and not the conquistadors, who merited praise for spreading god’s word and saving the
souls of the sinners. The conquistadors, a once praiseworthy group, were now seen as the
originators of Spanish oppression towards all Mexicans, *criollos* included. In this sense,
Torquemada followed in the footsteps of Las Casas in his criticism of the conquistadors’ inhumane and barbarous treatment of indigenous people.

The irony in which descendants of the conquistadors and early colonists themselves assume the role of the oppressed indigenous person must be reiterated. That is not to say that the plight of those identified as indios was not a consideration for the intellectual elite. Clavijero dutifully defends them against attacks from prejudicial writers. There is a clear separation, however, in that criollos did not necessarily have an indio view of themselves despite what some Europeans thought of them. The association was there nonetheless.

As was shown above, Las Casas’ sympathy and defense started a trend later picked up by Spanish writers that followed. Criollos expanded their sympathetic attitudes to include a direct association with indigenous people. Taking it a step further, they even assumed the position of natives who had inherited the traditions of Anahuac as the successor’s of central Mexico’s great civilizations. Native-mestizo writers contributed to the process by producing literary works that informed the imaginations and accounts of their criollo counterparts. This intellectual milieu produced a patriotic sentiment among criollos that planted the seeds of Mexican nationalism and, in turn, fostered the evolution of mexicanidad (Mexicanism) and eventually modern Mexikayotl.
* Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

1 For more on this, see: Erik H. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1994). Erikson’s insights into the relationship of life history and history began with observations on identity development in adolescence. This book collects three early papers that are considered the best introduction to his theories.


3 The term “ethnicity,” like “identity,” is also a recent concept. It manifests itself especially among nations with immigrant populations where the customs and traditions of the smaller groups are expected to subside over time but instead persist. Ibid., 285.

4 “The earliest and most complete information we have about Vinland … is found in two sagas, *Greenlanders’ Saga* and *The Saga of Erik the Red* which tell of the Viking discovery of North America. The two accounts were written independently, though both tell of things which took place in the early 11th century that were passed down by word of mouth in Greenland and Iceland until they were written down in the 13th century in Iceland. Both give general descriptions of the native peoples the Vikings met, relative sailing distances, and landscape features ….” Description is from: “Vinland Sagas,” Smithsonian Institution: National Museum of Natural History, accessed October 3, 2016, http://naturalhistory.si.edu/vikings/voyage/subset/vinland/sagas.html.


6 William F. Keegan, *The People Who Discovered Columbus: The Prehistory of the Bahamas* (Gainesville, Fla: University of Florida, 1992). As an aside, the word “key” (as in the Florida Keys) comes from the suffix of the name Lucayo [lu-cayo].


8 Scholars disagree about the pre-invasion population size of the Western Hemisphere, and whether what happened to indigenous Americans constitutes “genocide” or a “holocaust;” that polemic is beyond the scope of this study and will not be treated here. For more on this see: David E. Stannard, *American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); David P. Henige, *Numbers from Nowhere: The American Indian Contact Population Debate* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998); and Jared M. Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998).

9 The term “native” with a minuscule “n” in this sense refers to people that were born in the Americas but are not necessarily biologically or culturally indigenous.

10 Victor N. Baptiste and Bartolomé de las Casas, *Bartolome de las Casas and Thomas More’s Utopia: Connections and Similarities: A Translation and Study* (Culver City, Calif.: Labyrinthos, 1990), 14.

All of these chroniclers either wrote or published their work between 1550 and 1600.  


Ibid, 18.

Ibid, 21.

For a unique and excellent analysis of the various periods of Mexican history, see Enrique Florescano, *National narratives in Mexico: a history*, trans. Nancy T. Hancock (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006). Florescano examines each historical vision of Mexico as it was interpreted in its own time, revealing the influences of national or ethnic identity, culture, and evolving concepts of history and national memory.

For critical views by scholars on the traditional Spanish account of the Conquest and Aztec culture other than Lunenfeld, see: Camilla Townsend, “Buying the White Gods: New Perspectives on the Conquest of Mexico,” *The American Historical Review* 108, no. 3 (June 1, 2003): 659–87; Matthew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Restall and Fernández-Armesto, *The Conquistadors*. Of these, Townsend’s article was the first to make waves in the scholarship for her questioning and revision of the notion that Cortes was seen as man-god by Moctezuma. She argues, as some neo-Aztec thinkers have before her, that the Quetzalcoatl-Cortes myth has no pre-invasion antecedents, and that, instead, it was configured by Spanish priests after the conquest to justify the hostile, and perhaps extra-legal, usurpation of the Aztec state. In this regards, she is at odds with Lunenfeld who, despite being critical of the aforementioned omens, has no problem accepting the Quetzalcoatl-Cortes myth. He places it in line with the other presentiment omens and explains how it was also upstreamed to fit the declension narrative. Townsend states that there is no pre-invasion evidence to suggest that the myth of Quetzalcoatl’s return from the east on the year Ce Acatl (One Reed) ever existed prior to the conquest.


None of Motolinía’s work was published in his lifetime. The first of his books, *Memoriales*, was only published in 1903.


The *Historia de Tlaxcala* (History of Tlaxcala) is also known as the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* (Linen of Tlaxcala). Diego Muñoz Camargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala* (Mexico: Oficina Tip. de la Secretaria de Fomento, 1892).


Martin Vega, “Mothers and Daughters at Imperial Crossroads: Expressions of Status, Economy and Nurture in 16th Century Mexico” (Doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 2016), 38.

27 Doris Mathilde Namala, “Chimalpahin in His Time: An Analysis of the Writings of a Nahua Annalist of Seventeenth-Century Mexico Concerning His Own Lifetime” (Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2002), 45.

28 Ibid., 83.

29 His first name is sometimes shown as “Fernando,” a common variant of “Hernando.”

30 The term Aztlan is usually written with the Spanish accent on the second “a;” when not quoting someone, I omit the accent to keep with the proper Nahuatl pronunciation which is almost always on the penultimate syllable, i.e. Áztlan.

31 Hernando de Alvarado Tezozómoc, *Crónica Mexicana*, ed. Gonzalo Díaz Migoyo and Germán Vázquez (Las Rozas, Madrid: Dastin, 2001). The first printing was a French translation in 1831, and the first Spanish printing was in 1848. It was reprinted and edited by the eminent Mexican scholar, Manuel Orozco Y Berra, in Spanish in 1878, and is the version that has been used in every reprint since, including the cited here.


33 The term’s usage by MM adherents will be discussed in a later chapter. Also recall that the term “mexicáyotl” basically means: “Things relative to Mexico, the state of Mexico, the Mexican nobility, etc;” Rémi Siméon, *Diccionario de la lengua nahuatl o mexicana: redactado según los documentos impresos y manuscritos más auténticos y precedido de una introducción*, séptima edición en español (México: Siglo Veintiuno, 1988), 271.


35 On the term “criollo;” unlike the term “creole” used in the southern United States and some parts of the Caribbean to describe mixed black people, the Spanish colonial word *criollo* was used to describe a non-mixed Spaniard that was born in the Americas.

36 According to Townsend, Alva Ixtlilxochitl had a more nuanced view of himself towards the end of his life even while maintaining his pro-indigenous bias in his writings and personal life.

37 The *Historia chichimeca* is also referred to as *Historia general de la Nueva España*. Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, *Obras históricas de don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl: Tomo I; Relación histórica de la nación tulteca*, ed. Alfredo Chavero (México: Oficina tip. de la Secretaria de fomento, 1891); and Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, *Obras históricas de Don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl: Tomo II; Historia chichimeca*, ed. Alfredo Chavero (Oficina tip. de la Secretaria de fomento, 1892).


To borrow a commonly used phrase from the influential scholar Benedict Anderson, these are two instances of “imagined communities” that exemplify the phenomenon that he describes. And, although not yet materialized at this stage, these imagined communities carried within them the germination of culturally appropriative nativistic ideologies. In the case of criollo nationalism, it was used to justify a pseudo-indigeneity that imposed on and suppressed that of actual indigenous people and their descendants.


Quoted in Browning, Cornelius de Pauw and Exiled Jesuits, 293.

Ibid.

Quoted in Browning, Cornelius de Pauw and Exiled Jesuits, 297.

Francesco Saverio Clavigero, Historia Antigua de Mexico: Facsimilar de La Edicion de Ackermann, 1826, Tomo II (Puebla, Mexico: Secretaria de Cultura, 2000), 340. Original Spanish quote: “Las causas de la rapidez con que los Españoles se apoderaron de America, han sido en parte indicadas por Mr De Pauw. ‘Confieso, dice, que la artilleria era un instrumento destructor, y poderosísimo, al cual debían ceder al cabo los americanos.’ Si a la artilleria se añaden las otras armas superiores, los caballos, y la mejor disciplina militar de los conquistadores; si se agrega, sobre todo, la discordia que dividia a los conquistados, se vera que no hai motivo para censurar la cobardía de aquellos pueblos, ni para maravillarse del violento trastorno que sufrio el nuevo mundo. Imaginense Mr. De Pauw que en los tiempos de las estrepitosas y crueles facciones de Sila, y de Mario, hubiesen los Atenienses inventado la artilleria, y las otras armas de fuego, y que 6,000 hombres, reunidos, no a todo el ejercito de Mario, si no a una pequeña parte de sus tropas, hubiesen emprendido la conquista de Italia. ¿Cree que no la hubieran logrado a despecho del poder de Sila, del valor, y de la disciplina de las legiones Romanas, del numero de estas, y de sus maquinas, y de las fortificaciones de las ciudades?”

Basing his study on the work of Edmund O’Gorman and John Leddy Phelan, Brading wrote the first English language monograph connecting criollos to the Aztec past: The Origins of Mexican Nationalism. That short book led to his magisterial treatise: David A. Brading, The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492-1867 (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991). In it, Brading demonstrates how criollo chroniclers and patriots “succeeded in creating an intellectual tradition that … was original, idiosyncratic, complex, and quite distinct from the European model” from which they descended (5).

I am using historian Peter B. Villella’s definition of “novohispano” and its derivatives. “[It] refers to the colonial administrative entity of New Spain. As New Spain acquired a discrete and proprietary array of political and social networks – and because “Mexico” in the colonial era referred to Mexico City or to the native people who inhabited it before 1521 – I use ‘Novohispanic’ as an imperfect, but useful label to refer to that which arose within and pertained to the colonial entity, but not the indigenous ‘Mexico’ that existed before nor the national ‘Mexico’ that came after.” Villella, Indigenous Elites and Creole Identity in Colonial Mexico, 1500-1800, 11 (see footnote).


Ibid., 18.

The following section is sourced from numerous Mexicanist scholars, especially Brading’s book, The Origins of Mexican Nationalism. His work offers an insightful analysis on the rise of Mexican patriotism, nationalism, and indigenist political thought. I rely on their informative studies to contextualize the Mexikayotl
movement’s antecedents because my focus are the Chicanos who were influenced by that strain of Mexican cultural nationalism.

55 Anahuac or Anauac is the traditional Nahuatl name of central Mexico and is defined as: Near the water, the sea, etc., used to describe either the Valley of Mexico, where once there were large lakes, either of maritime shorelines, or any other place where water abounds. From the classic Nahuatl dictionary (1885): Siméon, *Diccionario de la lengua nahuatl o mexicana*, 28. Original Spanish: “Cerca del agua, del mar, etc., sirve para designar ya sea el valle de México, donde antaño existían grandes lagunas, ya sea de los litorales marítimos, o cualquier otro lugar donde abunde el agua.” The name Anahuac was used by the Aztecs to denote their seat of power in central Mexico and included the territories just beyond the limits of their empire. After Mexican independence, the toponym was on the short list of potential names for the newly founded nation.


57 An *encomienda* was a system of grants by the Spanish Crown to a colonist in America which conferred the right to demand tribute and forced labor from the Indian inhabitants of an area. For a detailed discussion of this, see Chapter IV of: Charles Gibson, *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule: A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519-1810* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1964).

58 Quoted in: Brading, *The Origins of Mexican Nationalism*, 4. This idea of being a “stranger in your own country” is one that recurs not just in Mexican historiography, it is also found in Chicano scholarship as well. For example, see: David J. Weber, *Foreigners in Their Native Land: Historical Roots of the Mexican Americans* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1972).


62 Although, I have been aware of the colonial caste system for a long time, I first learned of the extensive categorization employed by the Spanish about fifteen years ago in the album notes to Jorge Reyes’s and Suso Sáiz’s aptly named *Crónica de Castas*, Compact Disc (Mexico: No-CD Rekords, 1991). In it, they list fifty-three *casta* labels. Interestingly, the first academic documentation of this comes from the Mexican anthropologist, Nicolás León, who listed at least fifty-five casta categories in *Las castas del México colonial o Nueva España: noticias etnoantropológicas* (México: Talleres gráficos del Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Historia y Etnografía, 1924). I have not been able to consult this source, but Roberto “Cintli” Rodriguez notes that León “wrote that in effect there were but two [categories]: Spanish/white and all others, ‘gente de color’ or people of color (8);” cited in *Our Sacred Maíz Is Our Mother: Indigeneity and Belonging in the Americas* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014), 203, endnote 26.


64 Ibid., 45.
Even today, there exists a small minority in Mexico that espouses a *criollo* identity.


For an excellent discussion of these pseudo-historical/religious ideas, see: John Leddy Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World*, 2d ed. rev (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970). Chapter II in particular, “The Apocalypse in the Age of Discovery,” is very informative. Phelan suggests that the idea of a connection between the “American man” and the “Lost Tribes of Israel” was largely due to the “apocalyptic mood of the Age of Discovery.” He states further that other authors, like Gerónimo de Mendieta, took the stories about floods, deluge, and the promised savior Quetzalcoatl as being of Hebrew origin and, therefore, Quetzalcoatl was the Messiah of the bible (25). A contemporary religion that holds some of these interpretations today is that of the Mormon Church whose foundational story asserts that Jesus Christ himself visited the Americas and proselytized to the indigenous people centuries before Columbus.

Introduction

Historian Benjamin Keen perhaps described it best when he stated that there were two visions of Aztec society that emerged from the conquistadors’ accounts: “Where one sees a gifted people whose mode of life ‘was about the same as in Spain, with just as much harmony and order,’ another sees a race guilty of the blackest crimes against God and nature. All the sources mingle praise and criticism, but in each a favorable or unfavorable viewpoint clearly predominates.”¹ The division extended further than mere disagreement about the cultural morality of the Aztecs, Keen found four schools, with three in the Aztec camp and one in the Spanish corner. Keen noticed a divide between the “majority of indigenistas who regard the achievements of the ancient Mexican civilizations as an integral and valuable part of the national cultural heritage, and a minority of hispanistas who reject that position, proclaim Cortés the creator of Mexican nationality, and regard Spain as the sole source of enduring values in Mexican life.”²

Of the three indigenista camps, Keen concluded that the “scientific indigenistas” constituted a majority that was made up of Mexican anthropologists in the tradition of Manuel Gamio.³ Gamio’s scientific indigenism not only studied and valued the Native past, it also tried to incorporate living Indians into modern society. The second group of indigenistas Keen does not qualify with an adjective, but he notes that it was distinguished by extreme anti-Spanish
sentiments. This school was best represented by the archeologist Eulalia Guzmán who idealized the Aztecs to an extreme. Guzmán and her associates played an important role in the formation of what I call “romantic indigenism,” which is defined by a belief that that indigenous people lived in idyllic Native utopias before the Spanish invasion disrupted them. Some prevailing iterations of modern Mexikayotl are an offshoot of that belief.  

The third group of *indigenistas* was closely associated with another archeologist, Laurette Séjourné who Keen describes as showing a “strong influence of philosophical idealism and mystical psychological doctrines,” adding that she and her supporters regarded Teotihuacán “as the luminous center of a great spiritual tradition which the Aztecs corrupted for their own predatory ends.” 5 Keen’s last point helps explain why there has been an avid interest among romantic indigenists with a parallel movement that extols the Toltec over the Aztec. In her work, Séjourné compared Quetzalcoatl (the main Toltec deity) with Christ saying that: “His image, the plumed serpent, had for Pre-colombian [sic] peoples the same evocative force as has the Crucifix for Christianity.” 6 Although, there is a small tradition among indigenists of the supposed “Toltec way” known as Toltecayotl, it has never maintained the same large number of followers as modern Mexikayotl. 7 Despite the differences between both traditions, a feature that these two had in common was their disdain for the Spanish invasion and destruction of ancient life ways. Even so, not all Mexican nationalists lionized the Aztecs and vilified the Spanish.

The fourth and final school of thought that Keen describes is that of the *hispanistas*. Where the *indigenistas* were adamantly pro-indigenous, the *hispanistas* were the exact opposite, contemptuous of Native culture and eulogistic towards Spain. The most notable proponents of this school were the historian and Jesuit Mariano Cuevas and José Vasconcelos, the philosopher who popularized the idea of Mexico being the new nation of the future with its *mestizo*
population. He called it the “raza cosmica,” a concept that is usually directly translated as the “cosmic race” but perhaps a better translation should be the “universal people.” These thinkers were not only responding to the growing indigenist nationalist rhetoric, they were also continuing in the conservative tradition of intellectuals from an earlier era. Some of the hispanista intellectuals who emerged in the aftermath of independence—such as Lucas Alamán, Lorenzo de Zavala, and José María Luis Mora—were criollos who lost their enthusiasm for Mexican antiquity. As Keen puts it: “The Aztec cult had served its purpose of providing a historical rationale and rhetoric for the generation of Morelos, Mier, and Bustamante;” the generation that followed started to view the Aztecs at best indifferently and at worst antagonistically.8

What follows then, is a synthesis that explores the double sided coin that is Mexican identity—indigenous and Spanish. The tension between these two trends produced the mestizo ideology that manifested itself at the beginning of the twentieth-century. But, in order to get there, colonial society had to first shed its Spanish skin. This transformation came from the criollos who were tired of not being accorded the respect they believed was well deserved. By the late nineteenth-century, dissatisfaction among criollos had grown across many sectors of New Spain. Some of the main reasons that contributed to this discontent had much to do with political and economic changes happening in Europe as well as in the American colonies. The slight criollos experienced from their fellow Spaniards, the peninsulares, helped trigger a lot of their disgruntlement. The tension that existed between criollos and peninsulares is well documented, so that tension will not be treated in depth here.

Our main concern is to explore how criollo patriotism, which was tied to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century indigenist ideas of Aztec greatness, got channeled and transformed into the
familiar indigenismo and mexicanidad of the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries. But in order to do so, a basic chronology of Mexican independence is necessary first. A brief look at the causes and motivations of criollo patriots is helpful in analyzing the cultural impact that those events had on the ideological identity of the new nation.

**Mexican Independence**

The rumblings for Mexican independence date to at least the latter half of the eighteenth-century. In 1765, for instance, Monsieur Guiller—a French architect traveling in Spain—reported to the Spanish authorities about overhearing a discussion with troubling implications. While lodged at an inn in Madrid he overheard “two disgruntled Mexicans … preparing to present their grievances at the royal court, but if they did not gain satisfaction, they declared their readiness to ‘throw off the yoke’ of Spanish rule.” At the moment of this denunciation, serious talk about breaking away from Spain by criollo patriots was forty years in the future. Even among the novohispano intelligentsia there is little indication that independence maneuvers were at play this late in the colonial period. However, this instance demonstrates that the term “Mexican,” or better yet mexicano, was already being used to refer to criollos and not just indigenous people as had traditionally been the case. The other obvious point that emerges from this account is that independence sentiments have deeper roots in Mexican history than most people realize. The main interest here, however, is to recognize the grievances that bothered disgruntled proto-Mexicans in general.

Among the chief concerns throughout Spanish America at this time was Spain’s seeming lack of attention to its colonies and subjects as it embroiled itself in European affairs, in particular the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. This negligence left a void and
amplified colonial frustrations prompting *criollo* patriots to aspire for local governments more responsive to their immediate needs. Their chance came in 1808 when King Ferdinand VII of Spain adjudicated his throne to Napoleon’s brother, Joseph Bonaparte. Criollo patriots viewed this power struggle as an opportunity to declare independence in the name of the legitimate Spanish king. By masking their self-serving act of defiance as loyalty to the Spanish crown, *criollos* triggered a chain reaction throughout the Spanish Empire which, once started, was unstoppable and uncontrollable. Amid the turmoil that ensued, *criollo* patriots organized *juntas gubernativas*, or provisional governments, that were meant to act in the name of the lawful king, Ferdinand VII.

These proto-Mexican patriots were following the lead of the numerous juntas that sprang up in Spain after the French usurpation. The precedent had been set, but even so, novohispano elites viewed these juntas as potentially dangerous and treasonous. Besides, not all *criollos* desired a separation from the mother country, especially if it meant the potential for violence and volatility. Above all, economic and political stability was paramount to the colonial elite in general; conflict would only put lives in danger and cost the province immensely. Moreover, neither *peninsulares* nor *criollos* wanted the indigenous and *mestizo* masses directly involved in the formation of local governments because the fear of retribution for past injustices was ever present during this turbulent time. Complicating matters even further, *peninsulares* were also suspicious of *criollos’* motivations, for it was no secret that within their ranks thinkers were outspoken critics of Spain’s absolute domination of its American colonies. One of these critics was Fray Servando Teresa de Mier.

Mier was born in Monterrey, Nuevo León the same year that Monsieur Guiller reported the “two disgruntled Mexicans” to Spanish authorities in 1765. At the age of sixteen, Mier
entered the Dominican Order in Mexico City where he studied philosophy and theology in the Colegio de Porta Coeli. By the age of twenty-seven, Mier was ordained, had earned his doctorate, and was already a distinguished priest. He became infamous in 1794 after delivering a controversial sermon about the provenance of the original painting of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Because of his unconventional and anti-Spanish political opinions, Mier’s shadow looms large during the pre-independence period of Mexican history. Drawing from the work of the early criollo and indigenous writers, Mier’s public candor and political writings promulgated Mexican nationalism and its correlative neo-Aztec romantic indigenism. The writings of Mier, and of other proto-Mexicans like him, circulated throughout the Spanish world in the years leading up to independence, and they helped influence similar ideas already surfacing in other parts of Spanish America. Nonetheless, proto-Mexican criollos were not alone in their desires for separation.

For instance, the Spanish born viceroy of New Spain, Jose de Iturrigaray, sympathized with criollo patriots and found himself embroiled in a plot to form a localized autonomous government. Fearing anti-Spanish reprisals from the Mexican patriots, peninsulares hatched a plot of their own in the form of a coup d’etat and justified their actions by claiming that their intention was to stop Iturrigaray from establishing himself as King of an independent novohispano kingdom. On September 15, 1808, peninsular elites had Iturrigaray arrested and replaced with Pedro Garibay as the new viceroy. Garibay was an aged military officer who peninsulares placed in office to act as a puppet ruler while a Spanish official came to replace him. After a brief skirmish, all of Iturrigaray’s co-conspirators were captured and imprisoned, effectively ending the first attempt at an independent Mexican government. That episode
marked the beginning of prolonged unrest as the cries for autonomy increased throughout Spanish America.

Two years later, one such cry came in the wee hours of September 16, 1810 from the liberal leaning criollo patriot, Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla. Like Mier, Father Hidalgo was also a controversial figure. He questioned church doctrines and policies including priestly celibacy, the banning of literature, the infallibility of the pope, and the miracle of Christ’s virgin birth. Father Hidalgo soon found himself in the crosshairs of church officials for his contentious and potentially sacrilegious opinions. As a parish priest, he had performed his duties to a primarily indigenous congregation at the small town of Dolores since 1803. An avid reader and intellectual, Father Hidalgo belonged to the liberal oriented Club Literario y Social de Queretaro (Social and Literary Club of Querétaro). At the social club, he made acquaintance with a Captain in the Spanish army, Ignacio Allende, who was a radical thinker with independence sensibilities. As the unrest in Europe slowly manifested itself in New Spain, the liberal collective that had formed primarily for the purposes of intellectual discussion was forced to go underground. That move towards self-preservation effectively transformed the quaint social club into an organizational arm of the fomenting revolution.

In discussions that took place at meetings of clubs like this one, criollo rebels and reformers considered enlisting Natives, mestizos, and people from the lower classes in their effort to seize control from the royalists. Because Querétaro had been an important agricultural region, the widespread economic collapse that it suffered helped patriots recruit thousands to their revolutionary cause. To this end, Captain Allende and Father Hidalgo orchestrated an uprising marked to take place in December of 1810, but their plans were foiled when word reached the gachupin authorities who then ordered the immediate arrest of the rebel leaders.14
Their plans now exposed, Father Hidalgo decided to take drastic action and prematurely deliver his now famous *Grito de Dolores* on September 16. With virtually no military training to speak of, Hidalgo’s makeshift army—composed primarily of *indios* and *mestizos*—besieged the *gachupín* forces at Guanajuato and then went on a murdering rampage of Spaniards, making no distinction between *peninsulares*, *criollos*, or anyone deemed *español*. The ragged rebel army successfully fought several battles as they made their way to Mexico City, but once there, they camped on the outskirts as Hidalgo hesitated and stopped short of invading and occupying the great metropolis.

As the countryside turned into chaos, the recently appointed Viceroy Francisco Javier Venegas and Royalist Army General Félix María Calleja del Rey, aggressively pursued the insurgents in an effort to assuage the rising tide of revolution. By January 1811, royalist forces defeated Hidalgo and the insurgents followed by a bloody reprisal against suspected rebel sympathizers who were executed en masse. Turning toward the northern provinces, Hidalgo and his rebel army sought refuge in Nuevo Santander, Nuevo León, and Coahuila y Texas where sympathy for the insurgency and independence was strong. Despite their efforts and popular support, the royalist Captain Ignacio Elizondo ambushed Hidalgo and his close associates at the Norias de Baján (in Coahuila) on March 21, 1811. Captain Elizondo had them all summarily executed in Chihuahua, thus marking the end of what is considered the initial phase of the ten-year war of independence.¹⁵

**Mexican Nationalism**

Among the many things that stand out about this tumultuous period were the ideological motivations of the *criollo* intelligentsia of which Father Hidalgo was a prominent figure. We can
also confidently say that Mexican nationalism officially came into existence at the utterance of Hidalgo’s Grito, an action that converted criollo patriotism into a nativized sentiment, triggering the transformation of criollos into mexicanos.\textsuperscript{16} It is worth repeating here that criollos were already using the term mexicano as an identity. Following suit, Europeans used it as well when describing Spaniards born in New Spain. The calls for independence made the label even more salient to the proto-Mexican patriots who already identified as such. The important point here is that the conflict between royalists and patriots gave credence to criollo claims of nativeness through the use of the mexicano label. That event is crucial in the creation of Mexican identity and its inextricable connection to indigeneity.

Returning to Father Hidalgo, it is also noteworthy that he was an ethnic criollo, a priest, and a liberal thinker—a background that he shared with other patriots, such as Mier. Hidalgo’s views were mainly shaped by his interactions at the social club in Querétaro and his readings of francophone authors who extolled the greatness of liberalism and the French Revolution. According to Mexican historian Edmundo O’Gorman, Mier was cut from the same cloth, because the political ideas espoused in the Manifesto Apologetico had been inspired by the expositions of the French abbé Dominique Dufour de Pradt.\textsuperscript{17}

But perhaps this assessment by O’Gorman does not tell the whole story. The English historian David A. Brading argues that Mier was unreceptive to Rousseau’s line of thought and more inclined toward the historical and constitutional approach of Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos and Joseph Blanco White. These were enlightenment thinkers whom he had met while exiled in Europe, and who, ironically, were advisors to the Spanish crown. Through them, he reached back to more conservative thinkers, like Edmund Burke and Montesquieu. After being exposed to such diverse trains of thought, Mier broke with European orthodoxy choosing instead to pave
the way for “an autochthonous set of ideas, some of which later became integral elements of Mexican nationalism.”¹⁸

To get a better picture, we must look at Hidalgo and the notion of a liberal state. Whereas Hidalgo heralded a free and open society devoid of monarchic rule, Mier’s original set of ideas favored an English-style constitutional monarchy in Mexico with royal ties to Spain. Mier had lived in England in the early 1810s where he learned to appreciate what he perceived as an effective way of governing via a representative body headed by a traditional monarch. Those views drastically changed in 1816 after spending some time in Philadelphia, which was one of the thriving cities in the young American republic. Mier only accepted liberalism after it became clear that any form of monarchism was antithetical to the future of an independent Mexican nation. In the United States, Mier saw firsthand the success Mexico could have if it emulated its northern neighbor as opposed to the pitfalls of being governed by a despotic and authoritarian regime. That position was never clearer to him than when Agustín de Iturbide—the royalist general turned Mexican insurgent leader—secured Mexican independence and then proclaimed himself as the first emperor of the newly born nation.

When pressed about his vacillations, Mier explained that he preferred absolute separatism and full independence for all American nations above anything else, stating: “We were born there, and that is the natural right of nations.”¹⁹ In statements such as that, we can see the emergent indigenist thought that runs through the course of Mexican history. After independence, criollo patriotism transformed into Mexican nationalism, and the connection to Spain—although still there and impossible to erase—took a backseat in order to make the claim that the criollo elite were indisputably the rightful inheritors of Mexico’s glorious past. Mier
stood at the forefront of this emergent narrative. That is why Brading correctly called Mier, “the first historian of the Mexican insurgency and its most original ideologue.”

In Brading’s estimation, Mier was largely influenced by criollo patriotism and its vociferous precursors, beginning with the most noble of them all, Bartolome de las Casas. Apparently, Mier was so taken by Las Casas’s *Most Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies* that he sponsored three pressings of the book. After all, it was Las Casas who first led the charge against the atrocities committed by the Spaniards against the Natives, and now that criollos identified with ancient Mexicans, it was politically acceptable to make similar denouncements. While it is true that others before him had already articulated those ideas, Mier conceived his argument by melding indigenist sensibilities with a sophisticated application of criollo claims to ancestral rights that were supposedly derived from the conquest. By taking his cues from the main themes espoused by criollo patriots and transforming them into arguments justifying independence, Mier also distinguished himself from his novohispano contemporaries who simply parroted the language of European thinkers. His was a uniquely American perspective.

In this early nineteenth-century foundational period, Mier was not alone in making the case for an independent Mexican nation. Carlos Maria de Bustamante, a close friend and student of Mier’s, echoed similar sentiments. He melded the Spanish invasion and conquest with the cause of independence into a singular nationalist ideology. Bustamante was a criollo patriot of many talents, including those of historian, journalist, lawyer and statesman. As a journalist, he founded liberal-minded and independence-oriented newspapers, like the *Diario de Mexico* (1805), which he used to propagate his insurgent ideas. During the war of independence, Bustamante spent many years in and out of jail and in exile, and those events helped strengthen
his resolve in the motives for the insurrection. Because of his controversial and outspoken nature, he was also able to meet many leaders of the insurgency and acquire loyal sympathizers along the way.

One such person was none other than hero and early leader of Mexican independence, José María Morelos (Hidalgo’s successor), for whom Bustamante wrote the speech he delivered at the Congreso de Anáhuac—also called the Congreso de Chilpancingo—in 1813. This was the first independent congress that declared the total independence of North America from the Spanish throne. Making use of rhetoric provided to him by Bustamante, Morelos’ speech alluded to the conquest declaring that “the insurgents were about to free the Mexican people from the chains of servitude imposed on them in 1521.”

The following quote exemplifies the neo-Aztecism that pervaded liberal insurgent rhetoric at this time:

Spirits of Moctezuma, Cacamatzin, Cuauhtimotzin, Xicotencalt [sic] and of Catzonzi, as once you celebrated the feast in which you were slaughtered by the treacherous sword of Alvarado, now celebrate this happy moment in which your sons have united to avenge the crimes and outrages committed against you, and to free themselves from the claws of tyranny and fanaticism that were going to grasp them for ever [sic]. To the 12th August 1521 there succeeds the 14th of September 1813. In that day the chains of our servitude were fastened in Mexico Tenochtitlan, in this day in the happy village of Chilpancingo they are broken for ever [sic].

Insurgent criollos like Bustamante were so enveloped in their ideology that the irony of such statements completely escaped them. Bustamante, an ethnic criollo, appealed to his fellow patriots by alluding to previous Aztec rulers killed during the invasion of Anahuac and connected them to their cause. The descendants of the invaders were now identified with the vanquished, but not with the indigenous people of their time. Nevertheless, if not for thinkers like him, Mexican historiography would be significantly different.
Through the work of Mier, Bustamante channeled Clavijero and his neo-Aztecist narrative. Their work is intertwined to the extent that Mexican scholars credit Clavijero as the founder of Mexican nationalism and Bustamante as the father of the narrative accompanying that historical tradition. His most outstanding work in this vein is *Cuadro histórico de la revolucion mexicana, comenzada en 15 de septiembre de 1810 por el ciudadano Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla*—originally published in the form of weekly letters written and distributed between 1821-27 and later republished in an updated second edition in 1843. What made *Cuadro histórico* so appealing was the personal element that Bustamante inserted in his writing. By weaving anecdotes of his involvement with the insurgency into the historical treatises from his patriotic predecessors, Bustamante’s words carried the weight of knowledge and personal experience behind them.

The influence that Clavijero had on Bustamante cannot be overstated. It served as the cornerstone for the nationalist edifice that Bustamante created, but Clavijero was not his only influence. Bustamante’s ideas were also informed by early scientific approaches to Mexico and its indigenous landscape. These approaches can be termed as “scientific neo-Aztecism” for their positivist focus on indigenous monumentalism. Two individuals that stand out in this approach are Alexander von Humboldt and José Antonio Alzate y Ramírez.

**Scientific Neo-Aztecism**

The first notable neo-Aztecist scientist in Mexico was José Antonio Alzate y Ramírez. Alzate was a *criollo* priest, scientist, historian, cartographer, and journalist. He also published the periodical *Gazeta de literatura* between 1788 and 1795, which, despite its name, was mainly a repository of contemporary scientific reviews and reports, including his own. He specialized
in material about indigenes and Mexican antiquities and even conducted one of the first studies of Mexican architectural ruins, “Descripción de las antigüedades de Xochicalco” (1791). As is evident from the following statement, Alzate was sympathetic to indigenous concerns, lamented the destruction of their pre-invasion civilization, and subscribed to the greatness narrative of neo-Aztecism:

If the indiscreet zeal of some, and the greedy ignorance of others, had not destroyed the Mexican monuments, a large portion of antiquities could be collected with which to ascertain the exact origin of their monarchs, their commerce, and it would finally become clear that it was one of the mightiest nations of the world.

In addition to exalting the glorious past, he also defended contemporary Natives from those who impugned their character. Figures like Alzate were few in this period of Mexican history, but he served as a throwback to the indigenists of the early colonial period, like Clavijero and Las Casas, who still held a compassionate regard towards living indigenous people.

Alzate’s interest in the high civilizations of Mexico and the general history of New Spain reflected an increased self-awareness and pride in being criollo that was present in other parts of the Spanish colonies. Bustamante tapped into that self-awareness and added his voice to those emanating from around the empire. But Alzate’s was not the only voice or reason in Bustamante’s rhetorical arsenal. He also had the work of Alexander von Humboldt that he could point towards for reassurance. Humboldt was a German naturalist and explorer who was a major figure in the classical period of what are now called the earth sciences and ecology. He traveled through South America and made his way through New Spain compiling data for future analysis.

After completing his travels in the New World, Humboldt returned to Europe where over the course of twenty years he published numerous books, essays, and academic papers based on
his research. The most influential of Humboldt’s work on criollo patriots like Bustamante was the *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain* (1811). In it, he emphasized the wealth of the land still waiting to be unearthed and discovered, while pointing out that Mexico had the potential of becoming a world power under an efficient, enlightened and liberally minded administration. Humboldt offered a vision of what was possible for Mexico along with a guide on how to accomplish it. Bustamante shared that vision for an independent Mexico.

The peculiar thing about Humboldt is that while insurgent ideologues like Mier and Bustamante could cite him as a source for the potential of a triumphant Mexico, critics of the criollo indigenist paradigm could also cite him in repudiation of those very same things. One of the most damaging texts in this line of thought was *Vues des Cordillères, et monumens des peuples indigènes de l’Amérique* (1810). Humboldt described the Aztecs as: “A mountain people, warlike, robust but extremely ugly according to European ideals of beauty, numbed by despotism, and accustomed to the ceremonies of a bloodthirsty religion, they were already reluctant to rise to the cultivation of the fine arts.” Conservative leaning individuals certainly favored this line of thinking towards the Aztecs and indios in general, but it was not the prevailing attitude at the time. This was a time of liberal ideas, indigenismo, and independence, and criollo sensibilities dominated much of the ideological rhetoric.

**Conservative and Liberal Uses of Indigenismo**

The allure of indigenismo was so great that even conservative leaders appealed to it. Take the case of Anastasio Bustamante (Conservative Party), Mexico’s first conservative president in office between 1830 and 1832. In his attempt to stem the flow of illegal immigration from the United States into Texas, he instructed General Manuel de Mier y Terán to establish fortified
settlements (forts) called *presidios* in that province. At least three of those *presidios* were named in honor of indigenous cultures. The first two, Anáhuac and Tenoxtitlán, referred to the Aztec name for greater Mexico and the capital of their empire respectively. On the other hand, the third one—Lipantitlán, was named after a Lipan Apache band that encamped near the site. Historian John R. Chávez notes that this action by the central government in using native place names was an attempt “to strengthen ties with the Indian tribes in Texas.” Chávez adds further: “Independence from Spain had fostered pride in Mexico’s native background, and the symbols of that background were constantly used in attempts to unite the country and give the people a sense of nationality.” Of the three, only Anahuac survived the wresting of Texas from Mexico by illegal alien freebooters from the U.S., ingrate Anglo-Texian settlers, and sympathetic disgruntled Tejano separatists.

By the mid nineteenth-century, liberals started distancing themselves from romantic indigenism and became critical of the merits of neo-Aztecism. For example, during the Guerra de Reforma (Reform War) of 1857-61—a civil war between liberals and conservatives—many liberals viewed the indigenous past as irrelevant and a hindrance to the social and political advancement of the country. In their eyes, the struggle against Spain was a distant memory and the need to identify with the Aztecs in order to anchor their *mexicanidad*, or Mexicanness, was no longer necessary. Where once the liberal heroes of the War of Independence exalted the greatness of Cuauhtémoc, their successors now dismissed his people as barbarous and regarded contemporary Natives as obstructions to the modernization of the nation.

Ironically, nowhere was this more evident than with high ranking cabinet members of indigenous President Benito Juárez’s government. Ignacio Ramírez, the Minister of Justice and an admirer of Humboldt, condemned “the Aztec realm as an abject despotism, dominated by
superstition and fear, the surviving remnants of its art and literature only notable only for their barbaric taste.”30 At the heart of this about-face lay the concerns that many liberals expressed during this transformative period of Mexican politics. For one, liberals viewed the power and wealth of the Catholic Church as an impediment to the emergence of a secular nation. In their opinion, religious influence had no place in a modern liberal state. Secondly, liberals perceived that the rural isolation of the mostly indigenous peasantry signaled the persistence of a backward society. Desiring to model their country like that of their prosperous northern neighbor, liberals convinced themselves that shedding their indigenous skin was more beneficial than trying to hold on to a romantic idealization of ancient Mexico. Even so, it was understood that whether you were a criollo, mestizo, or indio, everyone constituted a single political, if not social, nation of mexicanos. The rejection of what had been a romantic form of indigenism set the stage for its more problematic offshoots in the twentieth-century—that of scientific indigenism and the extremely popular mestizo identity.

Invented Indigenismo

While a point of this study is to demonstrate the connection between the romantic indigenism of the twentieth-century to that of the colonial period, it is worth mentioning that there is little resemblance between the two ends of that same ideological strand. The only unifying traits common throughout Mexican indigenism is the constant inventing and revising of Native history to suit the political pursuit du jour. Speaking directly to this phenomenon, O’Gorman’s seminal book, La invención de América: investigación acerba de la estructura histórica del nuevo mundo y del sentido de su devenir (1958), looked at the idea of America vis-
à-vis the European imaginary of the so-called New World. O’Gorman’s argument was simple: “Columbus did not discover America; it was invented by Europeans.”

The key to the riddle centers on the term “discover.” O’Gorman states: “‘Discovery’ implies that the nature of the thing found was previously known to the finder, i.e., that he knows that objects such as the one he has found can and do exist, although the existence of that particular one was wholly unknown.” O’Gorman wondered how it could be that anyone could talk of discovering anything without having had prior knowledge of the thing in question. Stressing his point, O’Gorman used the planets to explain that: “Thus an astronomer who is already aware that some heavenly bodies are classed as planets may be said to have ‘discovered’ … But the astronomer who first has the conception of such bodies as ‘planets’ may properly be said to have ‘invented’ [them].” Using this reasoning, O’Gorman argued that Europeans constructed an image of the Americas that fit any narrative of their choosing. Hence, the existence of countless texts espousing conflicting views that range the wide spectrum between “savage” and “noble” Indians and some really bizarre descriptions of the land itself. Some of the more strange inventions about the Americas from European writers included incredible ideas about strange creatures (animal and human), islands of Amazonian women, St. Thomas as Quetzalcoatl, and Columbus’s favorite—the existence of a terrestrial paradise, the Garden of Eden.

Despite their efforts to distance themselves from Europe, indigenist romanticists engaged in the very same Eurocentric tradition of inventing America, or in this case Mexico, for their patriotic and nationalist interests. By appropriating the Indian past, criollo patriots could legitimate their cause and struggle for liberty, while simultaneously engaging in the creation of nationalist myths. Anyone familiar with basic Mexican culture and history understands the
strong association with the Aztecs as the founders of the nation and Cuauhtémoc as its most revered tragic hero. Following this thread, historian Paul Gillingham looked closely at the cult-like following of certain skeletal remains at a church in Ixcateopan, Guerrero attributed to Cuauhtémoc—the fallen Mexica leader. An official government report conducted by archeologists and specialists in 1950 concluded that it was impossible to determine whether the remains were in fact those of Cuauhtémoc, but they admitted that it was highly unlikely.

Nevertheless, this story does more than shed light onto this corner of romantic indigenism. The story also provides historical context for why the modern cult of Cuauhtémoc exists today, and his findings reveal that nationalism and (romantic) indigenism played a major role. Additionally, we learn that Cuauhtémoc has been resurrected several times in Mexican history, with the latest incarnation of the legendary hero being one that transcends “constructions of nationalism.” For all intents and purposes, it is a modern cult. One need only look at the way that danzantes and neo-Mexikas revere Cuauhtémoc to note that he is almost a Christ-like figure that died for Mexico’s sins. What is striking about the impassioned displays of romantic indigenism coming from cultural nationalists like these is their obliviousness to the origins of their traditions and beliefs. It would come as a huge surprise to most neo-Mexikas if they realized that criollos—a group they would construe as purely Spanish and completely antithetical to their indigeneity—were the intellectual and cultural progenitors of the Mexikayotl movement.

Indeed, many historical analyses that have explored Mexican cultural nationalism agree that romantic indigenism is traceable to the early writers and later adopted by criollo/mestizo patriots. One thing these studies show is that there is a common thread running through the indigenist discourse before the twentieth-century—a politically driven affinity for the declension
narrative. This is particularly interesting given that criollos themselves were, in fact, part of the elite class whose very own ancestors were responsible for the declension they now appropriated. Positioning themselves as the oppressed, criollos betrayed their privileged status by letting their feelings of second class citizenship govern their judgment, especially when it came to economic concerns and complaints of foreign domination by the Spanish. By assuming the role of the vanquished aboriginals, criollo patriots could justify their struggle against their colonial oppressors.

Alluding to the Native societies that had flourished as well as to the legitimacy of their sovereigns, criollo patriots derided the illegitimacy of the Spanish conquest as usurpation. Additionally, by pointing to indigenous resistance and leaders like Cuauhtémoc, they could claim patriotic duty in defense of American hereditary rights. If the conquest and subsequent colonization was nothing more than a brutal invasion, then the formation of sovereign states independent of Spain was nothing more than the recovery of lost freedom and the vindication of ancestral liberties. In order for such claims to ring true, it was necessary to construct an argument that appealed to the criollo and mestizo masses. This line of thought was not unique to New Spain; it was also evident in other parts of Spanish America, such as the Viceroyalty of Perú. For example, take the hypothetical dialogue from the Argentinean revolutionary hero and radical author, Bernardo de Monteagudo.41 After Ferdinand VII’s adjudication of the Spanish thrown, Monteagudo anonymously wrote and distributed—in what was then called Alto Perú (modern day Bolivia)—a text entitled, “Diálogo entre Atahualpa y Fernando VII en los Campos Eliseos” (1809).42 Through the sympathetic voice of Atahualpa, Monteagudo—the son of a criollo father and an African mother—juxtaposed the loss of the Inca Emperor with Ferdinard VII’s lament.
By donning the mask of a martyred Atahualpa, Monteagudo could then make the claim that the Spanish had no right to rule over the land that they had stripped from indigenous sovereigns, just as the French had done to Ferdinand. By the end of the dialogue Atahualpa persuades Ferdinand of his argument for American independence: “Convinced by your reasoning, I agree with what you say, and therefore, if I yet lived, I myself would urge [Americans] to liberty and independence, rather than live subject to a foreign nation.”43 To understand how Monteagudo makes the case for independence through a dead Native ruler, an examination of the text is in order. First, here is Ferdinand’s lament:

I am Ferdinand of the Bourbons, seventh by that name, and the most sad and disgraced of all the sovereigns … For I was just proclaimed by my people as the monarch of Spain and the Indies when the most infamous, the most vile of all living men, that is to say, the ambitious Napoleon, the usurper Bonaparte, pulled me from the sweet breast and lap of my country and of my Kingdom, and imputing to me false and fictitious crimes, as prisoner led me to the center of France.44

To this, Monteagudo’s hypothetical Atahualpa retorts:

Your misfortunes, tender young man, hurt me, all the more so since from personal experience I know that the pain of the one who, like me, is unjustly deprived of a scepter and a crown is immense … As unjust and iniquitous the conquest you have noticed of Spain by Bonaparte is, do not feel bad or surprised for I have graded the Spanish domination of America as an equally furtive usurpation.45

As mentioned above, the dialogue results in Atahualpa bringing Ferdinand to recognize that his plight is no more salient than that of the martyred Inca ruler. Ferdinand then also agrees that Spanish colonization deprived America of its liberty and self-determination.
By carefully constructing his argument, Monteagudo, through Atahualpa’s voice, calls into question the legal titles that Spain floats over America. As a liberal thinker, he criticizes the emptiness of Christianity and the disproportionate application of its religious exigencies, as well as the cumulative deficiencies of the colonial regime. This is spelled out in a list of grievances for which Ferdinand has no other choice but to assess the Spanish system as a form of foreign domination and approve the move towards independence. Throughout the text, Monteagudo impressively puts words in the mouth of an indigenous leader who not only describes the painful history of Native people, but also exposes the deep political and economic complaints of criollos. The purpose of merging these two strands of colonial society in the dialog is undoubtedly to create a common cause among the various castes. To that purpose, Atahualpa closes the dialogue by stating that he will communicate the good news “to Moctezuma and the rest of the ancient kings of America … that their vassals are ready to cheer that long live freedom.”

Ultimately, the implication of the text is that those who were then advocating for liberty, the criollos, were the inheritors of the imperial Native past. In that way, they struggled on behalf of all subjects, including indigenous people who were now conveniently part of one American whole.

With such historical considerations, criollos claimed for themselves the history of indigenous people before and after the conquest. By alluding to the lack of freedom and to the oppression of the Natives, they could also publicly denounce the oppression and lack of freedom of all America. Thus, criollo propagandists transposed the foreign domination, oppression, and exploitation that Indians had suffered since the conquest to their own caste. The identification with the history of the Natives was so deeply held that in some texts criollos appeared as the oppressed indigenous people themselves. Characterizing themselves as Natives, criollos
minimized ethnic and social differences with the intention of constructing for all people born in America the same belonging to the country. In that way, they could claim the right to the recovery of freedom lost since the conquest. Consequently, the liberation of indigenous people served as political propaganda and pretext for the independence movement. Since criollos acted on behalf of their unfortunate partners, it is unsurprising to find that they considered themselves as avengers fighting to correct the past injustices suffered by their defenseless indigenous brethren.

Once the Mexican nation was established, liberals like Bustamante continued advocating their “historical indigenismo,” as Brading describes it. Whether historical or romantic, the end result of indigenism was the same—to emphasize the roots of the nation in Mexican antiquity. From this ideologically driven narrative there are three premises that emerged:

1. The Mexican nation was founded when the Aztecs established themselves in Tenochtitlan.
2. The conquest was essentially the subjugation of the nation at the hands of foreigners.
3. Independence allowed its liberation after three-hundred years of Hispanic oppression and the return of its government to the real owners.

In this way, the Aztec mythos became inextricably intertwined with the identity of the Mexican nation to the exclusion of all other indigenous groups. Even after Maya culture began to receive international attention due to the discovery of surviving architectural ruins, art, and hieroglyphs, the Aztec image remained as the primordial identity of the nation. However, as mentioned at the top of this chapter, indigenism was not the only ideological strain competing for the collective identity of the emergent republic.
Reactive Hispanismo

The seeds of hispanismo can be traced to the early colonial period, as was shown in the previous chapter. Despite the prevalence of indigenist thought among criollos, there were those who maintained loyalty to the crown—as the royalists did during the War of Independence. It is from this subset of criollos that the hispanista tradition survived. Recall that hispanismo was a conservative reaction to indigenismo whose adherents held Native culture in contempt and lamented the loss of Spanish dominance in Mexico. Perhaps the scholar who best embodied this tradition was Lucas Alamán.

Alamán’s case was a peculiar one, and it will help explain his repulsion at the indigenist rhetoric espoused by the criollo patriots. While Bustamante had proactively immersed himself in the independence struggle, Alamán was only a young man of eighteen years when Father Hidalgo’s ragtag indio/mestizo army sacked his hometown of Guanajuato in 1810. A criollo himself, Alamán witnessed firsthand the massacre of many friends and family, and he barely escaped with his life. These terrorizing and life-shattering events left an indelible scar that forever influenced his anti-Indian, anti-liberal conservatism. For criollos like Alamán, Cortés was the father of their country and not the venerated Aztec hero Cuauhtémoc. Theirs was a Catholic, Spanish, and Bourbon Mexico that had been upended and severely disrupted by radical insurgents and wrongheaded liberals. In trying to correct that disruption, Alamán dedicated his life to politics and writing histories that evoked a different kind of greatness, that of New Spain and its hero Cortés.

In his work, Alamán celebrated the life of Cortés, the conquest of Mexico, and the colonial society on which the nation had been founded. As Brading explains, Alamán was: “Careful not to disparage the Aztecs, he simply ignored their achievements. His purpose here
was to contradict the historical *indigenistas*, such as Mier and Bustamante, who had identified the Aztecs as the national ancestors of modern Mexicans.\(^{52}\) This was strategic on his part, because he did not want to antagonize the majority of nationalists who were content in accepting the indigenist tropes so long as they helped unify a deeply divided country. Nonetheless, Alamán could not resist throwing a few jabs as he criticized his intellectual opponents:

> The conquest … has eventually created a new nation in which all trace of the past has been erased: religion, customs, language, people—all come from the conquest … Those who have sought to base the justice of independence on the injustice of the conquest, without pausing to consider all these effects, have failed to see that their case leaves two-thirds of the republic's population without a country and the republic itself without rights to the immense territory which lay outside the Mexican Empire.\(^{53}\)

With ideas like these, Alamán initiated the *hispanista* tradition that takes full shape by the turn of the nineteenth-century with thinkers like Vasconcelos. The *hispanista* interpretation of Mexican history was so unconventional for scholars at the time, that his peers were flabbergasted by Alamán’s scorn and dismissive attitude towards the Aztecs. As Brading notes: “Hispanism was not a Mexican tradition; it sprang from a new reaction against current *indigenismo*; it served as a weapon to attack the present.”\(^{54}\) In other words, Alamán’s *hispanismo* was really a conservative reaction to liberal indigenism, and the struggle for cultural dominance between the two ideologies led directly to the birth of modern *mexicanidad*, or Mexicanness—the quality or characteristic of being Mexican.

**Conclusion**

The *hispanista* tradition gained a strong following among many liberal minded thinkers and politicians during the second half of the nineteenth-century, especially after the Guerra de
Reforma. But it gets even more complicated. During this crucial point in Mexican history, when pro-reform radical ideologues, like Ignacio Ramírez and Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, summoned the *patria* (homeland), they were not calling on either Cortés or Cuauhtémoc—they celebrated Hidalgo as the “Father of the patria.”\(^55\) *Criollo* patriotism and nationalism had evolved into this. Even Mexico’s most heroic president, Benito Juárez—an astute politician of indigenous Zapotec descent—ignored the indigenist rhetoric that had defined his predecessors. Juaréz was a liberal patriot who admired the example embodied by the United States—a democratic republic founded on the classical liberal principles of freedom, equality, and capitalism. His most famous quote is a testament to that belief: “Among individuals, as among nations, respect for the rights of others is peace.”\(^56\) As a liberal, he subscribed to the Western notion of the individual citizen with equal rights and liberties, and not to the collectivist communal tradition of his indigenous forbearers.

From this ideological background, one characterized by its schizophrenic attitude towards ancient Mexico and Spain, *criollo* notions of patriotism and Mexican nationalism were transformed into new variants of indigenist and hispanist cultural politics. Out of this dynamic between the two camps of Mexican historiography emerged the more recognizable *mexicanidad* of today—one that borrows and blends from both historical traditions while looking forward to modernity. Furthermore, historical and romantic indigenism reached its national apogee in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution of 1910 with the emergence of neo-Aztec groups in and around Mexico City. In due time, all of these overlapping and conflicting ideologies would transcend their national confines and influence the cultural politics of ethnic Mexican communities in the U.S. But before we get there, the framework for transnational Mexican indigeneity must be constructed from *indigenismo, hispanismo, nacionalismo,* and *mexicanidad.*

2 Ibid., 469.

3 Manuel Gamio was the first director of the first government office of anthropology in the Americas, 1917-27. He fused the methods and goals of archeology and applied anthropology in his famous study of Teotihuacán. His type of scientific indigenism will be discussed further in the following chapter.

4 Eulalia Guzmán had ties with some of the early leaders of the Mexikayotl movement, and due to her extreme idealization of Aztec culture and anti-Spanish feelings, it appears that she was involved in some of the historical revision that is now a prominent feature of contemporary Mexikayotl.

5 Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought*, 470.


7 Perhaps the best known treatise on the subject is Miguel León Portilla's, *Toltecáyotl: Aspectos de La Cultura Náhuatl*, 1a ed. Sección de Obras de Antropología (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1980). Portilla is a preeminent Mexican scholar who has written voluminously on Aztec-Nahua culture. In the introduction to *Toltecáyotl*, he defines the term thus: “the essence and set of creations of the Toltecs ... the legacy of Quetzalcóatl and the Toltecs encompassed the black and red ink—wisdom, writing and calendrics, the painted books, the knowledge of the paths that the stars follow, the arts...” Original Spanish: “esencia y conjunto de creaciones de los toltecas ... el legado de Quetzalcóatl y los toltecas abarcaba la tinta negra y roja —la sabiduría—, escritura y calendario, libros de pintura, conocimiento de los caminos que siguen los astros, las artes” (7).

8 Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought*, 322.


10 Scholars who have looked at the history of Mexican uprisings tend to agree that the thrust of insurrection has usually come from the within the peasantry and agrarian sectors of that society. Father Miguel Hidalgo’s revolt, which was comprised of mainly indigenous and mestizo peasants is an excellent example of this. It appears that the criollo elite only got on board the insurgency after it became clear that they could not control the masses. The insurrection of 1810 and how it pertains to the subject of this study will be discussed below. For more on the matter, see Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); and John Tutino, *From Insurrection to Revolution in Mexico: Social Bases of Agrarian Violence, 1750-1940* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1986).

11 Although here we have an example of the term *mexicano* being employed to refer to *criollos*, I will refrain from using it that context until I discuss the post-independence period so as to not confuse the reader. During this period, the term is still primarily used in reference to Nahuatl-speaking indigenous people or to residents of Mexico City. It could be the case that the Frenchman used the term because he was talking about visitors from the capital.

12 Tutino, for example, begins his study in the middle eighteenth-century and explains that agrarian revolts, although few at that time, were always a present danger for the propertied elite Spaniards. See chapter two of *From Insurrection to Revolution in Mexico*, 41–98.

13 This summary of Mexican Independence was gathered from the following sources: Lucas Alamán, *Historia de Méjico: Desde Los Primeros Movimientos Que Prepararon Su Independencia En El Año de 1808, Hasta La Época Presente*, vol. 1, 5 vols. (Méjico: Impr. de J.M. Lara, 1849); David A. Brading, *The First America: The
14 The term “gachupín” was originally used to describe peninsulares in general, especially those who had recently arrived in New Spain; however, it later came to be used as a pejorative towards that group. For an interesting etymology see: Francisco Javier Santamaría, Diccionario de Mejicanismos: Razonado, Comprobado Con Citas de Autoridades, Comparado Con El de Americanismos Y Con Los Vocabularios Provinciales de Los Más Distinguidos Diccionaristas Hispanoamericanos, 2. ed (Méjico: Editorial Porrúa, 1974), 541–43.


16 I realize that the term “Mexicano” as self referent among criollos was in usage well before this time. What I mean to say here is that, just as the English colonists became Americans after their declaration, the same applies to criollos after the “Grito.”

17 See footnote in: Edmund O’Gorman and Servando Teresa de Mier, Antología del pensamiento político americano: Fray Servando Teresa de Mier (México: Impr. Universitaria, 1945), xx; Dominique Dufour de Pradt, Des colonies et de la révolution actuelle de l’Amérique (Paris: Bechét, 1817). De Pradt apparently was deeply interested in Spain’s problems with its colonies and wrote several books on the matter. Although, now summarily forgotten, his influence was such that, in 1822, the Mexican congress considered, but rejected, a proposal to erect a public statue in his honor (see footnote in O’Gorman and Mier, xxxi).


19 O’Gorman and Mier, Antología del pensamiento político americano, xx. Original Spanish: “Hemos nacido en ella y ese es el derecho natural de los pueblos.”


21 Bustamante wrote the text to Morelos’s inaugural speech to the Congreso de Anáhuac and helped draft Los Sentimientos de la Nación, which is basically Mexico’s declaration of independence. Brading, The First America, 636.

22 Quoted in Brading, The Origins of Mexican Nationalism, 52. Original Spanish: “¡Genios de Montezuma, de Cacamatzín, de Cuauhtimotzín, de Xicoténcatl y de Cantzoni, celebrad como celebrasteis el mitote en que fuisteis acometidos por la pérfida espada de Alvarado, este dichoso instante en que vuestros hijos se han reunido para vengar vuestros desafueros y ultrajes, y librarse de las garras de la tiranía y fanatismo que os iba a sorber para siempre! Al 12 de agosto de 1521 sucedió el 14 de septiembre. En aquél se apretaron las cadenas de nuestra servidumbre en México Tenoxtilán, en éste se rompen para siempre en el venturoso pueblo de Chilpantzingo.” In Carlos María de Bustamante, Cuadro histórico de la revolucion mexicana, comenzada en 15 de septiembre de 1810 por el ciudadano Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla. (Méjico: Impr. de J.M. Lara, 1843), 634.


24 Title translation: “Description of the antiquities of Xochicalco.” This is offered as a supplement of 24 pages in the Gacetas de Literatura de Mexico, 1831.
Original Spanish: “Si el celo indiscreto de algunos, y la codiciosa ignorancia de otros, no hubiesen destruido los monumentos mexicanos, se podría colectar una grande porción de antigüedades con que averiguar el legítimo origen de sus monarcas, su comercio, y finalmente se haría patente el que era una nación de las poderosas del orbe.” Alzate y Ramirez, Gacetas de Literatura de Mexico, 2: 466.

26 Alexander von Humboldt, Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain: Containing Researches Relative to the Geography of Mexico, the Extent of Its Surface and Its Political Division into Intendancies, the Physical Aspect of the Country, the Population, the State of Agriculture and Manufacturing and Commercial Industry, the Canals Projected between the South Sea and Atlantic Ocean, the Crown Revenues, the Quantity of the Precious Metals Which Have Flowed from Mexico into Europe and Asia, since the Discovery of the New Continent, and the Military Defence of New Spain, trans. John Black (New-York: I. Riley, 1811).


29 Ibid.


32 The following section on O’Gorman is adapted from a blog post I published under a pseudonym, Tlakatekatl, “Is ‘America’ an Indigenous Word?” [Mexika.org], May 13, 2015, https://mexika.org/2015/05/12/is-america-an-indigenous-word/.


34 Ibid.


37 Ibid. Particularly look at Chapter Four, “The Usual Suspects,” which offers a historiographical approach to Cuauhtémoc’s legacy by indigenist authors through the centuries. More than just exposing the bones as frauds, Gillingham places the figure of Cuauhtémoc in the historical context as a rallying national symbol. He also explains that there was a period between independence and the revolution when the Aztec hero was all but forgotten, only to be revived during the Porfiriato. It is also worth mentioning that Father Mier claimed to be a direct descendant of Cuauhtémoc himself.

38 Ibid., 197.
Every year, on Cuauhtémoc’s birthday (February 23), *danzantes* invade Ixcateopan to honor their hero. Gillingham notes that the entire event takes place on the last week of February, beginning with Cuauhtémoc’s birthday and culminating with his death on the 28th. He estimates that “an average of two to three thousand visitors pass through Ixcateopan” the week of the celebrations. Ibid., 266, footnote 3.

The connection between criollo patriots/nationalists from the colonial period and neo-Mexikas in the twentieth-century will become clearer in the following chapter. For now, suffice it to say that one of the intellectual authors and leaders of the modern “Mexikayotl movement” (MM) originally described himself as a criollo descendant before adopting the Mexika identity and immersing himself in Aztec thought and culture.

Although I have not made many references to the wider criollo literature coming from throughout Spanish America during the period known as that of the “Wars of Independence,” I am well aware of their existence and influence on Mexican authors, and vice versa. For those wanting more on this, see Brading’s: *The Origins of Mexican Nationalism*; and *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492-1867*. There is an extensive volume of titles that address the issue of criollo indigensim too long to list, but there are a couple of recent books worth mentioning: Rebecca A. Earle, *The Return of the Native: Indians and Myth-Making in Spanish America, 1810–1930* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007); and Estelle Tarica, *The Inner Life of Mestizo Nationalism* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). Earle’s book looks at the indigenist phenomenon from 1780-1930—or as she calls it, “Latin America’s ‘long nineteenth-century’” (2). Tarica deals more with academic indigenismo as exemplified by the cultural philosophers of the early twentieth-century, i.e. José Vasconcelos, Alfonso Caso, and José María Arguedas.

Bernardo de Monteagudo, “Diálogo Entre Atahualpa Y Fernando VII En Los Campos Elíseos,” in *Pensamiento Político de La Emancipación*, ed. Luis Alberto Romero and José Luis Romero, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Caracas, Venezuela: Fundación Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1977), 64–71. Monteagudo’s authorship of this text is questioned by some scholars, but it is attributed to him. Besides writing political pieces like this, he started several newspapers throughout South America and was one of the key figures in the struggle for independence, namely in Argentina, Chile, and Perú. I have tried to locate an English version to this text unsuccessfully, but Earle translates the title thus: “Dialogue between Atahualpa and Ferdinand VII in the Elysian Fields;” *The Return of the Native*, 32.


Monteagudo, “Diálogo Entre Atahualpa Y Fernando VII En Los Campos Elíseos,” 64. Original Spanish: “Fernando soy de Barbón, séptimo de aqueste nombre, de todos los soberanos el más triste y desgraciado … Porque apenas por mis pueblos fui monarca proclamado de la España y de las Indias, cuando el más infame, el más vil de todos los hombres vivientes, es decir, el ambicioso Napoleón, el usurpador Bonaparte, con engaños me arrancó del dulce seno y regazo de mi patria y de mi Reino, e imputándome delitos todos falsos y ficticios, prisionero me condujo hasta el centro de la Francia.”

Ibid. Original Spanish: Tus desdichas, tierno joven, me lastiman, tanto más cuanto por propia experiencia sé que es inmenso el dolor que padece quien, cual yo, se ve injustamente privado de un cetro y de una corona … Pues que de injusta e inicua la conquista habéis notado de España por Bonaparte, ni te sientas ni te admires que de usurpada y furtiva igualmente yo gradúe la dominación que ha tenido en América el español.

Ibid., 71. Original Spanish: “Idos, pues, Fernando, a Dios, que yo también a Moctezuma y otros reyes de la América darles quiero la feliz nueva de que sus vasallos están ya a punto de decir que viva la libertad.”

For more on this idea of assuming the role of the oppressed, see Hans-Joachim König, *En el camino hacia la nación: nacionalismo en el proceso de formación del estado y de la nación de la Nueva Granada, 1750 a 1856* (Santafé de Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1994), 242.

König, *En el camino hacia la nación*. König also explores the function that self-identification as “Americans” by criollos played as a temporary and convenient political strategy. Eventually, liberals in the decades
following independence would come to reject and even disavow any connection criollos had with American antiquity and indigenous people all together.

49 Brading describes “historical indigenismo” thusly: “They [liberal insurgents] played upon the deep-seated anti-Spanish emotions of both elite and masses by a revival of the Black Legend. Underlying this appeal was the assumption of the survival of a Mexican nation, already in existence when the Spaniards arrived and now about to regain its liberty. The old Creole patriotism was here transmuted into a nationalistic rhetoric.” Brading, The Origins of Mexican Nationalism, 50.

50 These are taken from Baruc Martínez Díaz, “Aztekayotl-Mexihkayotl: una aproximación histórica al movimiento de la mexicanidad (1922-1959)” (Bachelor’s thesis, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2010), 31. Martínez Díaz deduces this from his reading of Brading, The Origins of Mexican Nationalism. Original Spanish: “... la nación mexicana fue fundada cuando los aztecas se establecieron en Tenochtitlan, la conquista fue el sometimiento de esta nación a manos de unos extranjeros, la independencia permitió liberarla de trescientos años de opresión hispánica y devolverle el gobierno a los verdaderos dueños de él.”

51 Alamán, Historia de Méjico, 1:282.

52 Brading, The Origins of Mexican Nationalism, 77.


54 Brading, The Origins of Mexican Nationalism, 78.

55 Ibid., 100.

56 Original Spanish: “Entre los individuos, como entre las naciones, el respeto al derecho ajeno es la paz,”
Chapter 3
AZTEKAS AND THE EMERGENCE OF MEXIKAYOTL, 1910-1950

Introduction

The modern story of *indigenismo* begins in the years leading up to the Mexican Revolution in 1910. Unlike the disparate social milieu surrounding the insurrection of 1810, a more unified national consciousness operated, albeit loosely, by the end of the 1800s. Despite their political and ideological differences, *mestizos* and *criollos* both considered themselves members of a single Mexican nation. And, by not explicitly mentioning indigenous peoples, the constitution of 1824 established a common citizenship between them and non-indigenous people alike. Thus, in the newly formed Estados Unidos Mexicanos (United States of Mexico), there were no citizenship distinctions between any of the previous *castas*. This did not preclude the rise of regionalism among the rural peasantry and indigenous communities who still regarded themselves in parochial and provincial terms while retaining localized regional identities.¹

This division between the two Mexicos—urban-wealthy mixed/white versus rural-poor indigenous/peasant—was rooted in prejudice and colonial stratification and was a contributing factor to the revolution.² Historian John Tutino has shown how the factionalism and irreconcilable differences that existed among these social groups nourished the hunger that brought about agrarian discontent. He noted that between the 1840s through the 1880s there were: “… recurring waves of agrarian violence to widespread areas of Mexico … the causes of
that conflict were the attempts by struggling elites to use their new and often unstable powers of state to compensate for economic difficulties and to impose their will on the rural poor. Not only was Mexican society largely divided by regionalism and race at this time, but class and political power were also key factors that determined the best course of action suited for dealing with the rampant civil unrest.

After Benito Juárez’s death the democratic experiment he had envisioned for his beloved country began its slow regression into autocratic despotism. In 1877, General Porfirio Díaz assumed the presidency for the first time, although, he had effectively controlled the government since his coup d’état the year before. In addition to being a well seasoned veteran of multiple wars—the Guerra de Reforma (1857), the French Intervention of 1862, and other military engagements, Díaz was also a cunning politician who managed to stay in power for three and a half decades. This controversial period of Mexican history is known as the Porfiriato. Díaz’s dictatorship provided a stabilized government by suppressing civil unrest while championing the economic success of capitalist investors and the landed elite. Conversely, the Porfiriato encouraged excesses by the wealthy and profiteering by foreign investors at the expense of the working poor who suffered immensely. A comparable example would be if the Great Depression (times two) had lasted for thirty years only in the Unites States of America. All of these factors contributed to the revolt in 1910, but it was Díaz’s assumption of the presidency for an eighth term while refusing to accept Francisco I. Madero’s challenge in an open democratic election that sparked the call to arms.
Indigenist Artists

Amid this political turmoil and civil unrest we find the modern indigenist artists who had already begun molding and creating the nationalist tropes that helped define the country’s identity in the twentieth-century. One of these artists was Gerardo Murillo, better known by his artistic name Doctor Atl (Nahuatl for water)—a curious pseudonym in its simplicity and subject matter. Atl was a creative storyteller, and his recollection surrounding the origin of his Nahuatl name is emblematic of that talent:

I made a trip, many years ago, from New York to Paris, and on the ship I suffered a terrible storm. The ship almost sank, which would have given me much pleasure. Even the captain became seasick. So much water, man, and here I am with this name. I’m going to name myself water in some language! It seemed to me that there were none beautiful enough for me to have. Water in French, eau, in Spanish too. I’m going to name myself water in Nahuatl. I named myself Atl. I arrived in Paris, and with that name I signed my canvases, my commitments, et cetera . . .

Apparently, this soul-searching trip occurred in 1896, the same year that Atl’s distaste for the pervasive Spanish influence in Mexican culture started to manifest itself, but his naming adventure did not end there. Sometime in the early nineteen-teens, during another stay in Paris, his friend the Argentine poet, Leopoldo Lugones, commented on the simplicity of Atl’s name and suggested that he add a title to it:

That of only Atl is very ugly; why don’t you add a title to it? To which I said, title of prince, king, of what . . . No, no, no, a title . . . Ah, well I’m a doctor in philosophy . . . Doctor Atl!, then the next day we called our friends, who were many, and in his apartment, which was very nice, they filled a tub with champagne, undressed me and put me in the tub and they said to me: you are Doctor Atl. And since then I am Doctor Atl.
More importantly, with this action, he inadvertently initiated a naming tradition among romantic indigenists that survives to this day. Atl was so enamored with the idea of Nahuatl naming that he renamed Carmen Mondragón—his lover and object of artistic expression—“Nahui Ollin” (Four Movement), the Aztec metaphor for the current age, the four basic elements of life, the four seasons, among other concepts. Although, not as well known as his contemporaries, Atl is famous for his landscape paintings of Mexico’s volcanoes, and, according to Orozco, he was the “father” of Mexican muralist art.7

In 1875, a year before Porfirio Díaz rose to power, José Gerardo Francisco Murillo was born to Don Eutiquio and Doña Rosa in Guadalajara, Jalisco. His father—of Castilian descent—was a pharmaceutical chemist whose claim to fame was the receipt of an award by the prestigious French Academy of Sciences. His mother—of Catalan descent—was a pious woman whose two daughters Carmen and Guadalupe became nuns. He also had two brothers, Circilio and Luis, of whom little is known. Atl came from a comfortable urban middle class background, and the relative wealth of his family was enough to send him to the Liceo de Varones de Guadalajara, one of the largest institutions of education in Jalisco at the time. Showing interest in the arts from an early age, Atl made his way to Le Havre, France in 1897 and stayed with Baron Gostkowski, a cosmopolitan aristocrat of Franco-Slavic descent, who spent many years in Mexico (even became a citizen) where he was known for his satirical writings.8 During his years in Europe, between attending classes in Rome and showing his work at the Paris Salon, Atl became radically politicized and well versed in Marxist and anarchic literature, particularly with the writings of George Sorel and various Italian ideologues. These ideas led to his political
involvement in the Mexican Revolution. When Atl framed his politics through an artistic lens, they translated into a message that resonated with young and energetic artists.

Atl graduated with a doctorate in philosophy in 1900 and after a few years returned to Mexico. In 1904, he joined the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes (ENBA) where he taught painting and explored early ideas of mural work he had acquired in Europe during his many visits to places like the Sistine Chapel. That same year, he was part of a group of revolutionary painters in San Pedro de Tlaquepaque, a neighborhood in the city of Guadalajara, where he organized an exhibition of his paintings. In another exhibition, “conferences were given with a clear revolutionary orientation …,” and it is here where Atl initiated the Mexican pictorial revolution. Not long thereafter, in 1906, he conducted a painting exhibition put on by the magazine Savia Moderna, the publication of the Ateneo de la Juventud (Athenaeum of Youth) which was comprised of young intellectuals discontented with the direction of Mexico’s artistic and intellectual life. Most members of the Ateneo de la Juventud were under thirty years of age and included Atl, Rivera, Vasconcelos, and Antonio Caso among others. The purpose of the group was “to formulate an alternative to the ‘medieval rigidity,’ positivist orthodoxy, and francophile affectation which had defined fin-de-siècle intellectual life in Mexico. The very name of the group, the ‘youth athenaeum,’ established a counterpoint to the gerontocracy of Porfirio Díaz.” This exhibition is perhaps the first time that Mexican painters had the opportunity to present their native talent to the public.

The following year, 1907, Atl arranged the first exhibition of Diego Rivera to help him raise funds to study and travel in Europe. Things were moving fast, and by 1908, Atl painted his first large scale mural at the Academy of San Carlos. That mural was the first of its kind by a modern Mexican artist, and it foreshadowed the muralist movement that rose to prominence after
the revolution. Administrative officials at San Carlos took issue with the mural’s folkloric theme, because it broke with the convention of emulating European high art. Atl had grown tired of mimicking Europe and felt that Mexican artists should look inward for expression of national art. Despite his displeasure at the destruction of his work and ongoing disagreement with the administration, he continued painting and teaching at the academy.

Between the years 1906-1910, he was in charge of making an inventory of the old paintings that belonged to the academy, many of which he considered destroying because they reflected the old Eurocentric paradigm. His big break came in 1910 when he gathered enough money to help Mexican artists who wanted to present their own version of autochthonous art to celebrate the first centenary of Mexican Independence. The exhibition was a success, and Atl proposed organizing the new school of artists into a society called “Centro Artistico” whose purpose “was to get from the government, walls in public buildings to paint.” Unfortunately, political revolt broke just as the artistic revolution of the group was underway, leaving them no choice but to abandon their projects to the ruin of time. Mexico’s avant-garde artists had to wait for more than a decade before their vision was appreciated, at which point the postrevolutionary project of nation building coincided with the acceptance of folk and indigenous arts and the rise of monumental mural paintings.

Each artistic vogue and style has its iconic representatives, and for Mexican muralism, Orozco, Rivera, and Siqueiros automatically come to mind—and justifiably so. They constitute the leaders of the postrevolutionary vanguard of artists who are rightfully called the masters of Mexican muralism. Nonetheless, it is unfortunate that outside of scholars who deal with Mexican artists and intellectuals, figures like Dr. Atl have been largely forgotten. While it is universally accepted that Orozco and Rivera epitomize the nationalist aesthetic of the era, they
also represent the maximum evolution of Mexican muralism, a medium pioneered by Atl. His influence cannot be overstated, and to a certain degree Orozco and Rivera owe their success to him. Orozco was a student of Atl’s in the years preceding the revolution, and Rivera’s first trip to Europe in 1906 was made possible due to Atl’s assistance in selling his artwork to raise funds for his passage. Atl even wrote Rivera a letter of introduction to his friend and fellow artist, Eduardo Chicharro, who became Rivera’s teacher during his stay in Spain.14

An internationally renowned painter, Atl had clout in the art world and beyond, but more importantly, Orozco’s statement—that Atl was the father of Mexican muralism—is incontrovertible. The possibility that without him Mexican muralism might never have existed makes Atl’s influence all the more appreciable. Despite Atl’s visionary foresight and rejection of traditional convention, one wonders why he did not continue working in that medium. Art historian Olga Sáenz asks that same question and arrives at the answer given by Atl himself:

In his written account, Atl narrates, with some nostalgia, that his large-format works were destroyed (he refers to the frescoes painted in 1901 in the villa on Vía Flaminia 14, Rome). In 1908, Murillo painted ‘[…] a large frieze with female figures like nymphs or muses carrying a wreath towards a portrait of [Alejandro Luis] Olavatierra, who had donated a valuable collection of paintings to the academy.’ Doña Carmen Romero Rubio de Díaz—wife of Porfirio Díaz—ordered its removal because it portrayed the nymph’s [sic] nude.15

In addition to the destruction of the work mentioned above, administration officials at the San Pedro y San Pablo academy ordered the demolition of many of Atl’s murals that decorated the academy’s patio in 1921. First, Vasconcelos had the nymphs on the murals altered when he remodeled the academy to open the Hall of Discussion which housed an office that operated his campaign against illiteracy. Minister Narciso Bassols later had them completely destroyed.16
These incidents soured Atl to the idea of large scale murals, and he opted instead for the easel and the canvas.

Nonetheless, Atl’s affinity for indigenism and innovation in muralism launched an artistic movement in Mexico during the postrevolutionary era. In the work of Atl, the tension between the hispanist and indigenist traditions came to a head. In the decades before the master muralists ever considered adopting folk-style art and indigenist tropes, Atl had already experimented with those ideas since the late 1800s. Atl’s contribution to romantic indigenism helps describe the general sentiment at the time. The liberal mestizo Eurocentrism that reigned during the latter half of the nineteenth-century showed signs of cracking by the end of the century, and young dreamers like Atl who were tired of that cultural paradigm were there to exploit the rupture that would soon tear the country apart. Typical of modern rebellious youth, these dreamers rejected the culture of their elders and opted instead to create one of their own. This new culture was not only oppositional, it was one that celebrated the local folkloric traditions of the homeland. It is in this transitional and experimental period that a new indigenist narrative emerged and gave rise to neo-Mexika groups during the cultural revival and ethnicization (Indianization) of Mexican nationhood.¹⁷

**Academic Intellectuals**

In tracking the history of ethnic Mexican indigeneity, particularly its rise in the twentieth-century, indigenist intellectuals and writers continued to play an important role in its development. One such intellectual was Manuel Gamio whose anthropological training at Columbia University helped him modernize the field in Mexico. Gamio was born in Mexico City in 1882 to Lorenzo Gamio Echevarría, a criollo, and Margarita Otal, a mestiza.¹⁸ His family
background, combined with his liberal leanings, made him a classically quintessential Mexican—a criollo/mestizo with indigenous sympathies and nationalistic tendencies.

While at Columbia, Gamio befriended and studied under the German-American anthropologist Franz Boas, and together, they established the theoretical basis for what was called the “Mexican School of Archaeology.” Various courses that were offered at the National Museum between 1906 and 1929 inspired the “Mexican School” which was defined by its interdisciplinary courses that included physical anthropology, ethnology, and indigenous languages. Other leading scholars involved in the school were Alfred Tozzer, Eduardo Seler, and Alfonso Caso. After Gamio’s exit as director of the school, Caso succeeded him and in turn garnered a broad group of followers, including Eulalia Guzmán—the archeologist who was involved in the controversy over the authenticity of Cuauhtémoc’s bones at Ixcateopan, Guerrero.

Gamio and Boas did not agree on everything which made theirs a tense relationship. The main item of contention between them involved the philosophy culture. Gamio’s cultural philosophy contrasted the teachings of Boas who rejected all forms of racism by arguing that the classification of groups should be given by cultural, linguistic, and non-racial concepts. Boas delineated a theory of cultural development that privileged historical approaches and linguistic knowledge outside the ethnocentrisms and prejudices of the time. On the other hand, Gamio’s concept of the nation could not escape the positivist belief of progress, so he rejected Boas’s principle of cultural relativism that in his mind concluded in an inevitable heterogeneity. The nation, according to Gamio, constituted a superior unity built on scientific laws so that through education indigenous people could integrate into the nation by accepting the Western positivist
versions of culture—language, science, technology and political organization. Boas, on the other hand, maintained that linguistic change had its own autonomous logic, and that one of the tasks of anthropology was to combat racism and nationalism with the notion of the unity of humanity and cultural relativism. For Gamio, linguistic homogenization was a function of the highly desirable process of national incorporation. Once all of the citizens of the nation adopted the same language, social traits, and cultural habits—in other words, a homogenous unity—only then could the Mexican state achieve its national destiny.

Gamio also played a crucial role on the discourse of indigenism and as the ideological godfather of that academic strain in the postrevolutionary period. The renowned Mexican anthropologist, Guillermo de la Peña, observed that Gamio’s indigenist project involved the reproduction of the anthropological double myth: the encounter with the primitive and the induction of the primitive to civilization. However, in the historical interpretation of Mexican anthropology, there was a third myth that indigenists such Gamio also applied—the redemption of national identity. In most of Gamio's archaeological fieldwork, he highlights places such Teotihuacán as the most important historical monuments that illustrate Mexico’s foundational roots in pre-Columbian civilizations. Here, one notices echoes from the colonial period’s criollo patriotism and the insurgent criollo/mestizo nationalism of the nineteenth-century. Whereas neo-Aztecs and romantic indigenism lost favor during the rise of liberalism and scientific positivism after independence, the populist backlash to the policies of the Porfiriato paved the way for a “return of the native,” to borrow a phrase. Gamio’s seminal book, Forjando patria: pro nacionalismo (1916) set the official agenda for what became the first manifesto of the nascent neo-indigenist movement, or what Brading refers to as “official indigenismo.”
In discussing the increase in nationalism that antecedced and followed the Mexican Revolution, Brading notes: “Intellectuals as diverse as Andrés Molina Enríquez and José Vasconcelos denounced the sterile aping of European doctrines which had characterized the Liberal Reforma of the 1850s, in favour of measures which were based on colonial precedent.”

What was this colonial precedent that Brading refers to? It was the ideological fusion between the indigenist and hispanist traditions that were inherited from criollo intellectuals and the inevitable miscegenation among the American and European peoples—in short, mestizaje. In the view of indigenist intellectuals, the mixing of the races as well as their cultural traditions had produced the basis for Mexican national identity and unity. That was the purpose of Gamio’s text, to encourage pride in the multicultural background of the country in order to literally forge a nation where none had existed before. Intellectuals, such as Gamio and Vasconcelos, were drawing from four-hundred years of American knowledge and literature to formulate their ideas. Just as Las Casas, Torquemada, and Clavijero inspired Mier’s and Bustamante’s romantic indigenism, postrevolutionary thinkers could cite all of them in their discourse of mexicanidad and the formulation of “lo mexicano.”

**Mexicanidad and Lo Mexicano**

Intimately tied to this nationalizing project were notions of mexicanidad and lo mexicano which were meant to evoke pride and a sense of duty to the patria (homeland). In his incisive book on the subject, *The Roots of Lo Mexicano* (1978), historian Henry C. Schmidt notes that in its most basic expression lo mexicano deals with the psychology and character of the Mexican people, but that it also “speaks to the passion to understand things Mexican.” Although there are traces of lo mexicano dating to 1900 and earlier, what distinguishes those earlier instances
from the twentieth-century approach is their lack of modern analysis. In its modern context, *lo mexicano* referred to the study of the Mexican ethos through a psycho-analytical framework that addressed postrevolutionary manifestations of cultural nationalism and philosophical questions of ethnic identity. According to Schmidt, the theory peaked “when it was centered in the National University’s Faculty of Philosophy and Letters … and when it saw an independent expression in Octavio Paz’s *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950).”

With the forging of Mexican nationalism, a jingoistic ethnocentrism emerged among Mexico’s leading intellectuals. Anything related to Mexican culture had to pass the test of *lo mexicano* for it to be part of the larger project of *mexicanidad*, the latter defined as things pertaining to Mexicanness, or the quality thereof. This Mexicanist paradigm served as the bedrock for postrevolutionary nationalism and its handmaidens—ethnocentrism and nativism. It also set the stage for the rise of the “new mestizo,” a liberal nationalist ideology from the nineteenth-century that largely went unnoticed until Vasconcelos revived it under the guise of “la raza cosmica.” This phrase has been, I think, misconstrued as “The Cosmic Race,” and perhaps a better translation should be “the universal people.” That title would better convey the sentiments that Vasconcelos made in his essay *La raza cósmica* (1925).

In the book, Vasconcelos explained his concept of a future “fifth race” in the Americas which would be a composite of all the “races” in the world, regardless of skin color, in order to produce a new civilization called “Universópolis.” Vasconcelos envisioned armies of people going forth around the world professing their universal knowledge, and that the people most suited for this endeavor, naturally, were from Latin America. This was so, because they had the territorial, racial, and spiritual factors necessary to initiate the universal era of humanity. For example, Vasconcelos wrote,
The purpose of the new and ancient continent [America] is much more important. Its predestination obeys the design of constituting the cradle of the fifth race into which all nations will fuse with each other to replace the four races that have been forging History apart from each other … The so-called Latin peoples, because they have been more faithful to their divine mission in America, are the ones called upon to consummate this mission. Such fidelity to the occult design is the guarantee of our triumph.\

As previously mentioned, the word “cosmic,” as used by Vasconcelos, should be translated to mean “universal.” Likewise, the word “raza” is better understood as referring to “people”—or humanity in general, and not necessarily in the sociological construct of taxonomic race. In his point of view, a universal futuristic humanity would inherit the best of “the four racial trunks: the Black, the Indian, the Mongol, and the White.” Thus, the age of the universal people would signal the dawn of an evolved, progressed, and liberally minded society. Vasconcelos envisioned a global utopia spearheaded by the “Latin peoples” who would achieve this ideal by spreading the gospel of mestizaje around the world.

Utopian idealism heightened Vasconcelos’ argument against scientific racism and eugenics. He claimed, for instance, that Darwinism was a theory developed to validate and justify white superiority while suppressing the racial Other. His essay clearly refuted those ideas by portending the future development of a universal man. In their essay, “Return to Aztlan: The Chicano RedisCOVERS His Indian Past,” Guillermo Lux and Maurilio E. Vigil validate this point, but they go a bit further and suggest that Vasconcelos:

… developed the theory of la raza cosmica (the cosmic or super race) at least partially as a minority reaction to the Nordic notions of racial superiority. Vasconcelos developed a systematic theory which argued that climatic and geographic conditions and mixture of Spanish and Indian races created a superior race. The concept of La Raza connotes that the mestizo is a distinct race and not Caucasian, as is technically the case.
Countless scholars, such as Lux and Vigil, have tackled the concept of the “cosmic race,” and a good amount has been rightly critical of it. Vasconcelos’s *mestizaje* theory took decades to formulate, and it was greatly influenced by Western philosophy and Eastern esotericism. His notions of universal and racially-mixed super humans existing in an enlightened state are now seen as a utopian intellectual exercise. Nevertheless, none of that diminishes the fact that, ironically, his ideas were just as racist towards indigenous people as the Anglo eugenicists he critiqued.

In sum, Vasconcelos’s ideas paved the way for the insensitive assimilationist policies enacted by the Mexican government towards indigenous groups, an attitude akin to that of Richard H. Pratt’s stance on Native people. Pratt was a late nineteenth-century U.S. Army Captain who opened the first boarding school for Native American youth in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. He famously said that in order to civilize Native people you had to: “Kill the Indian—save the man.” In many ways, Vasconcelos’s *mestizo* theory followed in that tradition of encouraging Native people to abandon their indigenous ways in favor of modernization and progress. Furthermore, Vasconcelos’s “official indigenismo” was just an updated version of the positivist ideologies of the previous century, and thus, the continuity of liberalism ensured that the theory of *mestizaje*—which was really an updated version of *hispanismo*—prevailed.

And here we have the conundrum of Mexican nationalism. On the one hand, liberal progressives advocated a *mestizo* identity for the nation, while romantic indigenists sought to restore it to its autochthonous roots. This identity crisis, if you will, is evident in the literature of the time. For example, take the Mexican poet, journalist, educator, and statesman, Amado
Nervo, whose poem in honor of Benito Juárez entitled, “La raza de bronce” (The People of Bronze), followed the typical indigenist tone of eulogizing the Indian past:

Lord, let me tell you the glory of your people,
The glory of the men of bronze whose club
Dented audacity out of so many shields and helmets.
Oh tiger knights! oh lion knights!
Oh eagle knights! I bring thee my songs;
Oh great dead race, I bring you my elegy.

Nervo’s poem nicely expresses the mainstream Mexican position of acknowledging its indigenous past, but in terms that emphasized its death, in other words its irrelevance to the present. While Nervo exemplified the prevailing view of most Mexicans, romantic indigenists disagreed and took their ideology to the cultural opposite—one that emphasized indigeneity. What is interesting is that the ideologies of both mestizaje and indigeneity appear to have emerged almost simultaneously in the postrevolutionary period. On the one hand, you had Vasconcelos proposing the mestizo concept of a transcendent “cosmic” or universal man; on the other, there were individuals, such as Juan Luna-Cárdenas, who advocated the suppression of European elements altogether in favor of a strictly indigenous self-identity and the restoration of Aztec splendor.

**The Rise of the Neo-Mexikah**

In the 1920s, around the time that Vasconceles steadily pushed his cosmic mestizaje, romantic indigenists emerged with their own strands of indigenism. This strand of romantic indigenism was on the extreme end of the spectrum. Followers of this strand assumed an “aztín” (Aztec) identity and believed in nothing short than the restoration of Aztec greatness and it s
former imperial glory. Anthropologist Judith Freidlander, the first academic study to look into the activities of these restorationist groups, referred to them as “cultural extremists.”\(^{36}\) The description is appropriate if you consider the radical ideology of the groups in question, but in her case she was using the term disparagingly in her criticism of outsiders who went into indigenous communities, like Hueyapan, in order to instruct Natives on how to be more “Indian.” While Freidlander’s heart was in the right place, she failed to realize that even though these restorationist neo-Aztecs were urban middle-class intellectuals, many of them were of indigenous descent, particularly Nahua.\(^{37}\) In any case, she is correct in noting that they aggressively pushed their “extreme” ethnocentric ideologies around Mexico City and were always eager to get rural indigenous people involved in the project of restoring Mexico’s lost greatness. Inadvertently, the activities of the Aztec restorationists in the early twentieth-century initiated modern Mexikayotl (MM).

Some of the movement’s priorities were the full immersion of Aztec thought and culture, the learning and teaching of Nahuatl (the Aztec language), and the restoration of Aztec philosophy and spirituality. Through the exaltation of Aztec greatness, a peculiar form of romantic indigenism developed that was different from the romanticism of the previous criollo/mestizo variety. The nationalistic and nativist tendencies inherent in the pursuits of neo-Mexikas produced an ethnocentric ideology that valued all things indigenous and rejected everything related to the European. This ideological strain of indigenist discourse produced the first main group that would shape the course of this radical form of Mexican indigenism: the “Ueyi Tlatekpanilitl Ikniuhtik Aztekatl” (Great Cultural Society of Aztec Friends) which was headed by an individual of Nahua descent, Juan Luna-Cárdenas. Neo-Aztecists like Luna-
Cárdenas were the vanguard of the neo-Mexika movement that emerged in the middle of the twentieth-century.

**Juan Luna-Cárdenas and the Society of Aztec Friends**

In a fairly recent study of these restorationist movements, Baruc Martínez-Díaz refers to them as “neoaztekah” organizations—his name for the neo-Mexikah.\(^{38}\) I have chosen not to follow with his use of *neoaztekah* in my study, because non-specialists might confuse the term with that of “neo-Azteca” which dates to the colonial period and refers to the general affinity towards Aztec culture, etc. In my opinion, the term neo-Mexikah is more appropriate for the groups and individuals that went beyond the simple rhetoric of Aztec greatness and actually assumed the identity of the historical Mexica (Aztec) people.\(^{39}\)

Scholars looking at these neo-Mexika groups refer to them collectively as “el movimiento de la mexicanidad” (the Mexicanity movement). It is understood that they were nationalistic and nativistic in nature and emphasized the recovery of the lost greatness of the Aztec empire. Of this indigenist current, the leading neo-Mexika organizations that emerged in the 1920s were the “Sociedad Pro-Lengua Nahuaatl” (Pro-Nahuatl Language Society), “Aztekatlamachtlakah Hueyi Tlahuile” (The Great Light Aztec Union), “Los sacerdotes autóctonos que residen en Tetzcoco” (The Autochthonous Priests Who Reside in Texcoco), and the “Ueyi Tlatekpaniliztli Ilkniughtik Aztekatl” (Great Cultural Society of Aztec Friends, GCSAF).\(^{40}\) Friedlander tells us that there was another influential organization also associated with Luna-Cárdenas, the “Indigenous Confederation of Mexico.” What distinguished the individuals that made up the membership of these groups from the previous indigenists discussed thus far was their complete rejection of, not just *hispanidad* but, Western-European culture as a whole.
Groups like the Great Cultural Society of Aztec Friends (GCSAF), for example, encouraged their members to shed their non-indigenous names in favor of one in an indigenous language, particularly Nahuatl. This is reminiscent of Dr. Atl’s rebranding, but for completely different purposes. While it is unclear if Dr. Atl and Luna-Cárdenas knew each other, they did have acquaintances in common, such as Juan Chavez-Orozco, a painter who taught a class on calendar stones for the GCSAF. He had studied under Diego Rivera and most likely had met Atl at some point.41 What is interesting is that Atl wrote a book where he made connections between Nahua culture and Atlantis, a belief that was shared among neo-Mexikas and which lends currency to the idea that Atl and Luna-Cárdenas were likely familiar with each other.42

This is noteworthy because, like Atl, Luna-Cárdenas also went by a Nahuatl name, Yäkanini Meztli Kuautémok Kamoh, “meztli” being Nahuatl for “luna”, or moon. A brief biography of Luna-Cárdenas taken from the archives of the GCSAF claims that he was originally baptized at the “Templo de Metziko de la Santa Iglesia Aztekatl” (Mexican Temple of the Holy Aztec Church) under his Nahuatl name, but that due to religious persecution his parents changed it to Spanish.43 This same biography also states that he claimed descent from Moctezuma and that he was heir to the Aztec throne:

He was born on March 30, 1907, in the small town of Yauhtepek [Yautepec], in the present state of Morelos. His father was Zenón Luna N. native of the town of Ayutla of State of Guerrero. His mother was Felipa Cárdenas of the small town of Yauhtepek in the State of Morelos. On his father’s side, he descended from Akual Metztli (or Ignacio Luna), the son of Kuauhpopoka Metztli, the King of Koyohuakan [Coyoacan] … who when studying in the Imperial College of Tlaltelolko [Tlaltelolco], from 1535 to 1540, married the Imperial princess Matzayani Cuauhtémoc, the only daughter of the Great Emperor of Mexico-Tenochtitlan. His mother … whose Aztec name was Koyolikaltzin Kamoh was the only descendant of the King of Yautepec.44
Thus, Luna-Cárdenas’s outlined his royal lineage as being the heir of three seats: Coyoacan, Yautepec, and the great Aztec capital itself—Tenochtitlan.

Figure 1: Juan Luna Cárdenas circa 1947, from his book, Pre-historia de America.

If the entire *raison d’être* of Luna-Cárdenas and the GCSAF was to restore the ancient greatness of the Aztecs, in the case that those plans ever came to fruition, the restored nation of Anahuac would already have their ready leader—a direct descendant of the Mexica royal house. Congruent with that fantasy was the troublesome notion that the GCSAF would have to purify the Mexican nation once it was successfully restored. If there is an uneasy underlying tinge of racial extremism here, it is not by accident. The anthropologist, Lina Odena-Güemes, who has looked closely at neo-Mexika organizations found that some of the individuals had racial
supremacist inclinations. This sentiment was first espoused by Luna-Cárdenas who, as an engineering student in Germany in the thirties adopted the idea of Aryan superiority, a seemingly contradictory notion he would later translate into that of Aztec greatness.\textsuperscript{45} Take the following statement by one of Odena-Güemes’ neo-Mexika informants:

He gives great importance to the study of ethnic and racial phenomena and considers that the Jewish race is inferior inasmuch as the Nahuatl race belongs to the higher races. He often points out the similarity between the swastika and the nahui ollin sign. He concludes that the power of the Aztecs was derived from the esoteric power of this sign, the same power contained in the swastika employed by Hitler. He knows in detail the Nuremberg Trials, mentions them and comments on the dates, the contents, the names of witnesses, etc.\textsuperscript{46}

Thus, neo-Mexikas equated the Aztecs with Aryans and imbued them with mystical powers that were supposedly derived from symbols. Also evident is the rhetorical development of Aztec greatness, perfection, and exception. Stressing this point, Odena-Güemes cites examples throughout her study of the belief among neo-Mexikas that ancient Anahuac civilization was the best at science, mathematics, botany, astronomy, and just about any other human discipline imaginable.

Alicja Iwańska, another anthropologist who has looked into restorationists and neo-Mexikas, compared two distinct indigenous nativistic movements and separated them into the “realists” and “utopians.” The realists were educated indigenous people who moved from their Native communities to study in the capital in the hopes of enacting positive social change for Mexico’s indigenous population. The utopian movement was made up of neo-Mexikas who, oblivious their cognitive dissonance, rejected scientific principles that contradicted their beliefs while giving credit to the Aztecs for things they never discovered. From informant testimony,
Iwańska deduced that ancient Nahuas had “apparently discovered the ‘laws of evolution’ … based on ‘scientific deductions and predictions, practiced already by teachers and students in Kalmeka,’ the university of ancient Anauak.”47 The belief that ancient Nahuas possessed scientific knowledge that humanity has only discovered in the modern era, combined with the supremacist rhetoric described above, set the precedent for a Mexika exceptionalist ideology that is widespread among cultural radicals today.

This notion of being exceptional can also be gleaned from some of the names given to the aztekah organizations, such that of the Great Cultural Society of Aztec Friends (GCSAF). Juan Luna-Cárdenas headed this organization from its inception in the early twenties until its decline in the mid fifties. Through this organization, Luna-Cárdenas published numerous books on Nahuatl grammar as well as some that promoted his ethnocentric, pseudo-historical, and pseudo-scientific account of Aztec thought and culture.48 The GCSAF initially manifested itself as the “Sociedad Tlimetl” (Tlīmetl Society) as a sports and culture club. Luna-Cárdenas, his father, and a few other close friends—all of whom were presumably of Nahua descent—founded Sociedad Tlimetl in Mexico City, on New Year’s Day 1922.49 This was the first neo-Mexika group composed of individuals (all men) who self-identified as “aztin” or “aztekah.” They all claimed to be native Nahuatl-speakers from the surrounding areas of the Federal District. From the start, the main objectives that the group outlined were the revitalization of the Nahuatl language and the restoration of “aztekatl” culture. In 1925, the Tlimetl Society established the “Azteka Tlahtolmelauhkan” (Aztec Language Academy), and by 1927 the society changed its name to the GCSAF and began to proselytize their aztekah doctrine in earnest.50
The Beginnings of Modern Mexikayotl

As Martínez-Díaz explains, all of the major neo-Mexika groups have an origin myth that ties them to an elusive council of elders who were the keepers of traditional knowledge. In their origin myth, the GCSAF spoke of Zenón Luna (Juan Luna-Cárdenas father) as a great leader who was referred to as “Tonalteuktli” (Sun Lord). According the group’s legend, in 1920, Zenón called a meeting, “La Gran Junta de Ancianos Aztekah” (The Great Gathering of Aztec Elders), at a town called Ayutla de los Libres, Guerrero. Apparently, the purpose of the meeting was to reorganize the millenarian Aztec knowledge and to lay the groundwork for (his son) Juan’s leadership role in the three organizations previously mentioned: the Tlimetl Society, the Aztec Language Academy, and the Great Cultural Society of Aztec Friends (GCSAF). As previously mentioned, the GCSAF was the most influential of these and, in my estimation, is undoubtedly the ideological ancestor of most, if not all, of the neo-Mexika calpullis (cultural communities) that came thereafter.

Luna-Cárdenas was the founder of the modern Mexikayotl movement. Of course, that is not to say that he alone did it all, but all aztekah roads lead to him. Given his predilection for self-aggrandizement and historical fancy, one wonders how Luna-Cárdenas was able to convince the original group of neophytes of his message and that he was the heir to the throne of Mexico. Nonetheless, after many years of influence, his reputation and credibility started to crumble especially after an incident that occurred in the Nahua community of Hueyapan in the late fifties. Odena-Güemes recounts the unfortunate and defining episode thus:

Luna Cárdenas was the protagonist of a sad history in Hueyapan in which the Nieva siblings disapproved of his conduct. A succinct narration of what is known and said in Hueyapan relates that some murals had been found in the vicinity of the town; when Juan Luna and his companions arrived at the place of discovery, the sky became cloudy and it
began to rain torrentially, but it happened that the clouds opened, letting the rays of the sun bathe and crown only him. With this natural phenomenon on his side and his lineage unquestioned, he appeared to be enlightened. That occurrence was taken as a sign that a prince descended from the old Mexica nobility was to be born there. Thus, against her wishes, a maiden was “ritually” betrothed. Her disconsolate parents told us that this was how “Prince Huitzi” (contraction of the name Huizilihuitl or “the king,” as they call him in the area) was born. Luna Cárdenas continued his restorative activities there but his enthusiasm decreased over time; he stopped caring for the child and never returned to Hueyapan. The girl ended up having to leave the village because it was impossible to live in such a marked situation.\textsuperscript{54}

The reason Luna-Cárdenas was ever in Hueyapan can be traced to the early fifties, when a gentleman from the community, Eliseo Cortés, reached out to him after learning of his organization and efforts to restore Nahuatl. Luna-Cárdenas was one among many at this time who was advocating for the revitalization of a “pure” Nahuatl. He also advocated for the adoption of his own script where “c”s were replaced by “k”s and the “č” (c-cedilla) replaced the “ch” (as in “chair”), among other linguistic eccentricities. After first attending a language conference on Nahuatl called the “Aztec Congress” in 1939, then meeting Luna-Cárdenas in 1945, Cortés traveled to Mexico City with a few other villagers to learn “Classical Nahuatl” sometime in the early fifties.

Even before meeting Luna-Cárdenas his interest in language revitalization was spurred on by the arrival in the forties of the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) and the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) to Hueyapan.\textsuperscript{55} The purpose of these government agencies was to keep the “Indians Indian by commercializing the concept of Mexico’s indigenous heritage” and to incorporate them “ideologically, socially and economically into post-Revolutionary Mexico.”\textsuperscript{56} The more indigenous the community looked in terms of culture, language, and dress, the more funding it received. This project ran counter to the vision that Vasconcelos had laid out
for a singular national mestizo identity. In this case, economic enterprise proved more valuable than nationalistic ideology for the government.

Upon meeting, Cortés and Luna-Cárdenas became good friends, and the former became the latter’s biggest supporter in Hueyapan. Throughout the fifties, Cortés became Luna-Cárdenas’s connection to the rural and indigenous communities that lent authenticity to his own neo-Mexika project in the big city. For all his support, Cortés never really received any benefits from his association with Luna-Cárdenas.57 Sadly enough, the young girl chosen for the mating ritual described by Odena-Güemes above was none other than Cortés own daughter. Needless to say, they two men had a falling out. Luna-Cárdenas stopped going to the village, and the people of Hueyapan soon abandoned his Nahuatl revitalization and Mexikayotl restoration efforts.

Neo-Mexika Publications

While doing their part in the government’s social experiment of “keeping Indians Indian,” Cortés and a few other Hueyapeños had learned from Luna-Cárdenas that their local dialect of Nahuatl was wholly inadequate.58 His criticism held authority, because, ever since his proposed orthographic changes of written Nahuatl were accepted at the Aztec Congress of 1939, other nahuatlotos had followed his lead. A case in point is that of Miguel Barrios-Espinoza, who was educated as a teacher and worked with Robert Barlow (American linguist) who trained him in linguistics and paid for all his publications including the Mexihkatl Itonalama (1950) and a collection of poems. Barrios-Espinoza worked as an assistant for Barlow collecting ethnographic and linguistic materials in different Nahuatl towns in the valley of Mexico.59 The Mexihkatl Itonalama was an all Nahuatl periodical with a neo-Mexikah message that operated
independently of Luna-Cárdenas but was likely influenced by him. A good example of this influence is found in the following piece titled, “MEXIHKAYOTL” (see Figure 2):

It appears that we, us who are Mexicans, do not properly love our language; it appears that we are now ashamed to speak as masewales [Indians]; it appears that our language makes us believe that we do not have the same worth among those other people who consider themselves civilized.

Why should we feel ashamed because the Spaniards told us that we are worthless, when they came here to Mexico and robbed the Mexican gold? The Spaniards want to eradicate our Mexicanness, and truly they have already destroyed many things. And now why should we let also our language be lost? Why should we allow this? Is that of no value which our first ancestors created? How is this? Are we not Mexicans?

The land on which we live is our property, our refuge, our dwelling place; may we protect our language, may we exalt our discourse among the other great nations; may we make our ceramic plates of many impressive colors; may we polish them with much craftsmanship and build our houses.

The good things that we learned through the labor of our ancestors must not be forgotten. Let us do that which is proper for a Mexican, so that in that way Mexicanness will not be lost.\(^{60}\)

This restorationist message admonishing Mexicans for not embracing their Mexicanness is straight out of Luna-Cárdenas’s playbook. He wrote extensively and published numerous books between 1938 and 1964 that promoted similar ethnocentric neo-Mexika positions, advanced his peculiar from of Nahuatl writing, and that attacked academics for (in his opinion) incorrectly assessing the cultures of the continent. For instance, in the book *Pre-historia de America* (1947), Luna-Cárdenas explicitly accuses archeologists of engaging in simple investigations and not making the proper connections to the pre-history of America:

Investigations have been developed in a field of prejudice; researchers from all parts of the Earth have spoken with their studies, and these studies have been published in a dispersed manner and completely diverge as to the standard of their conclusions. Nothing more could come from the tangle of wild ideas that have dominated over the peoples of our continent.\(^{61}\)
Casting doubt on the methods and conclusions made by mainstream scholars, Luna-Cárdenas inserted his own pseudo-historical and pseudo-scientific interpretations that underscore most of his work. Perhaps the main revision that emerges is the idea that Mesoamerican cultures did not practice human sacrifice or anthropophagy.

Figure 2: Mexihkatl Itonalama, Vol. 5.

Nevertheless, examples of Luna-Cárdenas making up ideas for the sake of contradicting established knowledge are readily available. For instance, throughout the book cited above, Pre-
**historia de America**, he uses the term Ixaçilan to refer to “America.” The earliest this word came into usage was in 1938 when Luna-Cárdenas introduced it in his doctoral dissertation and stated that it meant “territorio extenso” (vast land). The term was later taken to mean “immensity” and the spelling changed to “Ixachilan” (sans c-cedilla), but the point is that he claimed that it was the original Nahuatl name of the American continents. The toponym is not found in any Nahuatl dictionary or standard literature on Mesoamerica and only exists in those associated with neo-Mexika ideology. It is very likely that the term originates with Luna-Cárdenas himself. It is also worth mentioning that there is another term used among neo-Mexikas that is found in the historical record, “Cemanahuac,” which loosely translates to “the known world”—conceptually similar to the “ecumene” of the Greeks. This begs the question, if he was already partial to the word “Anauak,” why the need to invent another word when he could have just as easily used “Zemanauak” (in keeping with his aztekah spelling)?

As evinced by his racial supremacist tendencies above, Luna-Cárdenas was full of contradictions. On the one hand, he valued Western science—although filtered through an aztekah lens, and on the other, he railed against Eurocentrism as it pertained to American cultures. When the facts were inconvenient, he resorted to fiction. His motivation in crafting the name of Ixachilan brings to mind O’Gorman’s invented America analysis, but in this case, it was an indigenous scholar engaged in the act. When asked in an interview about his thoughts on the name of the Western Hemisphere, this was his curious response:

Well yes, the name America rarely appears in the books and its origin is certainly not explained in the geographical maps, but is attributed to a certain man named Amerigo Vespucci. In fact, there never was an Amerigo Vespucci, because his real name was Albericus Vespucci, making several trips with Christopher Columbus, specifically on his second voyage when the region of Venezuela was seen. He asked the natives where they were from, and they replied that they were from the mountains of “Amerricka” which
are to the west of the country. Subsequently, he sent his *relaciones* [written accounts] to Germany to a gentleman named Waldseemüller who read the wonders of the trip. As a result, Waldseemüller chose to immortalize the surname of the cartographer and navigator, who was a very learned man, by using “Americae Vespucci” with a Latin ending [for America, “ae”] which means “of,” and meant “America of Vespucci.” Later, people who ignored Latin took away the “ae,” which is the genitive ending of the first Latin translation, and changed it to an “o” making it “Américo;” but certainly it is so that the western Venezuelan mountain region “Amerricka” was used to give the name to the entire continent. Which by the way, in the Aztec language it [the continent] already had another name called “Ixachílan,” where this ethnic group traveled from the regions of Canada to the pre-Inca Andes, and vice-versa, from the pre-Inca Andes and Mesoamerica they traveled north to visit the Aztec groups of North America.  

This interview was conducted at a LULAC conference in 1979, and there are two main things to take from his response. First, the Western Hemisphere is named after a Venezuelan mountain region whose name is the indigenous source for the term America. And second, America’s Nahuatl name is actually Ixachilán with no explanation given as to why that is. Some of Luna-Cárdenas’s questionable views were later picked up by the influential Native American historian Jack D. Forbes when he began advocating for Chicana/o indigeneity in the early 1960s. In turn, those views helped shape the indigenist worldview of indigenist Chicana/os.

**Conclusion**

The Mexican historian Fernando Benítez once noted that in the feverish nation building that transpired after the Mexican Revolution of 1910, “Mexicans discovered their country.” Benítez was referring to the rise of popular art by Mexico’s early twentieth-century leading artists—Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Rufino Tamayo, and Frida Kahlo—whom, he noted, were moving the nation forward by looking back at its historical legacy. As we have seen, by the end of the nineteenth-century this legacy had begun to coalesce around the idea of a mixed nation, both indigenous and Spanish. With few exceptions, for most
indigenists, including artists, the multiracial makeup of the young Mexican nation was inconsequential. Disregarding all other racial elements that constituted the true biological nature of the population, such as the African and Asian, what mattered most to the development of Mexican ethno-nationalism was the *indio-hispano* heritage of the nation.

Those cultural outliers did not fit the dominant narrative that had prevailed in capturing the nation’s indigenist imagined community. In many ways, the rise of Mexican *indigenismo* received tremendous reinforcement from artists and poets who promoted it as much as the intellectuals who had theorized it. These cultural creators and social innovators constituted two influential branches of the academic elite. The intellectuals were responsible for developing the body of ideas from which *mexicanidad* was conceptualized, and the artists applied those concepts as primer for the physical projections of their idealized cultural representations. More importantly, these Mexicanist artists and thinkers heavily influenced the ideologies and aesthetics of the Chicano movement of the sixties and seventies that continued well after that cause waned in the early eighties. Unwittingly, Chicana/o artists helped sow the seeds of neo-Aztecist ideology and the adoption of Mexika identity in Aztlan. People like Luna-Cárdenas did much to help that come about as well.

As the main voice of the movement, Luna-Cárdenas took his message abroad, throughout Latin America and the United States. He even taught a course at the University of Texas – Austin (UT) in the spring of 1979 entitled, “La cultura y la sociedad Azteca.” In 1980, he was interviewed for “The Mexican American Experience” show on the Longhorn Radio Network where he continued to promote his *aztekah* views. After careful consideration, I can confidently state that Juan Luna-Cárdenas is the progenitor of the Aztecist and neo-Mexika
lifestyle known by its adherents as Mexikayotl—the essence of being Mexican, Mexicanness or Mexicanity.

There is no question about the connection between contemporary ethnocentric cultural organizations known as calpullis and Luna-Cárdenas and his Society of Aztec Friends. Today, the founder has been largely forgotten by most neo-Mexikas. In fact, other than specialists and the older generation of original converts, the average Mexika today has never even heard of Luna-Cárdenas or any of the other figures that spearheaded the indigenist movement they follow. Ironically, much of the pseudo-history and assertions of pre-historic scientific discoveries are now accepted as fact and as oral history transmitted from time immemorial. The facts contradict those claims and support the idea that these beliefs are actually “Lunaesque” ethnocentric revisions. With the stage set, the actors that followed adopted most of the aztekah rhetoric scripted by Luna-Cárdenas but performed it in a plot of their own design. The curtain fell on the first neo-Mexika act and rose on the second.

2 The influential Mexican anthropologist, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, noted that there exist two Mexicos—one is “imaginary,” or synthetic, and the other is “profundo,” or deeply rooted; the former is one created by *criollo/mestizo* elites in their emulation of Western European and Anglo-American society, and the latter is one that is deeply rooted in Mesoamerican indigenous thought and culture. Batalla admonishes the consumerism and capitalism that has sullied the primordial character of the country and advocates in favor restoring control to México *profundo*. Buried in his good intentions is a nativistic impulse that, as we shall see, has motivated the efforts of indigenist intellectuals. Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, *México Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization*, trans. Philip Adams Dennis, 1st ed, ILAS Translations from Latin America (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).


5 Zabludovsky, “En La Última Entrevista de Su Vida,” 22; cited in Adelman, “La Obra Narrativa De Gerardo Murillo, Dr. Atl,” 9. Original Spanish: “Eso de Atl solo está muy feo; ¿por qué no te pones algún título? Titulo en que, le dije yo, de príncipe, de rey, de qué … No, no, no, un título … Ah, pues soy doctor en filosofía … ¡Doctor Atl!, entonces al día siguiente llamamos a los amigos que eran muchos, y en su apartamento, que era muy bonito, pusieron una tina y la llenaron de champagne, me desnudaron y me metieron adentro de la tina y me dijeron: tú eres doctor Atl. Y desde entonces soy doctor Atl.”

6 In popular Mexican culture, it is common to engage in a revelrous informal “baptism” when giving a nickname to a close friend, but not necessarily this exaggerated. The audience of his interview would have known the context of his account. It must also be noted that *criollo/mestizo* intellectuals were not in the habit of adopting indigenous names and suppressing their European given ones. Perhaps the only precedent for this is from the Franciscan missionary, Toribio of Benavente, one of the twelve Franciscans in the first formal religious expedition to arrive in New Spain in 1524—they were collectively called the “Twelve Apostles of Mexico.” Benavente “adopted the name Motolinía after hearing the Nahuatl word, which means ‘poor or stricken one,’ being used by the indigenous people to describe him.” Motolinía was an Iberian born ascetic on a mission, and this name adoption was a great way to win over potential Christian converts. To some degree, Atl resembled Motolinía in his mission to convert young artists to his emergent Mexicanist aesthetic. For more on Motolinía, see Monica I. Orozco, “Benavente, Toribio De (Motolinía),” *Encyclopedia of Mexico: History, Society & Culture*, 1998, http://literati.credoreference.com/content/entry/routmex/benavente_toribio_de_motolinia/0.

7 Atl was also a poet, writer, and was deeply involved in the politics of the revolution. Those aspects of his life will not be covered at length here.

9 In his autobiography Orozco recalls that, at the ENBA, Atl would visit his night class and recount his European exploits to the students while they worked. He enthusiastically described the Sistine Chapel and da Vinci, and how the great techniques of the ancients—the great murals, the renaissance, and the Egyptian pyramids—had been lost for four-hundred years. José Clemente Orozco, Autobiografía (México: Cultura SEP : Ediciones Era, 1983), 16.


12 Orozco, Autobiografía, 25. Original Spanish: “... cuyo objeto exclusivo era conseguir del gobierno muros, en los edificios públicos, para pintar.”


16 Ibid.

17 I am using the term “ethnicization” as it is used by the historian Rick A. López in, Crafting Mexico, 9. He explains: “[Moisés] Sáenz in the 1920s described this postrevolutionary movement as the ‘Indianization’ of Mexico’s nationality, and recently the historian Mary Kay Vaughan has called it ‘the browning of the nation.’ This study describes this process using the term ethnicization, so as to capture the fluidity and contested nature of this embrace of indigenousness as part of the national identity, even as the Asian and black presence was erased and prejudice against indigenous people was continually reconstituted. The term also highlights the extent to which intellectuals and artists seized on the revolution as a mandate to study contemporary indigenousness and make it part of the discussion on national identity.”


19 The “Mexican School of Archeology” refers to a school-of-thought and not an actual place of learning.


22 Ibid., 276.


25 Ibid., 75.


27 Schmidt notes that Samuel Ramos “launched the modern analysis of Mexican identity with the publication of *Perfil del hombre y la cultura en Mexico* (1934),” and adds that he is: “Credited as the initiator of *lo mexicano* ...” *The Roots of Lo Mexicano: Self and Society in Mexican Thought, 1900-1934* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1978), xi.

28 Ibid. The work of Paz has been the source of innumerable scholarship, and it does not figure prominently in this study; however, I will note that in his role as analyst of *lo mexicano*, his opinions about Mexican Americans have been a source of conversation and controversy among Chicana/o scholars over the years. The same can also be said about José Vasconcelos’ opinions on Mexican Americans. To both of these Mexican intellectuals, *pachucos* and Chicanos represented undesirable extremes on the spectrum of *lo mexicano*: the *pachuco*, who was viewed as personifying misguided rebelliousness and antiestablishment values, was an aberration at best; while the Chicano, with a culture that was neither fully Mexican nor American, represented, at worst, an undesirable bastardization of what Mexican culture could become if not properly maintained. These terms Chicano and *pachuco* will be fully addressed in a later chapter. For now, it is useful to note that they were used to refer to certain groups of ethnic Mexicans who resided in the United States.


30 Ibid., 18.

31 Ibid., 9.


34 Here I must note that I am not the only one who has found a correlative between Captain Pratt’s policies and Mexican examples. Roberto “Cintli” Rodriguez posits that the Spanish *congregaciones* and *reducciones* were akin to Pratt’s motives: “In effect, the objective of these two de-Indigenization projects was to corral Indians into missions or pueblos for the purpose of reducing or eliminating or ‘killing’ the souls of the Indians, creating Christians in their place ... The idea behind *reducciones* was similar to the ideological basis for the boarding-school

35 Amado Nervo, *Lira heroica* (Mexico: Tipografia de la Oficina Impresora de Estampillas, Palacio Nacional, 1902), n.p. Original Spanish: “Señor, deja que diga la gloria de tu raza, La gloria de los hombres de bronce cuya maza Melló de tantos yelmos y escudos la osadía. Oh caballeros tigres! oh caballeros leones! Oh caballeros águilas! os traigo mis canciones; Oh enorme raza muerta, te traigo mi elegía!”


37 The Nahua are a “Middle American Indian population of central Mexico, of which the Aztecs of pre-Conquest Mexico are probably the best known members. The language of the Aztecs, Nahua[tl], is spoken by all the Nahua peoples in a variety of dialects.” “Nahua,” Encyclopedic, *Britannica Academic*, accessed December 30, 2016, http://academic.eb.com.proxy.libraries.smu.edu/levels/collegiate/article/54676.

38 Baruc Martínez Díaz, “Aztekayotl-Mexihkayotl: una aproximación histórica al movimiento de la mexicanidad (1922-1959)” (Bachelor’s thesis, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2010). In her study, Friedlander only traces these groups, like the “Indigenous Confederation of Mexico,” back to the 1930s; *Being Indian in Hueyapan*, 1975, 171.

39 Martínez-Díaz also distinguishes between the early neo-Mexikah of the twenties and thirties and those that emerged in the fifties; he terms the former as “aztekatl”—after Juan Luna-Cárdenas’s prevalent usage of the term, and the latter he calls “mexihkayotl,” reflecting the adoption of this term by its main proponent, Rodolfo F. Nieva-López, and the groups that came thereafter. Nieva-López and his Movimiento Confederado Restaurador de la Cultura de Anáhuac (Confederated Restoration Movement of Anahuac Culture) will be discussed in the following chapter. In a footnote, Martínez-Díaz explains that previous scholars who have looked at the MM in Mexico have used the term “mexihkayotl,” as well as “Mexicandiad radical” and “la nueva mexicanidad,” to distinguish it from previous iterations or neo-Aztecism. “Aztekayotl-Mexihkayotl,” 7–8, footnote 2.

40 There is a website that is dedicated to keeping the memory of these groups and of Juan Luna-Cárdenas alive. It cites other variations of the groups names including the Spanish translations of the “Aztekatlamachtlakah Hueyi Tlahuile” (La Unión Azteca Gran Luz) and the “Ueyi Tlatekpanilztli Ixniuhitik Aztekatl” (Gran Sociedad Cultural de Amigos Azteka)—this last one had an alternate Nahualt spelling as well, “Weyi” instead of “Hueyi.” “Weyi Tlatekpanilztli Aztekatl,” Aztekatl.Org, 2010, http://aztekatl.org/. Friedlander translates it as the “The Great Society of Aztec Fellows;” *Being Indian in Hueyapan*, 1975, 183.


44 Ibid.


46 Ibid., 140. Original Spanish: “Concede gran importancia al estudio de los fenómenos étnicos y raciales y considera que la raza judia es inferior en tanto que la raza nahuatl pertenece a las razas superiores. Con frecuencia
señala la semejanza entre la cruz gamada y el signo nahuí ollin. Concluye que el poder de los aztecas se derivaba del poder esotérico de este signo, mismo poder contenido en la suástica empleada por Hitler. Conoce con detalle los Juicios de Nurenbberg, los menciona y glosa por fechas, contenidos nombres de testigos, etc.”


48 Martínez Díaz, “Aztekatol-Mexihkatol,” 7–9. I have reviewed seven books penned by him, ranging from 1938-1964, and they were all published by “U.T.L.I. Aztekatl,” or a variant thereof. This is the acronym for the “Ueyi Tlatekpaniliztlí Ikniuhtik Aztekatl,” or the Great Cultural Society of Aztec Friends.


51 Ibid., 39–40.

52 Many modern day *calpullis* originated as *danza azteca* groups, only later adopting Mexikayotl ideology, and in effect, linking them intellectually and ideologically to Juan Luna-Cárdenas and the Great Society of Aztec Friends.

53 Odena Güemes does not provide a date in her retelling of the account. In Friedlander’s revised edition of *Being Indian in Hueyapan*, she corroborates this story and supplies the identity of the young girl’s parents. She also notes that the boy “Huizti” was around 12 years old when she lived in the village, 1969-1970. Therefore, the incident between Luna-Cárdenas and the young girl must have occurred in the late fifties, 1958 or 1959. Judith Friedlander, *Being Indian in Hueyapan: A Revised and Updated Edition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 261, endnote 32.

54 Odena Güemes, *Movimiento Confederado Restaurador de la Cultura de Anáhuac*, 104. Original Spanish: “Luna Cárdenas fue protagonista de una triste historia en Hueyapan y los hermanos Nieva reprobaron su conducta. Una sucinta narración de lo que se sabe y se dice en Hueyapan refiere que en las cercanías del pueblo se habían encontrado unas pinturas murales; cuando Juan Luna y sus acompañantes llegaron al lugar del descubrimiento el cielo se nublo y empezó a llover torrencialmente, pero ocurrió que las nubes se abrieron dejando pasar los rayos del sol que le bañaban y coronaban, a él, únicamente. Con este fenómeno natural de su parte además de que no se pondría en duda su linaje, se le presentaba la ocasión de aparecer como un iluminado. Lo sucedido se convertiría en el indicio de que en ese lugar debía nacer un príncipe descendiente de la antigua nobleza mexica. Así, contrariando sus deseos, una doncella fue desposada ‘ritualmente.’ Sus padres muy desconsclosados nos relataron que así nació el ‘príncipe Huizti’ (contracción del nombre Huizilihuitl o ‘el rey,’ como lo llaman en la zona. Luna Cárdenas prosiguió con sus actividades restauradoras pero con el tiempo fue decayendo su entusiasmo; dejó de atender al vástago y acabo por no volver más a Hueyapan. La joven tuvo que abandonar el pueblo pues era imposible vivir en una situación tan aseñalada.”


57 For more on their relationship, see Friedlander, 182–84.
58 For more on this idea that Native Nahuatl speakers consider their dialect lacking and inferior, see Magnus P. Hansen’s dissertation, “Nahuatl Nation” cited above—particularly Chapter 3: “Nahuatl in the Plural: The Linguistic and Ideological Diversity of Nahuatl,” pp 129-93.


60 Miguel Barrios Espinoza, “Mexihkayotl,” in *Mexihkatl Itonalama*, vol. 5 (Azkapotzalco, D.F.: s. n., 1950), 1. Magnus P. Hansen provided the English translation from the Nahuatl original (see Figure 2), personal communication, December 2016. He holds a Ph.D. in Linguistic Anthropology and specializes in Mexican indigenous languages, especially Nahuatl.

61 Juan Luna Cárdenas, *Pre-historia de America* (Mexico, D.F.: U.T.L.I. Aztekatl, 1947), 9. Original Spanish: “Las investigaciones se han desarrollado en un campo de prejuicios; investigadores de todas las latitudes de la Tierra han intervenido con sus estudios, y estos estudios se han publicado de una manera dispersa y divergen completamente en cuanto al criterio de sus conclusiones. No otra cosa podía resultar de esa maraña de ideas extravagantes que han campeado sobre los pueblos de nuestro continente.”

62 This distrust of Western science and scholarship is shared by other indigenous ethnocentrists and is not unique to neo-Mexikah. Vine Deloria, Jr., a scholar of Native American descent, was an American equivalent of Juan Luna-Cárdenas; for an example of his anti-scientific stance, see *Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact* (Golden, Colo.: Fulcrum Pub., 1997).

63 This is a persistent idea among neo-Mexikas. I trace it to the archeologist Eulalia Guzmán who published a book in 1958, *Relaciones de Hernán Cortés a Carlos V sobre la invasión de Anáhuac*, in which she analyzed the letters of Hernán Cortés. In it, she calls into question his reports of widespread human sacrifice and cannibalism. She concludes that Cortes made it all up in order to justify his own illegal actions in Mexico. Guzmán and Luna-Cárdenas knew each other, and it is possible that he borrowed these ideas from her. In the prologue, she states that the work on the book began in 1940, and that she finished writing the manuscript in 1947. It took over 10 years to find someone that would publish her polemic account. This suggests that these ideas of denying human sacrifice and cannibalism among the Aztec date to at least that period. Eulalia Guzmán, *Relaciones de Hernán Cortés a Carlos V sobre la invasión de Anáhuac*, 2nd ed. (Mexico: Editorial Orión, 1966), cxxv–cxxviii.


65 “Ixchilalan” is also sometimes spelled “Ixchiltlan,” “Itzchilan,” “Itzchilatlan,” or some other similar variant.

66 Martínez Díaz also thinks that the term is a Luna-Cárdenas construction. “Aztecatl-Mexihkayotl,” 86.

67 Siméon simply defines “cemanauac” as “the world” (mundo); *Diccionario de la lengua nahuatl o mexicana: redactado según los documentos impresos y manuscritos más auténticos y precedido de una introducción*, séptima edición en español (México: Siglo Veintiuno, 1988), 77. The term is sometimes translated to “land between the waters,” a reference to the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans that sandwich Mexico. Like the other toponyms used by neo-Mexikah (see Ixchilalan above), it also has various spellings, such as “Zemanahuc Tlamachtilyan”—a Mexikayotl group that was founded in the 1970s.

68 This is incorrect. Vespucci sailed with Portuguese explorers, and never with Columbus.

69 League of United Latin American Citizens, *Cultura y civilización azteca / Juan Luna Cárdenas*, DVD (from original U-matic videocassette container), Filmed Interviews, Special Collections, Benson Latin American Collection, UT-Austin, (1979), 00:28-02:51. Original interview is in Spanish.
Benedict Anderson defines the “nation” as one that “is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Editions/NLB, 1983), 15.

For simplicity, when generalizing I will use the term “artists” to include poets, writers, dancers, and other cultural innovators that were not necessarily part of the intelligentsia.

The terms “Lunaesque” and “Lunism”(used later in this study) are my adaptations of Martinez Díaz’s similar term, “lunacardenista,” and will be used henceforth to denote neo-Mexikah revisions and interpretations that disagree with the accepted scholarship; “Aztekayotl-Mexihkayotl,” 92. Most academics that have looked at this phenomenon are unaware of its deeper history and only date its occurrence within the last fifteen years.
Chapter 4

RESTORATIONISTS & THE “DANZA AZTECA;” 1950-1969

Introduction

Several decades had passed since the end of the Mexican Revolution when an upheaval of a different sort swept the nation. Just as idealist youth had rejected the status quo of the early 1900s, a new generation of dreamers in the 1950s began searching for alternative ways of relating to the world. This manifested itself partly through the subversive lifestyle of the “pachuco.” This border youth culture was introduced by the comedic actor Germán Valdés, better known by his stage name “Tin Tan.” Although the pachuco lifestyle, known as “pachuquismo,” was not directly tied to neo-Aztecism or Anahuac restorationists, it played a role in the emergence of Mexican counterculture. In a roundabout way, young Mexicans of the fifties and sixties embraced Indianness through drug experimentation and by rejecting the values of their conservative society. In this, pachuquismo played a role, and we begin this part of the story with Germán Valdés.

Valdés was born in Mexico City on September 19, 1915, but was not raised there. His family moved around Mexico during his formative years, finally settling in Juarez, Chihuahua, when he was twelve. Growing up along the border, he—like his ethnic Mexican peers—came of age in a period when the United States was highly xenophobic. During the Great Depression, the U.S. government issued the Mexican Repatriation Act (1929-1939), a euphemistically and
inappropriately labeled injunction whose intended target were undocumented ethnic Mexican immigrants. In the ten years that the U.S. enforced the Act, the country ethnically cleansed itself of over a million Mexicans through forced or coerced deportations. It did not matter that sixty percent of those “repatriated” were American born citizens.

With the start of the Second World War, Americans signed up in droves to fight against the Axis Powers creating a labor shortage. Along the border, immigrants from Mexico slowly returned to satisfy the growing demands of a war economy in need of workers. During the war, American conservative values became more pronounced, and the U.S. government sanctioned xenophobia when it rounded up Japanese Americans and interned them in camps. This was the social environment that Mexican immigrants encountered, one not so different from the Depression era discrimination they had faced just a few years earlier. Living in Juarez, Chihuahua, Valdés witnessed the flow of immigrants “pa’l otro lado” (to the other side) as well as the development of a distinct Mexican-American youth culture in the barrios (neighborhoods) of Juarez and El Paso, Texas—one that he later emulated successfully in Mexican cinema.

The pachuco lifestyle was a response to a variety of factors. These included increased urbanization among Mexican-Americans, increased labor demands satisfied by Mexican immigrants who replaced the American workers fighting in the war, and the rise of consumer culture among young working class ethnic Mexicans. Chicano studies scholar Sonny Espinoza notes that the vacuum created by the Anglo youth who had enlisted in the military “enabled opportunities for minority youths in the unskilled manufacturing and service sectors.”1 This allowed for an “accumulation of disposable income by Mexican-American youths” that enabled “patterns of conspicuous consumption, hence, a youth culture emerged amongst the working class predicated on a flamboyant fashion sense.”2 Indeed, the ostentatious high-waisted, wide-
legged, tight-cuffed, and pegged trousers of the zoot-suits—as they were called—made *pachucos* stand out. The pants complemented a long coat with wide lapels and wide padded shoulders, a fedora hat, a pocket watch with a long knee length chain, and French-style pointed shoes.

Although this costume was popular among many ethnic groups—Filipinos, Italians, Irish, and African Americans—anti-Mexican sentiment incited by the press in 1942-1943 led to violence against *pachucos* in several American cities during the so-called “Zoot-suit Riots.” After the riots, many young Chicanos swapped their “*tacuche*” (the suit) for the military uniform, went off to fight, and returned from the war as the highest decorated ethnic group. The *pachucos* gave way to the Mexican-American generation who formed the civil rights organizations that gave rise to the Chicano movement a generation later.³

![Figure 1: Germán Valdés as "Tin Tan" the pachuco. Public domain.](image)
By the time Valdés’s *pachuco* big screen persona “Tin Tan” came on the scene in the early fifties, the fad was in decline in the U.S. As a borderland phenomenon, it was virtually unheard of in the Mexican interior, and there is a good reason for that. Mainstream Mexicans viewed border culture as corrupted and unworthy of inclusion in the umbrella of *mexicanidad*. Although not common today, the terms “*pocha*” and “*pocho*” were derogatory terms used by Mexicans to connote Americanized ethnic Mexicans tainted with Anglo values and culture. Ironically, Mexican Americans called these same people “*chicanos,*” a word originally used disparagingly towards lower and working class Mexican immigrants.

One of the earliest references in print to “*chicanos*” dates to a 1911 commentary piece in *La Cronica* newspaper from Laredo, Texas. The author described certain “*chicanos*” as an embarrassment to all Mexicans for their low-class behavior and roaming the streets selling tamales while shouting “Red Hot Tamales!!! ‘Red, white, and green, the mexican flag in.’” In other examples of this period, the term was often used to label ethnic Mexicans who behaved in unbecoming behavior usually associated with the rural poor. An analogous way to view this is to compare the “*chicano*” label to the terms “redneck” or “hillbilly” that are often associated with poor whites. During the Chicano movement, young Mexican Americans redeemed the label and applied it to themselves as a badge of pride in their Mexican heritage. In fact the term is a shortened version of Mexicano, with the letter “x” retaining a semblance of its original Nahuatl pronunciation of “*mexica*” (me-SHE-ca). All of these terms (*pocho, pachuco,* and *chicano*) were particular to the Americanization and creation of a distinct Mexican border aesthetic—one that blended Mexican working class attitudes with American consumerism.

Pachuquismo was also a response to the alienation felt by young people who experienced society’s rejection of their ethnic group’s presence—a society that was indifferent at best and
intolerant at worst. Young Chicana/os understood that there was something wrong, and the very name assumed by these disaffected youth reflected that sentiment. In a memoir by Rosalia Valdés-Julian (Tin Tan’s daughter) entitled La historia inédita de Tin Tan, she recalls her father explaining that the term *pachuco* came from the expression “Me voy para el chueco” (I’m going to the crooked side). In time, through the organic nature of linguistic evolution, the phrase was contracted to “para el chueco,” “pal’chuco,” and finally simply “pachuco.” Chicana/os still refer to El Paso as “El Chuco” today.

Valdés’s introduction of *pachuquismo* to Mexican audiences does not appear to have translated into a similar pervasive subculture among urban youth there. The dynamic was not the same. Mexico already had its own version of the nonconformist rebel, the “*pelado*.” Nonetheless, Valdés’s articulation of the *pachuco* did have an influence on the surfacing Mexican rock-and-roll culture of the fifties and sixties. In an enlightening book on Mexican counterculture by José Agustín, he notes that *pachucos* were few in Mexico City, but they left a significant impression nonetheless. They usually congregated at the famous “Salon Mexico.”

When Valdés was at the height of his movie screen *pachuco* persona, the Mexican intellectual Octavio Paz published *Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950). *Labyrinth* was an analysis of *lo mexicano* that begins by harshly criticizing *pachucos*. Paz did not hide his disdain, stating: “The purpose of his grotesque dandyism and anarchic behavior is not so much to point out the injustice and incapacity of a society that has failed to assimilate him as it is to demonstrate his personal will to remain different.” As a privileged scholar, Paz found it difficult to understand Chicana/o life, but that did not stop him from psychoanalyzing it. More to the point, he found the adoption of American conspicuous consumption by Chicanos as an excess that was antithetical to Mexicanness, and perhaps even a threat to the fabric of Mexican conservatism.
It could be said that *pachuquismo* was the first true form of American counterculture to invade Mexico, which explains why Agustín begins his book with a discussion about it. He also contends that “pachucos were the 1940s silent antecedent of counterculture.”

Although not explicitly saying so, Agustín is evidently connecting the non-conventionality of the beatniks and hippies—whom the book is really about—with the nonconformity of the first “rebels without a cause,” the *pachucos*. Agustín goes on to describe the rise of hippie culture in Mexico and its ties to the radical left political youth movement that developed in response to the growing repression and abuse of power by the conservative government.

The most disturbing example of this abuse came in the form of the now infamous “Massacre of Tlatelolco” on October 2, 1968, that left hundreds of student protesters dead. The government of then President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz disputed the claim that the troops he sent to disrupt the 10,000-strong demonstration at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas (Square of the Three Cultures) had killed around 300 demonstrators. The government officially confirmed the death of only 32 protestors. Among the reasons that sparked the student movement was the stagnation of the economy and the desire for government reform. The political establishment viewed the criticism and motivations for change by the student protesters as attacks on the very structure of their power—the one-party system. In the massacre’s aftermath, the government tried hard to cover up the facts and censor the media. It also took a harsh stance on young people who were emulating the troublesome counterculture of Anglo-American hippies.

Decades later, the residual trauma surrounding the tragic events of 1968 manifested itself in the form of a mystical-religious movement around a semi-mythical figure called “Regina” who is said to have been among the massacred. The movement was given credibility in the book, *Regina: dos de octubre no se olvida* (1987), by the New Age author and esoteric guru
Antonio Velasco-Piña. The “reginistas” mixed indigenous spirituality with ethno-nationalist Mexicanness and created what is referred to as “neomexicanidad” or “la nueva mexicanidad” (New Mexicanity). This socio-religious movement developed close ties with Aztec dancers and neo-Mexikas.

As for the hippie connection, Agustín tells us that many followed in the footsteps of the American beatniks, such as Neal Cassady, Jack Kerouac, and Allen Ginsberg. These cultural rebels traveled to Mexico in the fifties and sixties in search of hallucinogenic plants—i.e. ololiuhqui, peyote, and mushrooms—as part of their never ending quest to find alternative ways of engaging existence itself. At a time when it was not voguish to do so, they made their way to remote towns like Huautla (Oaxaca), San Miguel de Allende (Guanajuato), and Real de Catorce (San Luis Potosi). As a result of the beat invasion, these once sleepy communities were slowly transformed into tourist magnets that have never been the same since.

Taking their cues from the American beatniks, Mexican youth also flocked to where these plants of “power” grew naturally. In his book on Mexican counterculture, Father Enrique Marroquín—the first academic to study the topic—found that, as in the United States, drug experimentation was rampant among the youth involved in “La Onda” (the hippie movement). This in turn inspired some Mexican hippies to embrace indigenous spirituality, in particular the kind which involved the usage of psychotropic drugs. Father Marroquín called them “jipis aztecas,” or “jipitecas” (xipitecas) to distinguish them from Anglo-American hippies. Today, this term is used depreciatively by neo-Mexikas towards those who are perceived as being “posers” or New Agers who do not follow “la tradicion” faithfully. This was the socio-cultural and political climate that romantic indigenists contended with during this transformative period.
The various political, spiritual, and philosophical ideas circulating between the 1940s – 1970s in Mexico had a tremendous effect on the evolution of neo-Mexika ideology. Additionally, there was an independent Native tradition that developed separately from the type of indigenism discussed in this study thus far. It was “la danza tradicional,” and it collided head on with aztekah ideology in the seventies. This was the result of the younger generation of dancers that became increasingly politicized at a time when decolonial movements worldwide inspired the social unrest at home. The modern Mexikayotl that later gave rise to Chicana/o indigeneity emerged out of this melding of traditions.

**Rodolfo Nieva-López: From Criollo Identity to Neo-Mexika**

Rodolfo Nieva-López was born in Mexico City on May 13, 1905 to parents who were second generation “chilangos” (as the residents of Mexico City are known). His grandparents, on both sides, were from Orizaba, Veracruz, and knew Nahuatl but rarely ever spoke the language in public. It is unclear if they were actual nahautlats or if they were just exposed to the language in their community. It is possible that Nieva-López’s family was not culturally indigenous because, as a young man in the mid 1920s, he aligned himself with criollo nationalism and held a mestizo identity. The anthropologist Lina Odena-Güemes, who looked closely at Nieva-López and his neo-Mexika activities, adeptly points out that he grew up:

… in a society that suffered the most serious contradictions. At this time, the old debate about “our origins” was again taking place. Once again, the old wound would be reopened, caused by the desperation to find an identity: to be an indio or to be a criollo (or rather, to feel indio or to feel criollo) and therefore make every effort to live in a corresponding way.  

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The ever-present debate over Mexican cultural identity had a deep impact throughout his life. From young adulthood to maturity, Nieva-López swung from a *criollo* to an indigenous identity.\(^{15}\)

![Figure 2: Rodolfo Nieva-López. MCRCA website.](image-url)

As with most young people who lived through the trauma of the Mexican Revolution, the tumult and its aftermath greatly influenced the direction that his education took. Interested in matters of justice, Nieva-López went to law school at the Facultad de Derechos – Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) between 1925 and 1930. A believer in Vasconcelos neo-positivist cultural enterprise, he was involved in the creation of various student groups,
including the Partido Nacioanlista Estudiantil, while enrolled at the UNAM. He was a classmate of many future leaders, such as Miguel Alemán Valdez (President of Mexico) and Ernesto P. Uruchurtu (Regent of Mexico City), the latter with whom he maintained a close relationship throughout his life. As a young adult, Nieva-López sympathized with the ideas of Vasconcelos and criollo/mestizo nationalism (ideological mestizaje). And, unlike many of his post-Revolution generation, he was an adamant Hispanophile and held extreme anti-Anglo sentiments. He also subscribed to the very popular opinion among nationalist intellectuals that neither Bolshevism nor American democracy was viable in Mexico.

For most of his life, Nieva-López associated himself with the political environment of the then all-powerful official party, the Partido de la Revolucion Mexicana which later became the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). As a prominent member of the “official party,” he was also president of the Mexican Bar of Lawyers, but this would all change in the latter years of his life. By 1946, Nieva-López’s Hispanophilia started to wane while his political thinking slowly evolved towards indigenist nationalism. His interest in the neo-Mexika brand of indigenism is largely due to his interaction with Juan Luna-Cárdenas and his aztekah group, the Great Cultural Society of Aztec Friends (GCSAF).

It is unclear when both men met, but it was sometime in the mid to late fifties. This is arrived at by noting that Nieva-López was present at Hueyapan when the group headed by Luna-Cárdenas experienced the natural phenomenon that led to his impregnation of the young Hueyapeña girl. Nieva-López’s sister, Maria del Carmen, informed Odena-Güemes that the incident soured the relationship between her brother and the great aztekah leader. Luna-Cárdenas influence greatly diminished after the exposure of that depraved deed. The GCSAF soon went out of favor, and in its place, Nieva-López’s group, the “Ollin Kalpultin Anauak
Movement of Anahuac Culture), rose to prominence and established itself as the leading authority of things Mexikayotl. This group was (and is) commonly known by its Spanish name and acronym, the Movimiento Confederado Restaurador de la Cultura de Anáhuac (MCRCA). The exact date of the MCRCA’s founding is unclear, but Odena-Güemes placed its origin somewhere between 1955 and 1958.

The majority of the MCRCA’s membership consisted mainly of college educated and middle class professionals. Like Luna-Cárdenas before him, Nieva-López also went by a Nahuatl name, Zenkizka Kuauhtli, which loosely translates to “perfect” or “supreme” eagle. It is unclear from the sources how he received this name, but it does demonstrate the neo-Mexika tendency of adopting an indigenous name, often of grandiose significance. The group’s purpose was to restore pre-Hispanic culture through the “philosophical doctrine of Mexicanity,” in other words—Mexikayotl. According to one MCRCA member:

The reason for the founding of our movement is autochthonism; to restore the cultural values of Anahuac; erase the series of [inferiority] complexes that the invasion left us, like the Indian complex … begin banishing the evil that the invasion brought us which is attributed to our autochthonous ancestors … Therefore it is necessary to bring forth our culture which has been in the dark, because our history was made up by the invaders …

The last sentence reveals a couple of major themes of the MCRCA’s agenda: the deep sense of purpose that Aztec culture must be restored and the official narrative of the conquest of Mexico must be revised. This Lunaesque distrust of the accepted scholarship was a key tenet of modern Mexikayotl. Neo-Mexikas perceived academic scholarship as one-sided and favorable to the Spanish as well as denigrating and slanderous to the memory of indigenous ancestors. These deeply entrenched views fed into the restorative aspect of the MCRCA. Other ways in which
they challenged conventional standards in the literature involved calling the time before European arrival as “pre-Cuauhtémoc,” instead of “pre-Cortesian,” “pre-Colombian,” or “pre-Hispanic.”

Another Lunaesque pattern adopted by the MCRCA was the organizational structure of Luna-Cárdenas’s GCSAF, a structure that set the template for future neo-Mexika organizations. As had the GCSAF, the MCRCA used a governing group called the “Ue Tlatokan” (Supreme Council) headed by the “Ue Tekuhtli” (Great Executor) and the “Ue Ziuakuaitl” (Great Administrator). Nieva-López held the position of Great Executor from the group’s inception until his death in 1968 while Enrique de Gortari held the administrator position during that period. A third position, the “Ue-Tekuh-Paleui,” is not clear in terms of purpose or officeholder. What is clear is that, in keeping with Aztec tradition, individuals held their positions until death or resignation.

The MCRCA lived up to its “confederated” name by establishing numerous calpullis in and around Mexico City and the surrounding states. As noted in the previous chapter, a calpulli (pl. calpultin) at its most basic is a community, but it is sometimes used to denote a school or a neo-Mexika cultural organization. When Odena-Güemes conducted her initial research in the late 1970s, she noted the following active groups: Ueuetl Kalpulli de Zakatlamanko (Ancient Community of Zakatlamanko – Mexico City), Kalpulli de Koakalko (Coacalco – the State of Mexico), Kalpulli de Mezkititla (Mezquititla – the State of Mexico), Kalpulli de Koauillan (Coahuila – City of Torreón), Kalpulli de Zakatekaz (Zacatecas – Zacatecas City), Kalpulli Martín Carrera (Mexico City), Cooperativa-Kalpulli “Circulo de Oro” (Community Cooperative “Golden Circle” – Mexico City), Cooperativa-Kalpulli de Consumo (Community Food
As the names of some of the calpullis suggest, their purposes ranged from community food co-ops to more unassuming organizations that functioned as schools that taught pre-Hispanic ideology. Of the latter, the Kalpulli de Koakalko is perhaps one of the best examples of this enterprise as well as one of the few calpullis associated with the MCRCA that managed to survive well into the twenty-first century. Francisco Jiménez—an original founding member of the MCRCA and better known by his Nahuatl name, Tlakaelel—headed Kalpulli de Koakalko until his death in 2012.

A Neo-Mexika Revelation

By the early fifties, Nieva-López claimed to have received a “revelation” when he came in contact with various aztekah restorationist groups. Nieva-López also claimed that one of these groups had revealed to him a “mandate” that had been supposedly proclaimed by Cuauhtémoc the night before Tenochtitlan surrendered to the Spanish. Nieva-López first named the mandate the “Consigna de 12 de Agosto de 1521,” but was later renamed the “Nauatilamatl” (Mandate) to give it an air of authenticity. Apparently, the mysterious aztekah group had chosen Nieva-López as the one to finally reveal the mandate after centuries of secrecy.

Oral tradition among Aztec dancers and neo-Mexikah contends that the message was drafted by the “Ueyi Tlahtokan de la Gran Confederación de Anáhuac” (Supreme Council of the Great Anahuac Confederation) who then directed Cuauhtémoc to proclaim it to the Mexica people on the eve of the fall of Tenochtitlan. The mandate has since been retranslated and disseminated under various names and interpretations, such as “La Consigna de Cuauhtémoc”
and the “Declaration of Kuauhtemok.” Although the prose is not as flowery as the Spanish versions, the following is one of the most common English translations:

Our Sun has gone down / Our Sun has been lost from view / and has left us / in complete darkness / But we know it will return again / that it will rise again / to light us anew / But while it is there in / the Mansion of Silence / Let's join together, let's embrace each other / and in the very center of our being hide / all that our hearts love / and we know is the Great Treasure. / Let us hide our Temples / our schools, our sacred soccer game / our youth centers / our houses of flowery song / so that only our streets remain. / Our homes will enclose us / until our New Sun rises. / Most honorable fathers / and most honorable mothers, / may you never forget to guide your young ones / teach your children, while you live / how good it has been and will be. / Until now our beloved Anahuac / sheltered and protected our destinies / that our ancestors / and our parents enthusiastically received / and seeded in our being. / Now we will instruct our children / how to be good / They will raise themselves up and gain strength / and as goodness make real their great destiny / in this, our beloved mother Anahuac.

Cuauhtémoc’s mandate is a call to action that delivers a sense of purpose to those who seek an indigenist direction through Mexikayotl; the presumed antiquity of the mandate gives it sense of legitimacy.

However, there is no historical basis for the claim that Cuauhtémoc ever delivered the mandate. There is no hint of its existence before Nieva-López revealed it. When presented with this problem, neo-Mexikas dismiss it and point to the spirit of the message—one of resistance, resilience, and restoration—that matters more than its authenticity. There is no debate about when it first appeared in the modern era. According to the prophecy associated with the mandate, after its initial delivery by Cuauhtémoc, it was supposed to be held secret and only revealed when the time was right.

As the story goes, Cuauhtémoc’s mandate had been preserved for centuries by the “guardians” of “la tradición”. The mandate prophesied the restoration of the culture of Anahuac
and the rebirth of Mexicayotl. The MCRCA first made the text public in a 1967 issue of their newspaper, Izkalotzin (Resurgence), and later republished in the book, “Mexikayotl:” esencia del mexicano; filosofía náuatl (1969). Tellingly, there is no record or mention of the mandate by anyone, including the ardent neo-Aztecist writers from the colonial period, such as Tezozómoc, Chimalpahin, and Ixtlilxóchitl. Not even Luna-Cárdenas, the original modern aztekah who fashioned himself as the heir to the throne of Tenochtitlan, ever mentioned the existence of this mandate.

The mandate is now a part of Mexico City’s tourist culture, and there are places in and around the city’s main square, the Zocalo, where it is posted in the form of large scale plaques and mosaics (see Figure 1). Moreover, during the bicentennial of Mexican independence, a journalist described the mandate as the nation’s “first declaration of independence.” If the mandate was not an actual pronouncement delivered by Cuauhtémoc at the behest of a Supreme Council, where did it originate?

In the book Mexikayotl, published by Rodolfo’s sister—Maria del Carmen Nieva-López, she states (in Rodolfo’s own words) how he was entrusted with making the mandate public:

In effect, I certify that the knowledge that I have poured in these pages, I received according to the mentioned mandate of August 12,1521, in other words through oral tradition, given that the documents that our culture possessed, like the codices and hieroglyphs, were savagely destroyed by the Spaniards in the pyres that were formed in the name of God and under the admonitions of the Spanish priests, who came with the invading soldiers, in the courtyards of the so-called First Archbishopric of Mexico; the former, then the latter, torn by a thousand means or placed as the foundations of the buildings built in the Spanish layout over the city of Méxiko-Tenochtitlan.

The verbal tradition was transmitted to me by the descendants of the great Kalmeca of Tlauak, Federal District, headed by the illustrious representative of our people and great mathematician Mr. Estanislao Ramírez. Tlauak was a great cultural center and in it there flourished notable institutions such as the mentioned Kalmeka, which when the city fell, as the center of the nation and capital of Anauak, took care of
retransmitting the mandate of August 12, 1521, so that it could be faithfully delivered in a manner that efficiently fulfilled its purposes.

The knowledge I received was confirmed and supported by representatives of the Yaqui people. It was also supported by Professor Pablo F. García, distinguished son of the Tlauika people and originally from Tepoztlán, Morelos. Moreover, they were confirmed and expanded in Uaxtekapan, today called Huasteca, as well as with various personal researches carried out in other parts of the country.

The version of our history and culture, as received and relayed as faithfully as possible in this book, radically contradicts the Spanish version of the same subjects.  

Maria del Carmen does not give a date on when Rodolfo received the mandate nor why the elders of the Kalmeca of Tlauak (Tlahuac) entrusted him with revealing it. Additionally, it is unclear if this revelation is separate from the one where he realized that he was actually an indio and not a criollo. Like his aztekah predecessor Luna-Cárdenas, Nieva-López felt it was important to legitimate his indigeneity and leadership position through visions and mysterious revelations.

On his way to becoming Indian, Rodolfo Nieva-López founded the “Metzikayo Ahkomanalli” (Mexicanity Movement) sometime between 1957 and 1959. This later morphed into the “Movimiento Confederado Restaurador” (Confederated Restoration Movement), an early version of the MCRCA. During this time, Nieva-López became the leading figure of modern Mexikayotl, and the Kalmeca of Tlauak’s decision to finally reveal the mandate through him undoubtedly helped elevate his credibility among aztekah indigenists and the emergent neo-Mexikas. Meanwhile, the credibility of Juan Luna-Cárdenas took a sharp downward turn because of the Hueyapan incident. María del Carmen was so disgusted with his actions that her disdain for the man was still evident when she recounted the story to Odena-Güemes some twenty years later.
As time progressed, former associates of Luna-Cárdenas slowly parted ways with him and joined Nieva-López in founding the early iteration of the future MCRCA. Some of these people included members of the Great Light Aztec Union, a group for which little is known other than a leaflet in honor of Cuauhtémoc distributed in 1947, and the Pro Nahuatl Society “Mariano J. Rojas,” which published the bilingual newspaper *Mexihcayotl* in the mid forties (Figure 2).³²

Another reason for the split between the two *aztekah* leaders was due to ideological differences. Nieva-López was more interested in political activity and rewriting the history of the country from a Mexicanist perspective, and Luna-Cárdenas was more concerned with spiritual matters and reviving Aztec religion.³³ Luna-Cárdenas and his followers held ceremonies dedicated to pre-Hispanic deities. On the other hand, the ceremonies that Nieva-López promoted leaned towards the exaltation of Aztec military heroes and other defenders of *mexicanidad*. The importance given to figures like Cuauhtémoc by the members of the MCRCA is a good example of that.

Although, it might have been the case that both groups favored one approach over the other, it is also true that both engaged in all of these activities to varying degrees. More to the point, MCRCA ritually celebrated the Mexika New Year on December 21 and used censers to burn copal.³⁴ By that same token, Luna-Cárdenas’s metaphysical motivations were probably inspired by his firm belief in the restoration of Mexikayotl, an ideology that anchored itself on the greatness of its founders—the political Aztec leaders and savants who embodied the untainted core of a utopian indigeneity.³⁵

The two men shared much in common. Both were charismatic leaders who looked to the indigenous past for the source of their identity. While Nieva-López favored the political over the spiritual, Luna-Cárdenas preferred the opposite. Alas, despite Luna-Cárdenas efforts as the
father of modern Mexikayotl, his _aztekah_ organization remained static and parochial. It took Nieva-López to successfully spread the message of Mexikayotl far and wide.

The Rise and Spread of Modern Mexikayotl

Nieva-López was a great messenger of whatever ideology he happened to favor at any given movement in his life, and he found various ways of spreading his gospel. For instance, when Nieva-López first took up the neo-Mexika torch in the early fifties, he worked as a columnist at one of Mexico City’s major newspapers, _El Universal_. Through his political connections, he was able to discuss the principles of Mexikayotl with President Adolfo Ruiz Cortínez (1952-1958) during his presidential campaign. Nieva-López even wrote Ruiz-Cortínez an open letter in his column asking that, in assessing the problems plaguing the nation, he consider the plight of the “raza indígena” (indigenous people). In that same letter, Nieva-López argued that although most Mexicans were of mixed ancestry, the _mestizo_ ideology was a deficient holdover concept from the colonial era. In his estimation, it enabled _mestizos_ to separate themselves from indigenous people in order to justify their ill treatment and neglect.

In the years leading up to the formation of the MCRCA, Nieva-López was involved in the creation of other groups, like the “Movimiento Cívico Nacional” (MCN, National Civic movement) and the “Federación de Agrupaciones Pro México” (FAPM, Federation of Pro Mexico Associations). Through these groups, Nieva-López spread Mexicanist values and promoted a political ideology guided by those principles. For example, through the MCN, Nieva-López issued one of his first declarations to the Mexican people in 1956. The last bit of his message read:
MEXICAN: Such is your mission; you have to fulfill it by your own efforts and with your own resources. Do not expect official help. Let our Government fulfill its specific functions. We fulfill our destinies, those of our People, which were announced in the legends and traditions of the Aztec or Mexica people, destinies that are of glory, power and greatness.\(^{38}\)

In her analysis of Nieva-López, Odena-Güemes noted his growing authoritarianism which is evinced through his issuance of dictates as the one quoted above. He became increasingly disillusioned by the political climate and discontented with the growing rebelliousness and decadence of the Mexican youth who were being influenced by pochos and Anglo counterculture. Ironically, these same youth would later become some of the movement’s most ardent supporters and followers.

By 1957, his feelings toward these issues and others led him to found the direct forerunner to the MCRCA, the “Metzikayo Ahkomanalli” (Mexicanist Movement). Through this group, Nieva-López hoped to reverse some of the social ills that he perceived were ruining the country. The first step in accomplishing this goal manifested itself in the drafting of a “Doctrina de la Mexicanidad” (Doctrine of Mexicanity). The following are a few select points that became cornerstones of the MCRCA’s Mexikayotl ideology: Nahuatl as the national language of Mexico to the exclusion of others; the purity of indigenous people contrasted against the (supposed) inferiority complex of mestizos; and that the maximum goal was the restoration of the Aztec empire’s greatness.\(^{39}\)

The Doctrine of Mexicanity reflected much of the original aztekah restorationist rhetoric and motivations espoused by Luna-Cárdenas and the GCSAF. In keeping with the objectives of the doctrine, Nieva-López followed in the footsteps of his mentor and created the “Mexica Tlahtol Calli” (Mexican Language Academy) in 1960. The purpose of the academy was to
create a Nahuatl alphabet that promoted the written usage of that language among Mexicans. In true Lunaesque fashion, he advocated for a very particular Nahuatl alphabet that borrowed from Luna-Cárdenas, Miguel Barrios-Espinoza, and the standards set forth by the “Aztec Congress” of 1939.\(^{40}\)

The year before the establishment of the language academy, the Mexicanist Movement changed its name to the “Movimiento Confederado de Anáhuac” (Confederated Movement of Anahuac). It eventually added the “restaurador” (restorationist) qualifier to signal its ultimate purpose of resurrecting the cultural, spiritual, and political values ancient Mexico. The cure for Mexico’s corruption, Nieva-López believed, could only come from immersing oneself in Mexikayotl. The process involved rejecting mestizaje as an ideology, adopting a Nahuatl name and naming your children as well, forming “calpullis,” and rejecting foreign culture and ideas—particularly those of Anglo-American and Spanish/European origin.

In a unique move that drew from his academic education, Nieva-López oversaw the creation of the “Academia de Derecho de Anáhuac” (Law Academy of Anahuac). This project was promoted under the auspices of the “Asociación Nacional de Abogados” (National Association of Lawyers). He was also responsible for the creation of the Anahuaka Nemilil Nechikolli (Anahuac Culture Institute) which oversaw the teaching of philosophy, art, dance, literature, song, sculpture, biological sciences, and the history of Anahuac from a neo-Mexika perspective. Additionally, as previously noted, he also founded Izkalotl (Resurgence), the MCRCA’s periodical and main means of propagating their brand of Mexikayotl.

Always the patriot and public servant, Nieva-López worked a great part of his life in the government of Mexico City, where he took advantage of his relations with Ernesto P. Uruchurtu, who appointed him member of the “Consejo Ejecutivo de la Ciudad de México” (Executive
Council of Mexico City). Having had close ties with Presidents Miguel Aleman and Emilio Portes Gil, he made them honorary members of the MCRCA in 1960. As Nieva-López’s mexicanismo grew more xenophobic and extremely nationalistic, his displeasure with the direction of Mexican politics increased accordingly. Nieva-López’s desire to correct the ills facing the nation prompted his political motivations, a move that antagonized some of his old acquaintances. His political ambitions had a tremendous effect on the future of the organization.

From 1965 onward, Nieva-López gradually politicized his speech and radicalized his position against the government. On September 15 of that year, he announced the creation of a new political party, the “Partido de la Mexicanidad” (Mexicanity Party), whose motto was “La mexicanidad jamás perecerá” (Mexicanness will never perish) and whose emblem was the glyph for Nahui Ollin—the Aztec spiritual and philosophical concept of Four-Movement. The motto was taken from the MCRCA’s official Nahuatl slogan, “In Mexikayoyeliztli Aik Ixpoliuiiz,” which basically meant the same thing. Disheartened by the lack of autochthonous pride among government bureaucrats, Nieva-López made enemies as he steadily criticized the political system. The PRI accused him of having betrayed the ideals of the Revolution. The “Partido Popular Socialista” (PPS, Popular Socialist Party) reproached him as being inspired by foreign doctrines. And, the “Partido Acción Nacional” (PAN, National Action Party) accused him of being a reactionary—not to mention the communists whom he probably despised the most.

Nieva-López decided it was best to tour the country under the banner of his own party, which was officially formalized on March 1, 1967. His political career as a presidential candidate of the republic was relatively short. In September 1968, as the Mexicanity Party prepared to participate in its first elections, Nieva-López died suddenly under mysterious circumstances. Because of his unexpected death, many MCRCA members suspected foul play.
and imagined various conspiratorial scenarios. Some blamed the “sacerdotes autóctonos” (the Autochthonous Priests of Texcoco) for his death because it was well known that they opposed the politicization of Mexikayotl. According to MCRCA lore, these priests were highly secretive and were the main governing council of all restorationist groups. Despite the strong belief among members that the priests existed, there is no evidence to support that claim. Still, others pointed at politicians who feared that Nieva-López’s extremist views were gaining traction outside of his Mexico City following and wanted to stop his progress. His sister and other close collaborators believed it was the latter. Given the political climate of 1968—with the student massacre at Tlatelolco and general political repression, the suspicions of María del Carmen were well justified.

Nieva-López’s “Partido de la Mexicanidad” did not survive after his passing, and the MCRCA organization soon had to make other changes. The climate of persecution in 1968 forced it to modify its name yet again. Until then, it had been known as “Movimiento Confederado Restaurador de Anáhuac” (Confederated Restoration Movement of Anahuac). In order to distance themselves from politics now that Nieva-López was gone, the organization added the word “Cultura” to emphasize the organization’s cultural and non-political character.

After restructuring the organization, María del Carmen—known by her Nahuatl name Izkalotzin Zepayeuatzin—took charge after Jorge, their brother, declined to succeed Rodolfo. Izkalotzin was an elementary school teacher and school inspector in Cuajimalpa. She remained at the helm of the MCRCA only for a while. Izkalotzin dedicated most of her energy directing the MCRCA’s Anahuac Culture Institute where she taught Nahuatl language courses. She remained the organization’s figurehead until her death in 2007. No one at the MCRCA was able to match Nieva-López charisma and leadership, and this generated divisions and struggles within
the organization. Infighting produced schisms that led directly to its loss of prominence, and new groups headed by former MCRCA members soon emerged. Without question, all of them operated under the shadow of their deceased leader—Zenkizka Kuauhtli, the “Supreme Eagle,” Rodolfo F. Nieva-López.

The Danza Azteca-Chichimeca

While modern Mexikayotl developed in the fifties, an older form of indigenous expression, “la danza tradicional” (traditional dance) underwent an evolution in Mexico City. This is important here, because it is through the medium of the danza (as it is simply called) that modern Mexikayotl made its way to Aztlan and influenced Chicana/o indigeneity.⁴² Although neo-Mexikas at this time were not directly associated with danzantes (dancers), the blending of aztekah ideology with la danza tradicional was instrumental in the transformation of modern Mexikayotl.⁴³ Therefore, the following synthesis of danza is necessary.

The history of the danzas aztecas and mexicas originates with the “danza conchera”—a spiritual and syncretic folkloric dance that was developed in the Bajío region of Mexico, particularly in the state of Querétaro. The changes occurring in danza in the fifties produced at least two new major offshoots of the danza conchera: the “danza azteca-chichimeca” (Aztec-Chichimec dance) and the “danza mexica” (Mexican dance). Despite the common origin and interrelatedness between the three, ideological and spiritual differences divided and slowly drove them apart. Up until that time, the danza conchera had changed very little, especially in the rural communities whence it originated. Conchero dance troupes routinely splintered and created new groups, but the divisions that occurred in Mexico City were considerably different. The sources
suggest that *aztekah* ideology and Mexicanist influences played a key role in their separation in that city.

*Figure 3:* “Concheros,” c. 1940s, Martha Stone Papers.

There exist a great many folk and indigenous dances in Mexico. Each one varies depending on the region, and each has its own distinct and interesting history. Oral tradition
contends that the *danza conchera* originated during the time of the conquest. The “conquest” in question is not that of the Tenochtitlan, but rather the conquest of Querétaro on July 25, 1531. This is but one of many military operations that took place in the subsequent decades after the fall of Mexico City. Like many battles of the period, this one took on a religio-mystical meaning and can be considered part of a trope, the “crosses of the conquest.”\textsuperscript{44} The battle and the cross form the basis for the origin story of the *danza conchera* in conjunction with the supposed apparition of Santiago “*mataindios*” (St. James “Indian killer”) at Sangremal hill which led to the defeat of the Chichimec.\textsuperscript{45}

Concheros contend that their tradition is directly tied to that battle at Sangremal hill. The name of the hill means “bad blood” and it is a reference to the gory battle that occurred between Christianized Otomí people and the unconverted and unconquered Chichimec of the region. This region, which encompasses parts of the modern West North-Central Mexican states Aguascalientes, Guanajuato, Querétaro and Centro-Los Altos in Jalisco is known as “El Bajío” (the lowlands). *Conchero* lore affirms that the oldest and original *danza* groups come from this region and point to the legend of the bloody hill to support this claim. This is also why they are known as “*danzantes de la conquista*” (dancers of the conquest).

Colonial sources indicate that a battle did in fact take place in that part of the Bajio, but it was not one fought between Spanish forces and indigenous defenders. In religious terms, it was mainly an Indian versus Indian conflict involving the spiritual conquest of pagans into the fold of the Catholic Church. For many years after the Aztecs fell, indigenous communities outside of the empire’s purview resisted Spanish incursion and Christian conversion. It took decades, but, little by little, the autonomy of most Native people in central Mexico gave way to ecclesiastical and legal authority in the form of missions and “*cacicazgos*”—Indian settlements ruled by
Christianized Native chiefs. The *danza conchera* is believed to have originated as a syncretic response that blended indigenous practices with the new Spanish religion.

As the Spanish made their way into the Bajío from Mexico City, they encountered resistance from the numerous Otomitl (Otomí) and Chichimecah (Chichimec) tribes of the region. An example of this resistance came from an Otomí *cacique* (Indian chief) by the name of Cónin. He, along with his family and a group of Chichimec followers, avoided capture and religious conversion by taking refuge in caves while subsisting on hunting and gathering. After numerous skirmishes with the Spanish, Cónin finally converted to Christianity and took the name Hernando de Tapia around the year 1530. Together with the *cacique* Nicolás de San Luis Montáñez (a descendant of the rulers of Tula) and other Christianized chiefs, Cónin dedicated himself to spreading the Christian faith and undertook the conquest of the Chichimec peoples in the Bajío region. He commanded an army composed of converted Tlaxcalan and Otomi Indians, as well as of some Spaniards, and led them into Querétaro to the fateful battle of Sangremal in 1531.

As legend has it, Cónin and the Chichimec agreed that no lethal weapons were to be used during the battle of Sangremal. This hand-to-hand combat was a customary practice during the pre-contact period where the objective was to capture rather than kill on the battlefield. When the struggle was at its worst, “there appeared a shining cross, suspended in the air above the fields of battle, and at its side the image of St. James, whose day it was. The Christians had invoked his aid to detain the sun, as night was coming on and the fighting was bitter.” The belief by *concheros* that “a shining cross” appeared during the battle with Santiago at its side is corroborated by the written account attributed to Montáñez by fray Pablo Beaumont: “… on the
day of Saint James the Apostle war was made and won against these people, and on that day the sun stopped, which was the will of God …”

Montáñez describes in detail the lead up to the conquest of Querétaro, a process that took decades to fully complete, from 1522 to 1555. This perhaps explains the confusion with the dates. He explained that the year 1522 was the first “entrada” (incursion) into the region then known as Xilotepec (Jilotepec), which was also the first time that he and Tapia fought with the querétano Chichimecs. In the same account, Montáñez confounds the years and states that the decisive battle at the hill occurred in 1522, but fray Beaumont’s analysis disproves that claim. He cites fray Isidro Félix de Espinosa (an early priest assigned to Querétaro), who affirmed that the battle had occurred in 1531. This was also the year that the city of Santiago de Querétaro was settled, establishing a permanent Spanish presence in the region.

Regardless of when the battle actually occurred, conchero legend attributes it as the moment when the Chichimec of the Bajío dropped their “arcos y flechas” (bows and arrows) in favor of the “concha” (shell) guitar—a kind of ten-string guitar made with an armadillo shell as its box—from which their name is derived. Interpreting the religious experience in prophetic terms, the Chichimec ceased fighting, surrendered, accepted the Catholic faith, and requested that a cross like the one they had witnessed be placed on Sangremal hill. After several attempts at trying to satisfy the Chichimec, the Spanish finally managed to please them when they brought a beautiful multicolored stone cross and placed it in on the desired spot. As a sign of joy and veneration, the Native converts danced around the cross and periodically exclaimed at it, “El es dios!” (He is God!). To this day, many dancers believe that this was the exact moment danza was born and then spread to other parts of the Bajío. The fact that the tradition has always had a strong presence in San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato is a testament to that.
Still, other dancers maintain that the surrender of the Chichimec was temporary, and that they suspended hostilities in order to recoup and live to fight another day. This might explain why most titles danzantes use are martially based. Emulating their conquerors, concheros adopted a hierarchical structure that incorporated Spanish military titles, such as “general,” “capitán” (captain), “sargento” (sergeant), and “alférez” (ensign). In their role as pseudo-militants, they went about calling themselves “danzantes de la conquista” (dancers of the conquest). As such, their descendants have carried on the tradition of winning over neophytes to their particular conception of folk Catholicism.

Whichever way danzantes interpreted the religious signs—whether as a vehicle for religious conversion or a military détente designed to gather strength—both beliefs gave danza its raison d’être. Each interpretation provided the impetus danzantes needed in their role as “guerreros” (warriors) whose general mission was to conquer souls for their new order. Anthropologist Gabriel Moedano, who closely studied the concheros, explains that their tradition belongs to a larger nativist phenomenon that emerged during the conquest as a response to the rapidly changing cultural and religious landscape. At that time, concheros called themselves the “Hermandad de la Santa Cuenta.” Moreover, he also approached danza as part of the broader “crisis cult” phenomenon which itself is a kind of revitalization movement. Through the brotherhood, Natives tried to save at least some aspects of their social and religious culture by masking it through Catholicism. Furthermore, given its militaristic aesthetic, it is interesting to speculate that perhaps the original objective of the brotherhood was to increase their numbers for a future indigenous rebellion.

Thanks to the efforts of the brotherhood, aspects of Otomí and Chichimec culture survived in the dance-cult. Filtered through Catholicism, what emerged was more than the usual
mestizo hybridization, but rather the development of a socio-religious tradition whose objective was the preservation and maintenance of Native religion and cultural values.\textsuperscript{55} This desire to retain their indigenous culture through religious dancing resulted in the creation of formal groups called “mesas” (boards).\textsuperscript{56} The “Mesa General de Chichimecas” from Queretaro claimed to be the earliest one in existence. However, another unnamed group also made that claim. They produced documentation which showed that their mesa had been formalized in the year 1558.\textsuperscript{57} That was the year that Church officials erected the stone cross at Sangremal hill. If the claims of the unnamed group are true, that would make them one of, if not, the oldest conchero association with ties to the original post-conquest Hermandad.

Interestingly, there is hardly any mention of the first dance organizations in the early accounts by the colonial chronicler of the region. Fray Alonso de la Rea’s account of the Michoacán province in 1649 provides the only reference to indigenous dancers associated with the stone cross at Santiago de Querétaro. In that account, he noted the deep veneration of the cross during the religious feast day in its honor and the militaristic code and dress of the celebrants, saying: “The first thing they do is choose a captain, ensign and sergeant, ordering a militia in the manner of our Spain.”\textsuperscript{58} He also reminisced poetically at the resplendent tradition while lamenting that it was not as prevalent as had been, signaling a period of decline in the dance cult:

In the old days they mixed with the militia some mitotes or dances of gentiles, with such beautiful feathers admired by vanity, and from two hundred to three hundred, and even more, those who danced, each carried in their head their headdress, and in their left arm a very big green feather, and to the beat of the militia they led the charge forming their dance moves as they went, and when they arrived at the church, the soldiery entered the Mass, and the mitote was then organized in the courtyard, so beautifully, that each Indian, wearing many and varied colors, represented a beautiful bouquet and all together a beautiful spring; this custom has been slowly coming to an end as the Indians have been
consumed; yet still its remnants have survived in the towns of Querétaro, Pátzcuaro, Tzintzuntzan, Nahuatze [Nahuatzen], Celaya and the great town of Uruápam [sic]; but not as common as when it first originated.\textsuperscript{59}

Moedano noted that by the middle of the seventeenth-century, \textit{danza} had exceeded its regional limits and extended into Michoacán. The tradition Rea praised was in trouble of completely disappearing due to economic factors that forced populations to shift and resettle.

The eighteenth-century brought intense capitalist development to the area. As a result, Natives turned from subsistence farming to mining, ranching, and mill labor. This caused cultural stress and led to a reduction in indigenous language and social norms as indigenous people adopted Spanish customs in order to survive their new world.\textsuperscript{60} The economic development that ensued caused serious disruption to Otomí and Chichimec life ways leading to social and cultural disintegration. In response to this transformative period, danzantes formalized their dance-cult into the Hermandad de la Santa Cuenta, and through it, Natives tried to save some semblance of their social and religious culture by masking it through Catholicism.

Natives resorted to the security of their traditions as a form of escapism and as a means from which they could assert their influence. Through their military titles, individuals could feel like they still held power and sway over others, but perhaps there is more to this. As previously noted, it is interesting to speculate that maybe the original objective of the brotherhood was to increase their numbers for a future indigenous rebellion. The Bajío’s reputation as the cradle of Mexican Independence surely is suggestive of that. Scholars have shown that the power struggles between the Spanish landed elites, the \textit{criollo} bourgeoisie, and the mostly indigenous labor force shattered the stability of the region.\textsuperscript{61} Those conflicts are credited as the forerunners to Mexico’s separation from Spain.
After independence, many indigenous laborers from the Bajío region moved into urban centers. In the late nineteenth-century, in particular, Mexico City saw an influx of rural Natives in search of a better life. As people moved away from their traditional communities, they took “la danza tradicional” with them. The earliest documentation of the danza’s presence in the capital dates to 1876, when a certain Jesús Morales from San Miguel de Allende introduced the Hermandad to that city. Morales’s descendants would later form the core of one of the city’s oldest danza fraternities, “Danza Chichimeca de la Gran Tenochtitlán.” Following the Mexican Revolution, another dance association that went by the name of “corporación de danza azteca” (Aztec dance corporation) emerged in Mexico City. In time, the two branches of danza in the capital—the azteca and chichimeca—became known simply as the “danza azteca-chichimeca.”

By the forties, neo-Aztecism and indigenist nationalist rhetoric greatly influenced the danza in Mexico City, especially the younger generation of dancers. In the fifties, young urbanized danzantes started new groups, ditched the “chichimeca” moniker, and called themselves simply “aztecas.” They also replaced the original friar approved regalia consisting of long modest dresses in favor of a more “authentic” pre-Hispanic aesthetic. They kept the concha guitar but placed a greater emphasis on the “huehuete” and “teponazte” drums. The teponazte is a horizontal wooden drum with two resonant slats in different tones, and the huehuete is a vertical drum with an animal skin head. Besides the concha guitar, aztecas also kept the “ayoyote” (from Nahuatl “ayoyotl)—also called “hueso” (bones)—which are strings of seeds sewn on a large leather patch and are worn around the ankles.
The aztecas also kept the syncretic rituals and ceremonies associated with Catholicism. These rituals have evolved to keep up with the times, but the core of their purpose and meaning has not changed much in over the centuries. For example, the main ceremonies observed by danzantes are the “velación” (vigil) and the danza itself. The velación is a private ceremony reserved for members of the group, their families, and the occasional guest. The ceremony is always celebrated at night, usually at the house of the group’s leader. The celebrants erect an altar to pay homage to the saints of the Catholic pantheon and to the “animas conquistadoras”—the conquering spirits of the old dead concheros who protect their spiritual descendants. The ceremony varies according to the occasion of the celebration, but they all include the standard ritual songs grouped into three categories: a) the “cantos de ceremonia” (ceremonial songs) that are sung at specific moments, like to greet attendees and religious imagery, “pedir permiso” (request for permission), saying goodbye, etc.; b) the “toques de ceremonia” which are
instrumental songs used for the “llamada de ánimas” (calling of souls) for protection; and c) “alabanzas,” songs of worship that narrate events associated with the specific group and the overall conchero tradition.

Figure 5: Detail of “Folding Screen with Indian Wedding and Flying Pole,” Mexico, c. 1690. Dancers are dressed in typical conchero regalia. Picture taken by the author.

The dance ritual component of the tradition has always been a public ceremony. Paintings from the colonial period clearly show danzantes performing at churches for various engagements, including the celebration of a weddings which is an activity routinely conducted by dancers (see Figure 5). More importantly, though, each group has ceremonial danzas that require attendance at least four times a year. These are called “obligaciones” (obligations) associated with four important sanctuaries located at “los cuatro vientos” (the four winds), or cardinal points. Of these four, the sanctuaries at Chalma and Villa de Guadalupe are the main
ones. All dance ceremonies begin with the obligatory “request for permission” sung and performed by the dancers in front of the main altar of the temple or church. They then form a circle in the atrium, and after making the sign of the cross with their feet the first dance begins. Each dance is led by a different member who performs the traditional steps that the others repeat. At the end of the hours-long danza, the dancers return to the altar and sing the “agradecimiento” (gratefulness) and “despedida” (farewell) songs.

The biggest change that occurred in the dance tradition was the emergence of the danza mexica in the seventies. This is when the next generation of danzantes took a hard-line stance against the legacy of colonization. The influence of neo-Mexika rhetoric also played a role in the politicization of the danza. The mexica mode of dress remained basically the same as that of the aztecas. The main difference between the two came down to philosophical differences. And while danza had splintered and evolved, Nieva-López’s brand of Mexikayotl had become static and unappealing. Young people wanted to connect to something greater than themselves, to the decolonial movements developing worldwide, and that is how danza and Mexikayotl traveled north to Aztlan.

Conclusion

Decolonization involved ridding the mind of oppressive influences, including spiritual ones. Unsurprisingly, Mexikayotl—the newly adopted creed among young danzantes, ran counter to Christianity. Mexicas decried Catholicism as the religion of the Spanish invaders. Ironically, the danza de la conquista transformed into the dance of decolonization, or de-conquering (if you will). Danzantes mexicas discarded Catholic rituals and ceremonies and replaced them with dances and ceremonies honoring the ancient gods. In some cultural extreme
circles, the ancient gods were not gods at all, but rather “energies” and philosophical principles. This approach to Mesoamerican spirituality was obviously influenced by nontraditional forms of esotericism, and its application was twofold: first, a Lunaesque rejection of non-indigenous doctrine coupled with historical revisionism; and second, New Age and Eastern philosophical influence via the *jipitecas* who were connected to indigenous religious practices.

Furthermore, by assuming that *danza*’s antiquity meant that it dated to the pre-conquest, *mexicas* went about proclaiming that the dance was being purified to its pre-invasion roots. It is necessary to point out here that, despite the Sangremal legend and the colonial evidence, there is no solid connection between *danza conchera* and any pre-contact dance form. The best that can be said is that dancing existed prior to the invasion, and dancing continued in its aftermath. Determining continuity from one period to the next is unknowable. It is reasonable to suggest, though, that if continuity persisted, the dance did not remain static and evolved, as was shown above.

Although the sources do not explicitly point to a connection between *danzantes* from Mexico City and *aztekas*, like Juan Luna-Cárdenas, and neo-Mexikas, such as Rodolfo Nieva-López, it is likely that they must have, at the very least known about each other. Nieva-López’s politicking had to of caught the attention of some danzantes. One wonders what they must have thought about him and his neo-Mexika restorationist movement. In him, the quintessential paradox of Mexican identity is evident. On the one hand, he grew up in a mainstream Mexican family and had a *criollo/mestizo* view of himself. As a young man, Nieva-López was a proud native son of Mexico who also leaned on Spain for his identity like the colonial writers had done. In his adult years, through the influence of Luna-Cárdenas and the elders of Tlahuac, he
reinvented himself as an *indio* of Mexica descent. Through this identity, he founded the MCRCA—a group based on a rebranding of Luna-Cárdenas’s *aztekah* ideology.

Ultimately, the merging of *danza mexica* with *aztekah* restorationist principles led to the emergence of a new pan-Indian spirituality that borrowed from various indigenous traditions and couched them under the broader Mexikayotl umbrella. This indigenist ideology was complicated further when it encountered New Age offshoots associated with hippie culture, like the “reginistas.” This group appropriated Native traditions and blended them with Buddhism and Mexican nationalism and eventually formed its own *danza* circles. Before long, it became difficult to ascertain who had borrowed from whom and what beliefs were actually autochthonous.
Ibid.


“Hot Tamales,” La Cronica, December 14, 1911.


Octavio Paz, The Labyrinth of Solitude: And the Other Mexico; Return to the Labyrinth of Solitude; Mexico and the United States; The Philanthropic Ogre (Grove Press, 1985), 14–15.


Although Father Marroquín is credited with coining the term “jipiteca,” a version of it was already in usage by “vendedores” (those in the movement) years before his book was published. The 1973 song “El Hippiteca” by the Mexican rock band Las Cucarachas is an example of that; see Manuel Martínez Peláez, “La Musica,” trans. Ray Brazen, After Avándaro: The Black Hole of the Mexican Rock, accessed February 9, 2017, http://www.maph49.galeon.com/avandaro/ingles/avandaro7.html.

The following biographical information on Rodolfo Nieva-López is from Lina Odena Güemes, Movimiento Confederado Restaurador de la Cultura de Anáhuac (SEP Cultura, Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 1984), 81–159.

Ibid., 82. Original Spanish: “La infancia del niño transcurrió en una sociedad que sufría las más graves contradicciones. En esta época se entablaba otra vez el viejo debate sobre ‘nuestros orígenes.’ Una vez más se reabriría la vieja herida causada por la desesperación de encontrar una identidad: ser indio ser criollo (o mejor dicho, sentirse indio o sentirse criollo) y por lo tanto, hacer todos los esfuerzos para vivir de la manera correspondiente.”
Here, *criollo* refers not to biology, but rather to *hispanista* identity, different from that of *mestizo* and *indigenista* identities.


17 Because this is the most studied neo-Mexika group, I will follow the scholarship standard in using its Spanish acronym, MCRCA, instead of an English one.

18 Rémi Siméon, *Diccionario de la lengua nahua o mexicana: redactado según los documentos impresos y manuscritos más auténticos y precedido de una introducción*, séptima edición en español (México: Siglo Veintiuno, 1988), 83. “*Zenkiika*” is a Lunaesque variant of “*cenquiza*” which Siméon defines as “perfect ... completely pure ... optimal, excellent ... honor, supreme dignity.” Original Spanish: “Enteamente, netamente, perfectamente ... completamente puro ... optimo, excelente ... honor dignidad suprema.”

19 Odena Güemes, *Movimiento Confederado Restaurador de la Cultura de Anáhuac*, 21. Original Spanish: “El motivo de la fundación de nuestro movimiento es el autoconsonismo; restaurar los valores culturales de Anáhuac; ir borrando esa serie de complejos que nos dejó la invasión, como el complejo de indio… ir desterrando tanta lacra que nos trajo la invasión y que nos las atribuyan a nuestros antepasados autóctonos… Entonces es necesario dar luz a lo nuestro que ha estado en la obscuridad, porque nuestra historia la hicieron los invasores …”

20 Ibid., 24, 140. Odena-Güemes noted that MCRCA members used the phrases “prekuauetomtzinos” and “Pre-Kuautémica.” There are other variants of the same in the neo-Mexika literature, such as “pre-kuauemoquina(o)” and even “pre-invasion.”

21 Ibid., 21.

22 Ibid., 22–23.

23 The historical Tlacaelel was a prominent figure in Aztec society and a high ranking noble of the court. He served as adviser for five Tlatoani (rulers), and is purported as having ordered the burning of the books of the peoples conquered by the Aztecs. His actual existence and import to the history and rise of the Mexica has come under question by prominent Mesoamericanist scholars, like H.B. Nicholson. For more on this controversial figure, see Susan Schroeder, *Tlacaelel Remembered: Mastermind of the Aztec Empire* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016).

24 Ascensión H. de León-Portilla, *Texupatlahcuilolli: Impresos en náhuatl; historia y bibliografía* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1988), 16–17, endnote 55. León-Portilla analyses a Nahua newspaper, *In Amatl Mexicatlatoani*, in which an article from 1975 titled, “Nauatilamatl, Papel del ordenamiento,” presents a text “which was supposedly written as an order or mandate on the 12 of August of 1521, during the fall of Mexico-Tenochtitlán.” Original Spanish: “Ofrece un texto que dice se escribió como orden o mandato el 12 de agosto de 1521, es decir, al tiempo de la caida de Mexico-Tenochtitlan.” Other Nahua name variants of the mandate include “Nawatilamatl” and “Itenahuuatl.”


The mosaic pictured in Figure 1 is roughly six feet tall and four feet wide and is located on Calle República de Guatemala near the Zocalo (main square), between the Catedral Metropolitana (Metropolitan Cathedral) and the Templo Mayor (Great Temple). “Calle República de Guatemala,” Google Maps, accessed January 26, 2017, https://goo.gl/i85X8a. Image source: Thelmadatter, CuauhtemocLastMsgDF, October 5, 2008, https://goo.gl/R6KAos.


Nieva López, Mexikayotl, 156–58.

Odena Güemes, Movimiento Confederado Restaurador de la Cultura de Anáhuac, 104.

Ibid., 105. The Great Light Aztec Union was one of the earliest aztekah organizations mentioned in the previous chapter. The Pro Nahuatl Society consisted mainly of Nahuatlatos from Tepoztlán; it later changed the spelling of the newspaper to Mexikayotl.


Copal is a type of tree resin that was (and is still) used in most indigenous Mexican spiritual practices. Its usage dates back millennia.

The idea of an indigenous utopia merits a broad explanation here. As stated in the previous chapter, in The Truths of Others, Iwańska compared two separate trends within Native intellectuals, the “realists” and the “utopians,” and her description of the two groups is worth quoting in its entirety:

The members of the first movement, whom I named “Realists” (they described themselves frequently as “realists” or “pragmatists” in conversations with me), challenge mainly the Government’s strategies of integration of the Indian masses into Mexican society. This integration should be done, according to them, under the leadership of educated natives like themselves, born and raised in Indian villages and maintaining unbroken contacts with their people.

The members of the second movement, whom I named “Utopians,” (because of their ambitious ideology of a total restructuring of Mexican society) are fully acculturated urban people, generally. They refer to themselves as “Nahuas,” “Mexicans” (in the sense of aboriginal Mexicans), “Aztecs” and “Anahuakians.” Their program is ambitious indeed, since they have been promoting nothing less than a peaceful transformation of Mexico into a modernized Confederation of Anauak, or Aztec Empire, as it is usually known. (2)

Iwańska’s approach of contrasting rural educated indigenous people with urban middle-class mestizos really gets at the core of the criticism that most scholars have towards the MCRCA. This criticism, proffered by some scholars and some Native people focuses on ethnic Mexicans who identify as indigenous, namely Mexikah. They are perceived as inauthentic “wannabees,” because they are not directly tied to an indigenous community. For more on this sentiment, see Rayna Green, “The Tribe Called Wannabee: Playing Indian in America and Europe,” Folklore 99, no. 1 (January 1, 1988): 30–55.

These sentiments are not helped by the fact that most Mexicans identify as mestizo and view indigen-centric Mexicans with skepticism and even ridicule. The response to those criticisms by indigenists centers on upholding American (indigenous) identity and rejecting any and all connection with that of the Spanish/European. This radical response to cultural identity has precedent with Nieva-López’s own crisis of identity. He did not always have an “indio” conception of himself.

Odena Güemes, Movimiento Confederado Restaurador de la Cultura de Anáhuac, 109. The following summary of Nieva-López and the MCRCA is taken from these sources: Odena Güemes, Movimiento Confederado
Odena Güemes, *Movimiento Confederado Restaurador de la Cultura de Anáhuac*, 111.

Ibid., 114–15. Original Spanish: “MEXICANO: Tal es tu misión; tienes que cumplirla por tus propios esfuerzos y con tus propios recursos. Ni tan siquiera esperes ayuda oficial. Dejemos a nuestro Gobierno llenar sus funciones específicas. Nosotros cumplamos nuestros destinos, los de nuestra Raza, anunciados en las leyendas y en las tradiciones del pueblo azteca o mexicatl, destinos que son de gloria, de poder y de grandeza.”

Ibid., 121–22.

Miguel Barrios-Espinoza and the “Aztec Congress” were discussed in Chapter 3.

The mantra superseded its original purpose and is still repeated by neo-Mexikah (with no connection to the MCRCA) to this day.

Unless specifically discussing one of the three groups, the term “danza” will be used to refer to them collectively.

Academic studies on *danza* are too numerous to cite here. Virtually all of them are anthropological in nature, and to my knowledge, no proper historical analysis of it exists. In recent years, a number of insightful dissertations and theses by Chicano/o scholars who are also long-time dancers have emerged, such as: Mario E. Aguilar, “The Rituals of Kindness: The Influence of the Danza Azteca Tradition of Central Mexico on Chicano-Mexcoehuani Identity and Sacred Space” (Doctoral dissertation, Claremont Graduate University, 2009); Jennie M. Luna, “Danza Mexica: Indigenous Identity, Spirituality, Activism, and Performance” (Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Davis, 2011); and Enrique Gilbert-Michael Maestas, “Culture and History of Native American Peoples of South Texas” (Doctoral dissertation, University of Texas, 2003). There are also a few books on the subject, including: Yolotl González Torres, *Danza Tu Palabra: La Danza de Los Concheros* (México, D.F.: Plaza y Valdés [u.a.], 2005); Susanna Rostas, *Carrying the Word: The Concheros Dance in Mexico City* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2009); and the now classic by Martha Stone, *At the Sign of Midnight: The Concheros Dance Cult of Mexico* (University of Arizona Press, 1975).

In an essay on the topic, William B. Taylor forgoes applying a collective term to describe this phenomenon of early colonial crosses tied to purported miraculous circumstances, so I offer the phrase “crosses of the conquest” here; see Taylor’s “Placing the Cross in Colonial Mexico,” *The Americas* 69, no. 2 (2012): 145–78. Of course, there is also the related phenomenon of the supposed apparitions of “Santiago mataindios” (St. James the Indian killer) during decisive battles in favor of the Spanish. This martial-religious trope has precedent in the Iberian Peninsula well before the invasion of America. During the “reconquista” in Spain, the saint was known as “Santiago Matamoros” (the Moor killer). During the conquest of Mexico, there were a number of battles that attributed Spanish/Christian victory to this saint’s apparition. These incidents were first studied by Rafael Heliodoro Valle in “Mitología de Santiago en América” (Master’s thesis, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico, 1944). He noted that there were three saints who illuminated Spanish imagination in the 15th and 16th centuries: St. Christopher, St. Michael, and St. James—or Santiago—who was seen as flesh and bone by the Spanish militias. For indigenous people, he represented an invincible new grounding force who bore arms of thunder and lightning (15). In all, Heliodoro lists 14 Santiago apparitions, including the one at Sangremal hill after the conquest of Querétaro. Also see Emilio Choy, “De Santiago Matamoros a Santiago Mata-Índios,” *Revista Del Museo Nacional* 27 (1958): 195–272; and Javier Domínguez García, “Santiago Mataindios: La Continuación de Un Discurso Medieval En La Nueva España,” *Nueva Revista de Filologia Hispánica* 54, no. 1 (2006): 33–56.

The following is from Valentín F. Frías, La conquista de Querétaro: Obra illustrada con grabados que contiene lo que hasta hoy se ha escrito sobre tan importante acontecimiento, así como documentos inéditos de bastante interés para la historia de Querétaro (Querétaro: Imp. de la Escuela de artes de sr. S. Jose, 1906).

During his investigation of the events surrounding the conquest of Querétaro, Mexican historian Valentín F. Frías found inconsistencies in the sources on the actual date of the incursion. Some colonial manuscripts placed it in 1531 while others put the battle closer to the mid sixteenth-century. Frías determined that Querétaro had been conquered by Tapia and Montáñez on July 25, 1531. See Ibid., 194.

Nevertheless, doubts on the accuracy of this chronology still persist. For instance, in his study of the Christian cross in Mexico, historian William B. Taylor dated the battle to the year 1551. He attributed the date discrepancy to the conflicting colonial manuscripts which were based on indigenous oral accounts. All of them were written in the 1700s through the early 1800s, with earliest account at 1717. That account—which was found in a manuscript in the Querétaro college library and is attributed to none other than Nicolás Montáñez, Cónin’s brother in arms—states that the “conquest of Querétaro against the heathens” occurred in 1551. See Taylor, “Placing the Cross in Colonial Mexico,” 169.

As suggested by Taylor, the twenty year discrepancy can be attributed to the fact that all of the accounts of the event were first written down at least a century after the fact and were largely based on indigenous oral tradition. It is interesting that neither Frías nor Taylor were able to find any official documents to confirm the actual date of this famed battle. This undoubtedly leaves the issue open to doubt and interpretation, with skeptics questioning the antiquity of the dance and supporters adopting the oldest date possible to affirm their belief. For example, see “El Cerro de Sangremal,” News, El Universal de Querétaro, (March 23, 2015), http://www.eluniversalqueretaro.mx/vida-q/23-03-2015/el-cerro-de-sangremal.

Whether the earlier year is correct or used out of convenience is irrelevant in the overall picture. The issue is discussed here to show that, as with other claims made by danzantes regarding the tradition, there are many unresolved issues surrounding the foundational legend and the origin of the dance itself. To Taylor’s assessment that the battle took place in 1551, that sate is noted by Montáñez as the year that the conquest officially ended, an event commemorated by the installation of a stone cross at Sangremal hill. And although Montáñez cited the battle of Sangremal as falling on a Sunday, when adjusted from the Julian to the Gregorian calendars, the date actually corresponds to Tuesday August 4, 1531.

Toor, A Treasury of Mexican Folkways, 329.

As transcribed in Pablo de la Purísima Concepción Beaumont, Crónica de la Provincia de los Santos Apóstoles S. Pedro y S. Pablo de Michoacán de la regular observancia de N. P. S. Francisco, T. 4, Biblioteca histórica de la Iberia 18 (México: Escalante, 1874), 559. Original Spanish: “… el día del señor Santiago apóstol se hizo la guerra y se ganó á este pueblo, y en aquel día se paró el sol, que fué permisión de Dios …”

This rallying cry serves as a ritual greeting between the “compadres” (fictive kin) or “hermanos” (brothers and sisters) of the danza.

For more on this, see Justino Fernández, Vicente T. Mendoza, and Antonio Rodríguez Luna, Danzas de los Concheros en San Miguel de Allende: Estudio Histórico, Costumbrista y Coreográfico (El Colegio de México, 1941).
Moedano was one of the first academics to take a critical look at the *concheros* and not just dutifully document their tradition and version of historical events. Before Moedano, most anthropologists studying the *concheros* were more interested in documenting the dance tradition and trying to find ways to explain its existence historically using the data they collected from their informants. Very little in terms of deep analysis was taking place until Moedano and Arturo Warman came along. Regrettably, current anthropological scholarship by dancer-scholars continues to perpetuate this error. On the flip side, there is a recent study that attempts to critically analyze “neo-Indians” in Mexico and Peru, but the authors fail to properly historicize these movements and end up misrepresenting *danzantes* and neo-Mexikah as imposters and “Hollywood” Indians; see Jacques Galinier and Antoinette Molinié, *The Neo-Indians: A Religion for the Third Millennium*, trans. Lucy L. Grant (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2013).

The “Hermandad de la Santa Cuenta” is a secretive designation, and its esoteric meaning and associated rituals are known only to a select few. Moedano noted that: “… it is said that in ancient times the ritual greeting was not only ‘He is God,’ but ‘He is God and the Holy Count.’” Also in some recent documents of groups from Querétaro, we have seen the word ‘count’ as synonymous with a group belonging to a ‘table.’ Of course, those who know and manage completely and comprehensively these secrets are the old captains and generals.” Spanish original: “…se dice que antigüamente el saludo ritual no era solamente ‘El es Dios,’ sino ‘El es Dios y la Santa Cuenta.’” Asimismo en algunos documentos recientes de grupos de Querétaro, hemos visto usada la palabra ‘cuenta’ como sinónimo de grupo perteneciente a una ‘mesa.’ Desde luego, quienes conocen y manejan en forma amplia y completa estos secretos son los viejos capitanes y generales.” Moedano, “Los Hermanos de La Santa Cuenta,” 606.

For more on this, see John W. Connor, “From Ghost Dance to Death Camps: Nazi Germany as a Crisis Cult,” *Ethos* 17, no. 3 (1989): 259–88.


These “mesas” are usually translated as “tables,” a reference to the altars on which they are set. I think that it might also be reasonable to translate it as a “board,” such as the “board of directors” of organizations with clear hierarchical leadership.

Moedano, “Los Hermanos de La Santa Cuenta,” 603. He noted that this unnamed group showed him a parchment that was supposedly made from human skin which dated the group to that mid sixteenth-century date.


Ibid., 227. Other than Querétaro, all of these towns are in Michoacán, the subject of Rea’s chronicle.


Ibid.


There is more to their spirituality than the average Mexican religious syncretism. Danzantes believe that the saints they revere and the Christian rituals they practice are a cover for the continuance of an ancient form of indigenous religion.
Introduction

The tumultuous period of the late 1960s is marked by the many troublesome actions and events that occurred around the world. Liberation and decolonization movements sprang up in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and these in turn influenced the political climate in the United States and Mexico. Mexican American youth in particular saw this as an opportunity to channel their own discontent towards a society that they believed was indifferent to the plight of poor and working class ethnic Mexicans. Following in the footsteps of their African American peers, these young people took to the streets to rally, protest, and strike for various causes affecting their communities. Wanting to distinguish themselves from the moderate activism of their assimilationist predecessors, these young activists adopted the name Chicana and Chicano to refer to themselves. The civil rights activities and political causes they were involved in came to be called collectively as “La Causa” (The Cause), or the Chicano movement.

During the Chicano movement, ethnic Mexicans in general became more vocal and interested in their Indian roots. Chicanos who were more inclined towards cultural nationalism and the idea of Aztlan as a Chicano homeland are the ones that began taking indigeneity seriously. Oddly enough, the idea of a Mexika identity did not originate with Chicano
indigenists. Jack D. Forbes, who grew up around ethnic Mexicans was one of the earliest people to suggest that identity for Chicanos. Forbes was a Native American of Powhatan-Renapé and Lenape descent and a professor of history. He acknowledged that Mexicans were an Indian people long before Mexican Americans publicly accepted it. At this time, most Mexicans found it offensive to be called indio and preferred to be identified as “white” and “Spanish.” When the term Chicano first became popular, Mexican Americans in general found it offensive for its low-class association and derided the young people for using it.

Some of the earliest Chicanos that called had an indigenous view of themselves came before the movement’s rise, in the late fifties and early sixties. At least one of them, Henry C. Orozco, was affiliated with Forbes, and the other, Reies López Tijerina, was a major land rights activist. In the mid fifties, during the early research phase of what would become his life-long activism, Tijerina traveled to Mexico where he met Rodolfo F. Nieva-López—the great neo-Mexika leader. Orozco’s interest in Chicana/o indigeneity, specifically the Mexica identity, originated from his interaction with Forbes in the early sixties when the academic first began articulating his ideas. Despite these early connections and iterations of Chicana/o indigeneity, indigenist notions of belonging were still some years in the future.

Many transformative events occurred in 1969 beginning with the National Chicano Liberation Youth Conference held in Colorado in March. Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzalez and the Crusade for Justice, a community based civil rights organization in Denver organized it. During the meeting Gonzalez and the Chicano poet Alurista crafted a proclamation called El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán outlining a course of action that called for Chicano sovereignty and the reclamation of their ancestors’ territory—Aztlán.¹ Using the Plan Espiritual as a foundational manifesto, various independent student groups from around the Southwest—such as San
Antonio’s Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO)—merged into the preeminent student organization, the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA).

A month after the Denver youth conference, at a symposium held in April at the University of California, Santa Barbara, the Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education drafted *El Plan de Santa Bárbara*. Unlike the *Plan Espiritual’s* call for political action, this one demanded implementation of Chicano Studies programs at institutions of higher learning throughout the state of California. The movement was already a few years old at this point, and it seemed as if Chicanas and Chicanos were finally breaking ground at the national level with the rise of the La Raza Unida Party, the land grant struggle in New Mexico, and the farm worker strikes throughout Aztlan.

Nonetheless, the unification of Aztlan proved short lived, and a few years after the Denver youth conference, the movement slowly started to crack. Factionalism and infighting among the leadership heightened tensions among the various ideological strains, ranging from accommodationist reformers to radical cultural nationalists. The movement generally failed to address gender politics, and the patriarchal tradition inherited from Mexican culture gave rise to resistance from Chicana feminists and the Gay and Lesbian community. Opportunistic individuals with their own socio-political agendas jumped on the movement’s bandwagon for their own personal gain. Disillusionment that the Chicano cause did not receive the same widespread support as did the Black Civil Rights Movement and the Red Power Movement from the general public slowed its momentum as well.

Indigeneity was but one face of the larger Chicana/o cause; it often ran parallel to it, but not necessarily intertwined with it. Furthermore, just as 1969 was an important year in the course of Chicana/o history, it was also a very significant year for the history of Mexika identity.
in the U.S. That year, a *danzante* from Mexico City by the name of Andres Segura arrived in Texas for the first time. This proved a momentous event in the evolution of Chicana/o indigenist ideology. Segura was instrumental in creating the very first *danza* groups in Texas and New Mexico. He also established a presence in California where other groups already existed mainly through the effort of Florencio Yescas, another *danzante* from Mexico City. Yescas and Segura, introduced Chicanos to a whole different way of experiencing the world through an indigenous Mexican lens.

**The Aztlan-Anahuac Connection**

Although, Yescas and Segura are key players in the history of Chicana/o indigeneity, as mentioned above, the trend among Mexican Americans began earlier. In this, Rodolfo F. Nieva-López—leader of the Movimiento Confederado Restaurador de la Cultura de Anáhuac (MCRCA)—also had a hand in initiating it. Nieva-López’s neo-Mexika agenda was more grandiose than previously mentioned. He sought connections with Mexicans living in the United States as well as with indigenists in Latin American countries. Nieva-López wanted to establish ties with people and institutions in other countries in order to promote the creation of neo-Mexika organizations in those places. Anthropologist Odena-Güemes noted that in 1956, Nieva-López met the future leader and one of the heroes of the Chicano movement, Reies López Tijerina. This occurred on Tijerina’s first trip to Mexico when he was first investigating the New Mexican land grants issue. Tijerina’s recorded this meeting in his own memoir originally published in Mexico and purposely only in Spanish. José Angel Gutiérrez, another leader of the Chicano movement, eventually translated it into English. A passing comment Tijerina makes in the memoir is significant, because it shows that early in his activist career, he was introduced to
indigenist ideology: “My faith believed everything, saved everything. A doctor and attorney, Mr. Nieves [sic], director of the Restorers of Anahuac, gave me a lot of information on Mexico (Tenochtitlan) and its history.”

Significantly, then, as early as the mid fifties—during the “Mexican-American generation” neo-Mexika ideology appeared among Chicanos. Tijerina did not provide further details about Nieva-López or the MCRCA, yet it is important that they met. Nieva-López probably introduced Tijerina to aztekah ideology. Later in his memoir, Tijerina mentioned the “Meshicas” as part of the knowledge he gained regarding the various historical cultures of Mexico during his trip there. His spelling of mexicas emphasized the “sh” sound represented by the “x” in Nahuatl. He likely learned that from Nieva-López. Furthermore, this brief encounter probably led him to his preferred self-identity—“Indohispano.” This term signified that, although he understood he was of mixed ancestry, it also declared that he was indigenous to the Southwest through both his Spanish and Indian roots. The label never really caught on with other Chicanos; only Tijerina, and perhaps some of his followers adopted it as central to their identity.

Tijerina was not the only Mexican American, however, who had contact with Nieva-López, and as Odena-Güemes indicates, Nieva-López’s interest in Chicana/o issues increased thereafter. By the mid-sixties, Nieva-López established links with individuals receptive to his restorationist mission. It is unclear when these groups became active, but they certainly existed prior to 1968 (the year of Nieva-López’s death). Odena-Güemes states that the MCRCA had committees in Detroit and Chicago where “un hermano de causa” (a brother of the cause) resided. The Detroit group is unnamed, but the Chicago organization called themselves “Tonatiuhz aztecas de America” (Aztec Suns of America). That they existed as early as the
sixties shows that the idea of being indigenous continued to compete with notions of “whiteness” among Mexican Americans.

In the 1970s MCRCA connected with an Iroquoian organization called the White Roots of Peace (WRP). The White Roots of Peace emerged in the mid-1930s, started by an adopted Mohawk of Scots-Irish descent named Ray Fadden and a Tuscarora holy man Wallace “Mad Bear” Anderson. According to Troy R. Johnson and Joane Nagel, the WRP “taught Iroquois traditions and attempted to influence Mohawk youths to take leadership roles in the Mohawk Longhouse … an effort to revive and preserve Iroquois traditional life.”

The White Roots of Peace traveled throughout the country speaking at Indian and non-Indian community engagements for the purpose of “preserving tradition by bringing back the Great Binding Law.” The organization’s main goal involved inculcating Indian pride among Mohawk and Native youth. Its main mode of operation was a “mobile teaching group composed of musicians, dancers, speakers, artists, and writers from dozens of Native nations across North America operating under the wing of the Mohawk Nation.” Furthermore, the WRP members preferred taking their message to the places and people they were trying to serve, such as Indian centers and reservations, in addition to schools and even prisons. In this way, the activists instructed the participants how to organize at the community level by using “a philosophy rooted in Indian sovereignty and indigenous law.” MCRCA’s and restorationist ideology and the WRP’s revitalization efforts made them perfect allies.

The Native American Movement

Around the same time that the MCRCA was expanding its influence internationally, Chicana/o indigeneity evolving from earlier forms. In 1961, historian Jack D. Forbes formed an
organization in southern California that he called the “Native American movement.” It must be noted that the name of Forbes’s organization should not be confused with the larger Native American civil rights efforts—this was just one iteration of that larger cause. Forbes was particularly interested in “bring[ing] together indigenous people from north of the boundary and south of the boundary in one movement.” By trying to unite indigenous people from both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, Forbes was applying a transnational approach to indigenous rights. This distinguished NAM from other Native American organizations that solely focused on Indian peoples in Canada and the U.S.

Forbes’s efforts made an impact locally among indigenist Mexican Americans dissatisfied with the accommodationist approach to political activism. In a letter addressed to Forbes dated August 20, 1961, H.C. Orozco responded very positively:

I think you will be interested to know that I have passed out some of the sheets on your proposed Native American League in the Van Nuys colonia. The response was fantastic. I must admit it was what I expected. I will have a complete report for you in a week or so.

Forbes then stood at the forefront of Chicana/o indigeneity at a time when most Mexican Americans did not view themselves that way. In fact, as early as 1960, Forbes was already thinking and publishing about this. In an article entitled, “The Eurindian: A Subject for Southwestern Studies,” Forbes argues that scholars should move away from only looking at the two major “ethnic types, the caucasian [sic] (Spanish or Anglo-American) and the Indian” to look at the third type—the “eurindian.” For all intents and purposes, the eurindian was basically anyone mixed between native and European, including those with non-Hispanic European ancestry. In this article, Forbes made his case for Mexican-American indigeneity.
This idea had been stirring in Forbes for a very long time, since childhood. When asked about his interest in Mexican-American indigeneity, he stated:

I grew up in a place called El Monte, to the east of Los Angeles. There we had a lot of Mexican campesinos, a lot of mejicanitos in my elementary school. So, I grew up with knowing people of Mexican background, and I knew that they were brown-skinned, I knew that they were dark haired; and because of my own background, my reading and talking to my relatives and everything, I just assumed from the very beginning that Mexican people were indigenous people.19

One wonders what ethnic Mexicans thought when they listened to this Indian scholar at the local community meetings and political gatherings that he attended. After all, aspiring towards whiteness predominated among middle-class Mexican Americans at this time. Of course, most were not middle class. Forbes’s message most likely resonated with the people whom he called “mejicanitos campesinos”—those who could relate to being tied to the land.

Forbes’s relationship and ethnic Mexicans helps explain why did not see a problem with including them in his larger conception of what constituted a Native person. That was the purpose of the “Native American movement” (NAM) which was headquartered in the San Fernando Valley and Ventura County, an area with a significant ethnic Mexican population. The multiethnic group, it was also sometimes referred to as Movimiento Nativo-americano and described as a “pan-indigenous organization.”20 Seeking to unite Native Americans and Mexican Americans, people like Orozco were receptive to Forbes’s message about pan-indigenous unity; however, Mexican Americans in general were not interested in becoming “Indian.”

The Mexican-American period of the fifties and early sixties favored conservative and accommodationist politics. Many Mexican American people preferred to be called Spanish
American, Spanish Speaking, Latin, or hispano. They eschewed indio—a word that signaled ignorance and backwardness. Differing from Mexican with their affinity for mexicanidad, upwardly mobile Mexican Americans preferred to be called “anything but Mexican”—to borrow a phrase from Chicano scholar Rodolfo F. Acuña. In other words, whereas a Mexican national would take umbrage at being called indio, one born in the United States might add “Mexican” to their list of offensive names. In the racially charged environment of the post-World War II era, a substantial number of ethnic Mexicans believed that they could achieve success by passing as white. Orozco’s letter hints at this:

A 40 year old world war II [sic] veteran had this to say, “This fellow wasn’t around here 25-30 years ago. I tried to join such an organization once; it wasn’t for Mexican-Americans so they refused to admit me. I can still remember when I was a kid how I use [sic] to hear the gringos saying to my father why he didn’t go back where he came from. We were here first weren’t we? No, this fellow has a few good ideas but hesway [sic] off base.”

The “fellow” being referred to was Forbes, and the organization was his Native American Movement. The World War II veteran nicely expounds a Chicano attitude with his rhetorical question: “We were here first weren’t we?” The Chicano movement was at least four years in the future, so this critical commentary almost seems anachronistic, but it shows that, even in this conservative climate, Mexican Americans found ways to contest their place in society.

The veteran lauded Forbes’s attempts at uniting ethnic Mexicans and Native Americans but called some of his ideas “off base.” This was likely due to Forbes’s belief that ethnic Mexicans should embrace an indigenous identity. In another letter to Forbes, a lady by the name of Maria Teresa Calderon responded to an unpublished and mimeographed article he wrote called “Nuggets of History.” She expressed her disgust at Forbes’s suggestion that Mexican
Américans should unite with “Africans and the Asiatics.” Calderón considered “Mexican peoples Natives of the Americas,” but she also thought of them as “white” whose “white mother” was Spain. In her mind, being “native” to the land meant her ancestors settled it first, and that her native ancestors were Spanish, not Indian. This kind of resistance to being called indio likely explains why indigenismo was not a prevalent expression of ethnic Mexican cultural nationalism in the United States before 1965. The reaction from everyday people to Forbes’s ideas about the NAM and Chicano indigeneity reflect both Anglo and Hispanic racism.

Forbes also made his case about indigeneity with Mexican American political figures, such as Henry B. González and Hector P. García. González served in the U.S. House of Representatives for Texas’s 20th congressional district (San Antonio) and García was a World War II veteran who founded the American G.I. Forum. In 1963, González rejected Forbes’s indigenist views and solicitation to get involved in his organizational efforts. In fact, González declined the invitation, saying: “I am not sure I could help your organization attain its goals. For example, I am not a member of the various organizations you hope to mold together, and so have no influence over them.” He reminded Forbes that the people of his mostly ethnic Mexican district had already gone to great lengths to preserve their culture. Dismissive of Forbes’s suggestions, González here referred to the Mexican flavor of the city. San Antonio has always had cultural and folkloric groups that showcase life in the colonial Spanish and Mexican national periods.

García congratulated Forbes on his manuscript entitled, “The Native Americans: Who Are They,” and asked for six more copies. Although Forbes never published the manuscript, it showed the direction of his thinking regarding Chicana/o indigeneity. This was one of the many mimeographed essays passed around by Forbes and members of the Native American
Movement. In it Forbes states, “Mexican Americans are not ‘whites.’ They are not Europeans. They are descended from the Native Americans who established the great Toltec, Aztec, Mixtec, Zapotec, and Maya civilizations …”

In an undated three page statement titled, “A Proposed Organization for All Persons of Native American (Indian) Ancestry (Especially Including Mexican-Americans),” Forbes laid out the purpose of the Native American Movement:

It is here proposed that an organization be created which will seek to unite all persons of Indian ancestry (no matter how small the degree) and all persons interested in the native American. The name ‘Native American league’ has been suggested. This organization would not be limited in function but would seek to attack the problems facing Mexican-Americans and Indians on all fronts.

Interestingly, besides ethnic Mexicans and Natives, the other groups considered for inclusion in this “League” were “persons of Anglo-Indian, French-Indian, Spanish-Indian and Negro-Indian ancestry, Puerto Ricans of Indian ancestry and Latin Americans in general.” With such broad inclusivity Forbes was ahead of his time. Pan-indigenous organizations like the one he envisioned were at least a decade into the future, but, even if on a small scale, Forbes was able to gather people from various backgrounds together. For example, the list of names for one of the organization’s first major meetings held in Santa Paula, California (Ventura County) on August 20, 1961 speaks to the multiethnic background of the attendees. In the list of eighty-six conferees, the surnames of Arellano, Estrada, and Osuna are found alongside those of Kerry, Van Horn, and Webb. This conference, however, seems to be the only major event organized by NAM, and it is unclear how many of the attendees were actual members. Forbes’s early correspondent H.C. Orozco—whose full name was Enrique “Henry” Cardoza Orozco—was a
prominent member of NAM and organized primarily in the San Fernando Valley. Ronald Lopez and Antonio del Buono, rounded out the central figures involved in NAM. Lopez particularly focused his efforts in Ventura County. 32

NAM’s members mailed Forbes’s articles across the country and organized smaller gatherings to discuss issues affecting Mexican-Americans. Unsurprisingly, the organization’s activities intersected with local politics, and, at the state Democratic Convention held on March 4, 1961 in Santa Monica, Forbes met with Edward Roybal who was a member of the Los Angeles City Council. 33 Forbes also took the time to meet with youth, especially the “Teen Toppers” directed by Ernestine Webb. Forbes probably discussed the importance of education and the idea of Chicana/o indigeneity.

By 1963, NAM was pushing for “tribal and Mexican American” unity “to work for [a] Native American University.” 34 The following year, del Buono attended the statewide Community Service Organization (CSO) convention on March 7, in Oxnard where he passed out organizational literature that promoted their mission of indigenous unity. And by the summer of 1964, the organization “comes to an end,” as Forbes put it. The reasons for this had nothing to do with the momentum of the organization, which had remained steady throughout its existence. Given time, it could have grown bigger and more influential. In fact, earlier that year, an individual from El Paso named Cleofas Calleros inquired about initiating a chapter in that city. Calleros was a well known and respected historian and community leader whose many accomplishments included helping organize that city’s first LULAC chapter, collecting materials for the Texas Centennial and co-writing a unique book called Historia del Templo de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe that includes information on early settlements in Texas. 35
The reason that NAM came to an end in 1964 was largely due to the relocation of its core members. Forbes moved out of California when he accepted a job at the University of Nevada – Reno. Antonio del Buono moved to the city of Gilroy in Northern California, and became a local leader who eventually had an elementary school named after him. Forbes dedicated a book to his “… adopted ‘uncle’ Antonio del Buono, an Otomi-Italian-Chicano farm worker, organizer and activist in the struggle for justice.” Del Buono did not continue advocating for NAM and indigenism after his move, and Henry Orozco went a different route.

**The First Mexica Movement**

In 1965, Forbes’s protégé, Henry C. Orozco, initiated what he called the Mexica Movement. Of his involvement in both his Mexica Movement and Forbes’s Native American Movement, Orozco states that they “were at best precursor actions to the Chicano movement. The fact that they were pro-indigenous did not heighten their appeal.” Orozco credited Forbes with revitalizing indigenism, explaining that Forbes espoused “issues so long forgotten that they were new and radical only because they were so old.” According to Orozco, the three radical points elucidated by Forbes were: reviving of the concept of Aztlan, advocating Mexican American indigeneity, and supporting bilingual and bicultural education for Chicano students. He also acknowledged Forbes’ initiative to reexamine the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. On this, however, however, Reies López Tijerina had preceded Forbes. What is most important is that, inspired by Forbes, Orozco initiated the Mexica Movement, which he says was basically “an extension of the Native American movement … [which] … proposed that Mexican Americans should accept the ancient Mexican appellation *Mexica*, and discard the hyphenated Mexican American label.”
Orozco’s own ideas were reminiscent of Rodolfo F. Nieva-López’s thinking:

… priority was acceded to the idea of developing and cultivating greater affinity with the native peoples of Anahuac and by extension to those of Aztlán. More importantly, the Mexica label revived both the historical and racial continuity of the original inhabitants of Mexican America. Identification with the Mexica label reaffirmed “Indian” origins, that is to say, tribal affiliation with Tarascans, Tlaxcalans, Cascanes, Zapotecs, and Chichimecas. Instead of an absurd class struggle and distinction premised on a mythical *mestizaje* or false Caucasian status …

Recall Orozco’s statement that the Native American Movement was the “precursor to the Chicano movement.” Although not stated outright, it would not be a stretch to suggest that he probably thought the same of his Mexica Movement. In a later paragraph discussing the people whom he calls the “Aspirants types” (a reference to those who aspired to be white), Orozco points out the irony of how the “sons and daughters of Aspirants formed the clamorous and militant vanguard of the Chicano movement.”

His commentary suggested a dash of self-satisfaction for having been a forerunner to that cause.

If we accept Orozco’s claim that the Native American and Mexica movements were the forerunners of the Chicana/o movement in California, both were influenced by the Mexican indigenists. Both Orozco and Nieva-López disliked the term “mestizo” because it downplayed the indigenous ancestry of the individual, and they preferred the Mexica identity. Furthermore, their cultural point of reference revolved around the Aztlan/Anahuac cultural space. Perhaps the best link between Orozco and Mexican indigenists, such as Nieva-López, is a passing comment he made in a short 1966 essay called, “Mexica: An Identity for Mexican Americans.” Orozco noted that the term “pronounced MESHICA and is spelled MEXICA” had “been coined by
several persons of Mexican descent.”⁴⁴ These “persons” were likely people connected with the MCRCA, since they had made inroads into the U.S. during this period.

All in all, Orozco’s “Mexica” essay probably represents the first formal instance of a Chicana/o using the term as a self-referent and for ethnic Mexicans in general. Similarly, the idea of Aztlan as a symbol for the Southwest—one of the most enduring symbols of the Chicana/o movement—first originated at this time.

**The Revival of Aztlan**

From the onset, Aztec iconography and the Nahuatl language have predominated in Chicana/o indigenist aesthetics. The idea of Aztlan as the symbolic name for the Southwest was one of the first memes that merged both language and imagery into one single powerful concept—abstract and concrete. It influenced Chicana/o groups, such as MEChA, and its persistence is a testament. However, contrary to popular belief, the original allure of Aztlan was not necessarily tied to a Chicana/o understanding of Aztec origin mythology. As previously noted, Jack D. Forbes introduced the idea of Aztlan as a Chicana/o homeland first in 1962, years before Chicana/os embraced it. He did this through one his many mimeographed essays which the Native American Movement distributed throughout the Southwest.⁴⁵ It is very likely that Forbes’s early writings on the subject planted the seeds that later blossomed during the Chicana/o movement.

By the mid-1960s, ethnic Mexican youth had grown tired of the systemic oppression, racism, and sheer neglect of their communities by the government and society at large. They took to the streets to demand immediate corrective action for these injustices. Of course, ethnic Mexicans had been politically active, in one way or another since the U.S.-Mexico War (1846-
Among the distinct political activities of the sixties was not that ethnic Mexicans suddenly “woke up,” but rather, that they re-appropriated the once disparaging term “Chicano” and wore it as a badge of honor. Whether striking in the fields, walking out of class, or protesting the unequal justice system, Chicana/os made three universal demands: better schools, political representation in all levels of government, and an end to police brutality. The various actions used in order to achieve these ends were collectively called the “Chicano movement,” and one of its unifying symbols was the cultural homeland called Aztlan.

From the onset, the adoption of Aztlan as a Chicana/o symbol translated into an act of collective defiance and gave the ethno-nationalist movement a land base on which to ground itself. During the Chicano movement, the idea that the land taken from Mexico in 1848 was now a Chicano homeland had set into the minds of many Mexican Americans. This was especially true of those who espoused indigenist nationalist ideologies. Native Americans indigenous to the Southwest scoffed rightfully scoffed at the notion that Chicanos had rights to the land of their ancestors. Using the internal colonial model of historical analysis, it can be argued that Mexican Americans who descend from the people who were conquered by the United States are indigenous by definition. Furthermore, the sheer magnitude of inter-ethnic proximity and intermarriage between ethnic Mexicans and Native Americans contributed to biological indigeneity.

In the years since the decline of the movement, the toponym of Aztlan has been repurposed to accommodate various agendas and meanings by various Chicana/o scholars and organizations. Depending on who you ask, Aztlan is now construed as either an actual place from where ancient Nahuatl-speaking peoples migrated south into the valley of Mexico or as a utopia that can be molded to fit the need. Early in the Chicana/o movement’s history, LGBTQ
and Chicana feminists became critical of the Aztlan narrative. The perceived imperialism of applying the name Aztlan to land occupied by American Indians also dulled some of the term’s luster. In their attempt at redeeming the concept of Aztlan from its problematic associations, some scholars redefined the term into abstract notions pertaining to “personal feeling” and “state of mind.”

The Aztecs regarded it as their point of origin—their ancient homeland. The notion of an ancient northern homeland was noted by the early Spanish chroniclers who documented the culture and history of the Aztecs. Native informants stated that their ancestral and remote place of origin, Aztlan, was located somewhere to the north of the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan. Explorers tried to locate Aztlan’s precise geographic location beginning in the sixteenth-century, an endeavor that accelerated the initial exploration and settlement of what is now New Mexico. Some scholars have suggested that the place is a metonym for Tenochtitlan and Mexica social structure. The name itself is usually translated as “place of the herons, or whiteness,” and in some versions of the migration story Aztlan is represented as an island city similar to Tenochtitlan itself. During the Chicano movement, Aztlan came to symbolize the territory ceded by Mexico to the U.S. in 1848. Aztlan is used here to represent the actual geographic place known as the (Spanish) U.S. Southwest.

When Forbes first considered of Aztlan, he envisioned it incorporating northwest Mexico and the southwestern U.S., because he believed that they constituted a singular geographic region:

Aztlán is the Aztec (Mexican) name for their original homeland far to the north of the Valley of Mexico. It is used to refer not only to the Southwest United States, but also to Northwest Mexico, both of which are part of a common geographical-cultural-historical unit.
It is obvious that Forbes did not initially conceive of Aztlan in ideological and political terms.
He meant Southwest and parts of northern Mexico, intending the term to do for this area what
Paul Kirchhoff’s “Mesoamerica” did for central Mexico. More specifically, Forbes’s Aztlan
encompassed parts of the northern Mexican states of Chihuahua, Sonora, Coahuila, Tamaulipas,
and Nuevo Leon. On the U.S. side, it encompassed all of New Mexico, Arizona, and California
as well as the southernmost parts of Nevada, Utah, and Colorado. He also included parts of west
Texas and stopped right around the Comancheria, an area which includes parts that were
originally within Coahuiltecan territory prior to Comanche incursion in the area.

Of course, those familiar with Chicana/o ideology know that Aztlan eventually came to
symbolize all of Mexico’s ceded territories, including Texas. Some thought of it as the “lost
land,” and the notion gained wider attention throughout the Southwest after the Denver Youth
Conference.

“La Danza” Comes To Aztlan

Indigeneity among Chicana/o indigenists was still an abstract concept. Besides flokorico
groups that showcased traditional dances from Mexico, with an occasional Indian dance, there
was hardly any explicit representation of Chicana/o indigeneity. The introduction of the “la
danza tradicional” changed that. The earliest mention of Aztec dancing performed publicly in
the United States dates to 1911 at the San Fernando Valley “Hub City Carnival.” A brief
comment in the Riverside Morning Enterprise noted that:

… 25 Colton Mexicans attired in the costumes of the Aztec warriors of many years ago.
To the time of weird, uncouth music, furnished by an artist hammering what resembled a
gasoline tank, the dancers, gorgeously arrayed in paint, silk, feathers, bells, miniature mirrors and many other gew-gaws and carrying war-clubs, executed a sort of dance that would affright a stone man.\footnote{It is unclear whether these dancers were invited back to the festivities in the years that followed.}

In Texas, one of the earliest documented showcases of Aztec style dance occurred at the Greater Texas and Pan-American Exposition at Fair Park, Dallas, in 1937.\footnote{The exposition intended “to promote the feeling of international goodwill between the twenty-one independent nations of the New World.”} It almost turned into a scandal when Mexican Consul Adolfo G. Dominguez aware that a young girl had been cast as the sacrificial victim instead of a young male, he stated: “We Mexicans feel that use of a girl in the role can bring nothing but racial prejudice and misconception of the true meaning of the Aztec human sacrifice as it was performed …”\footnote{Dominguez referred to scholarship which suggested that male warriors were the prime victims of the practice.}

Nonetheless, Florencio Yescas, a danzante from Mexico City, receives the credit for bringing the tradicion to Aztlan first. In 1953 he lived in Las Vegas, Nevada, and practiced danza there.\footnote{In 1962, he moved to California and worked with a Dr. Haskell from the University of California—Santa Barbara “to help him with some investigative work on Indigenous history.”} While Yescas practiced danza during his early days in the U.S., his motives for doing so are unclear. Was he trying to initiate a traditional danza circle that promoted indigeneity? In a period of Mexican-American conservatism, it would have been difficult to find neophytes willing to embrace an Indian identity. The more reasonable speculation is that Yescas’s motivations were economic. In 1963, a Los Angeles Times ad for the Million Dollar Theater, billed Yescas’s troupe as the “Ballet Florencio Yescas” under other
prominent Mexican artists, such as José Alfredo Jiménez, Rosa de Castilla, and Manuel Medel. Under the banner of as “Esplendor Azteca,” Yescas used his knowledge of the traditional dance to perform a stylized version of danza mainly as spectacle and as a means of income.

When word of Yescas’s deviance from tradition reached dancers in Mexico, they were not pleased. Yescas was part of the younger generation of danzantes that were experimenting with other ways of expressing the danza. Recall that danza conchera was transformed by young dancers, such as Yescas, in Mexico City in the fifties and sixties. Moreover, Yescas and a few other danzantes took their traditional dance knowledge and costume-making expertise with them when they helped form the original cohort of indigenous dancers in the now world-renowned, Ballet Folklorico de México de Amalia Hernández. Andres Segura, a danzante tradicional from Mexico City, criticized Yescas and his followers:

In the Valley of Texas there is another group of people who, by this need to know the roots of our culture, contacted another group that is in California. This Californian group is not traditional. This group was created through a completely foreign and different idea from ours. This group is dedicated to what we call show business. Even their name, Aztec Splendor, says it all. This group is run by Mr. Juan Perez [pseudonym for Florencio Yescas], who at some point danced within the tradition, but special circumstances in Mexico slowly pulled him towards theater and later to the cabaret.

The “special circumstances” Segura referred to were obviously Yescas’s involvement with the Ballet Folklorico de México and his participation in the transformation of the tradición conchera into what later became the danza azteca—a faster-paced and more flamboyant style that was perceived by traditionalists as obscene, rebellious, and disrespectful. Although, some of his protégés have claimed that Yescas’s “Esplendor Azteca” dance style remained relatively unchanged from its conchero roots, the ballet folklorico clearly influenced the danza azteca.
There has also been a lively dispute over who brought it to the U.S. first, with protégés and their dance descendants making the claims on both sides. The long-time dancer, Mario Aguilar, dates danza to the early sixties with the arrival of Yescas and his Esplendor Azteca ballet. Jennie Luna, another long-time dancer and scholar, also dates it the sixties with the formation of the first dance group in Otay, California by a Señora Angelbertha Cobb who studied under Yescas in Mexico. However, Irene Lara, scholar of ethnic studies, proposed an earlier date claiming that in 1947, Cobb and Yescas both brought the danza to the U.S.

Wherever the credit goes for being the first, Andres Segura and Florencio Yescas were undeniably instrumental in bringing about a sense of indigenous pride among ethnic Mexicans. However, with their introduction of the tradición, these two masters also imported the dichotomous and sometimes antagonistic relationship between la danza tradicional and the danza mexica from Mexico City. Yet, despite all of their teaching and preaching, Yescas and Segura were only able to succeed at “conquering” a handful of Chicana/os to their brand of indigeneity through the dance tradition. Although most Chicana/os did not choose to immerse themselves in danza or self-identify as Mexika, they adopted the Aztec symbolism floating around during the Chicano movement. The symbol that stands out the most is that of the Southwest as Aztlan.

Texas Begins To Dance

In 1964, the Ballet Folklórico de México de Amalia Hernández performed at the Texas State Fair Music Hall in Dallas. The Dallas Morning News article announcing the show made it a point to focus on the indigenous dances performed by the troupe. In fact, the article’s accompanying image pictured male dancers in “Aztec” costume standing on a stepped pyramid,
forming a triangle shape, with the leader of the “The Gods” dance at the top. The caption partly read: “This is a scene from this dance with Rene Rivera as Huitzilopochtli, God of War.”

Nine years later, in 1973, a dance troupe by the name of Ballet Aztlán of Mexico City, billed as “the national dance of Mexico,” held two performances on February 23 and 24 at the McFarlin Auditorium of Southern Methodist University in Dallas. Its repertoire also showcased “prehispanic dances” and a song in Nahuatl. These dances, although inspired by danza tradicional, were not meant to instill indigeneity among Chicana/os. They were performed for the consumption by a mainly white audience curious about the folk dances of their southern neighbors, the Mexicans.

The task of inculcating indigeneity was the work of Andres Segura who traveled to Texas for the first time in the late sixties. Segura and his conchero group from Mexico, “Xinachtli de la Mesa de la Virgen de Los Dolores,” established their headquarters in San Antonio and spent six years dancing in Texas. Segura did not elaborate on what motivated him, but according to José Flores—one of the earliest Chicano danzantes in Texas—Segura’s group traveled around the Unites States with the White Roots of Piece (WRP). The WRP went around promoting indigenous values and connected with other indigene-centric groups, both nationally and internationally, such as the MCRCA from Mexico City.

Similarly, danzantes also connected with the White Roots of Piece who incorporated them into their own revitalization activities. Segura recalled that his group danced throughout Texas for six years (1969-1975) in places like Austin, Houston, Waco, Crystal City, Fort Worth, as well as Kansas City, Missouri and even the federal prison at Leavenworth, Kansas. Segura does not reveal the character of these events, but his mention of dancing and traveling supports
the description of the WRP’s activities. Flores stated that the danzantes and the WRP conducted “public ceremonies,” and these were held in places such as churches:

They would do them at St. Edwards, you know, to try to bring consciousness to the people. So, they were kind of major gatherings that were along with concheros, along with Native American people … I got a chance to see one of them, but Andres Segura was not with them. It was another group that still exists. I just talked to the capitán.⁷⁵

Flores does not recall the exact date, but it was sometime in the early seventies. This was the first danza he witnessed, and in this particular instance, a lady by the name of Antonia Guerrero (capitana) led the group of concheros at this public ceremony. Thus, from the descriptions provided by Flores and Segura, the picture emerges of a coalition between Native people in the U.S. and Mexico.⁷⁶

Flores added that the connection between the White Roots of Peace and the concheros had to do with the idea of “uniting the eagle and the condor to begin uniting Mexico and Latin America as one indigenous continent and culture.”⁷⁷ The “eagle and condor” is a reference to the prophecy, in which the eagle represented North America and the condor South America. According to believers, the prophecy would be fulfilled when indigenous people of both continents united in a single front to promote peace and dignity for all Native nations.⁷⁸ The “one indigenous continent and culture” comment refers to an influential book written by a Mexican philologist of Mayan descent—Domingo Martínez-Parédez.⁷⁹ Martínez-Parédez had some strange ideas that were also shared by members of the MCRCA.⁸⁰ He was friends with Nieva-López and held influence in among the organization. Nevertheless, Flores’s statement about the White Roots of Peace and its role in the eagle and condor prophecy certainly places Segura’s conchero activities within the prophecy’s context.

¹⁹²
Jose Flores, a migrant worker from Laredo who grew up in the barrio, had no interest in things indigenous prior to seeing the danza performed. At an early age, he realized that being called “indio pata rajada” (barefoot Indian) was a pejorative, so Indian identity was not something he pursued. Although Flores acknowledged that the Chicano movement inspired pride in the indigenous past, he felt that the movement was more about equality and assimilation. He seemed to disagree that the Chicano movement was the catalyst for Chicana/o indigenism. However, Flores wrote:

Since 1968, Andres Segura has developed these traditional groups made up of Chicanos and Chicanas who feel spiritually and culturally connected to their Mexican Indian roots. Segura explains that his first contact with these Chicanos was in the heat of the Chicano Movement when Luis Valdez (El Teatro Campesino) and other Chicano activists were eagerly searching for identity. Although some may have transferred this Indian identity to artistic expressions, others transformed it into a way of life.81

Segura traveled throughout Aztlan, and as early as 1968 Segura met with Luis Valdez—the leader and early innovator of Chicana/o theater tied to the United Farm Workers (UFW).82 The UFW was headed by the labor union leaders Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez. Incidentally, Valdez was also inspired by the writings of Mexican philologist Domingo Martínez-Parédez, especially the concepts of, “In Lak Ech” (You are my other self), “Panche Be” (To seek the root of truth), and Hunab Ku (the Grand Architect of the Universe and the Giver of Life).83 Basing his compositions on those concepts, Valdez wrote several pieces of poetry, including “Pensamiento Serpentino,” where his interpretation of Martínez Parédez’s ideas was projected onto his budding version of Chicana/o indigeneity.84

The works of Luis Valdez and Alurista—author of the “Plan Espiritual de Aztlan”—were widely circulated among Chicana/o youth in the early seventies, especially in places of higher
learning. This possibly explains Jose Flores’s interest in majoring in English. When he saw danza for the first time at the White Roots of Peace’s public ceremony, he was enrolled at the University of Texas in Austin and pursuing an English degree. In fact, one of his instructors at Texas was none other than the great Chicano poet Alurista a visiting lecturer in 1976. Being from California, Flores had connections there with people who were also learning danza from the other key figure of the tradition, Florencio Yescas. Alurista also knew Andres Segura through a folklorico dance troupe called Ballet Folklorico de Aztlan de Tejas (Austin). The troupe was directed by Maria Salinas who would host concheros to teach them their dances. Observing Flores’s enthusiasm for the dance, Alurista encouraged him to seek the folklorico group to learn more about it. Flores says that, sometime in 1976, he accompanied Salinas on one of her routine supply restocking trips to Mexico City, and that is when he met Segura.

By 1977, Segura established the dance troupe “Gruppo Danza Tradicional Xinachtli” in Austin with José Flores Peregrino as “jefe primero” (head chief) and Juan Tejeda as “jefe segundo” (second chief). Tejeda would leave the group a decade later and Flores’s wife, Sara Flores, who was also a member of Xinachtli, took over as the “jefa segunda.” Both Segura and Flores assert that this group, “Xinachtli – Semilla que Germina” (Germinating Seed), was the first one formally organized in Texas. The name of the group is appropriate considering that Andres Segura in Texas (among other places) and Florencio Yescas in California truly planted seeds that germinated in the minds of Chicano indigenists.

Under the tutelage of Segura and Yescas, Chicana/o danzantes slowly spread the tradición throughout Aztlan, from Texas and California, into New Mexico and Colorado. For example, Raquel Hernandez Guerrero states that in the 1970s, “students of Yescas and Segura performed danza and associated ceremonies at various parks in Denver to reclaim them for
Chicanos, renaming Lincoln Park to La Alma Park, Curtis Park to Mestizo Park, and Columbus Park to Chicano Park.\textsuperscript{90} Apparently, these actions of “symbolic conquest” took place after “the first New Fire ceremony held since the conquest” in 1975.\textsuperscript{91} This marked the movement to reclaim our Mexika heritage.

Conclusion

The serious contemplation of Chicana/o indigeneity is older than is commonly held. Although, it is true that these notions of being indigenous are traceable to the colonial period, those instances do not compare to the serious assertions of being Indian and cultural immersion. Starting with the early interaction between Nieva-López and Tijerina in the fifties and on to the affirmation by Forbes and Orozco that Chicana/o people were indigenous in the sixties, there is a direct line to the romantic indigenist and cultural nationalist tradition of Mexico. Orozco’s declaration that Mexican Americans ought to identify as Mexica is a clear testament to that.

Those examples, however, were not explicitly manifest. They were ideological abstractions that were almost meaningless without a concrete and physical example of what an asserted Indian identity could be. The danza filled that vacuum. It was a visual and aural cultural example to which Chicana/os could affix their indigeneity. It was part of a living and vibrant tradition that claimed ancestral lineage to the pre-contact era. This appealed to Chicana/os who were hungry for a deeper connection to their Mexican roots. This sentiment was very salient during the Chicano movement and the struggle for civil rights. Chicana/os did not just want to fit into American society; they knew they belonged to the land, Aztlan. The prophecy was coming true: that one day the Mexica would return to the land of their ancestors.\textsuperscript{92}


3 On the meeting, Tijerina only had this to say: “Mi fe todo lo creía, todo lo guardaba. Un doctor y licenciado Nieves [sic], director de los Restauradores de Anáhuac, me dio mucha información sobre México (Tenochtitlán) y su historia.” Reies López Tijerina, *Mi lucha por la tierra* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1978), 35. Translation is in the next reference.


5 Ibid.

6 “Spanish-Mexican” refers to the mixed makeup of the first settlers of what was then the northern frontier of New Spain. The “Spanish” ancestry of ethnic Mexicans with deep roots in the Southwest has been exaggerated over the years. Identity politics in New Mexico, in particular, have led many so-called *hispanos* to believe that they are direct descendants of pure-blood Spanish settlers. Other than the ruling elite, most of the early settlers were actually *mestizos* and Hispanicized *indios*.

7 Via Odena Güemes’s MCRCA study, Susanna Rostas notes that it was in 1965, but she is using the publishing date of *Izkalotl* No. 28a (Edición Especial) in which the groups were mentioned; *Carrying the Word: The Concheros Dance in Mexico City* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2009), 260. See endnote 16.

8 Odena Güemes, *Movimiento Confederado Restaurador de la Cultura de Anáhuac*, 126.

9 Research into these groups has not produced any results that can corroborate Odena-Güemes’s findings. She cites various issues of the MCRCA’s periodical, *Izkalotl*, for this claim; Ibid., 155. The one citing the “Tonatiuhz” is No. 89, January 1978. See notes 151-155. Although evidence for these groups is virtually non-existent, there has been a danza as well as Mexikayotl presence in Chicago since the 1990s. In a recent online article by Antonio Zavala, he states: “The Aztec Dance arrived in Chicago in the mid-1990s when Roberto Ferreyra, a member of the Mesa de San Juan de los Lagos y del Santo Niño de Atocha, began to teach Aztec Dance at Casa Aztlán;” “La Danza Azteca En Chicago: Al Menos Flores, Al Menos Canton,” News, *El Beisman*, (April 14, 2014), http://elbeisman.com/article.php?action=read&id=156. It is impossible to know at this point if these dance groups had anything to do with the “Tonatiuhz” connected to the MCRCA. Zavala mentions in his article that he’s also a *danzante*. I reached out to him to see if he could provide any information on the groups mentioned by Odena Güemes, but he never responded.

10 Odena Güemes, *Movimiento Confederado Restaurador de la Cultura de Anáhuac*, 126. Citing *Izkalotl* No. 84, September 1976, she calls it “Las blancas raíces de la Paz.”


12 Ibid. The WRP had an antecedent group also founded by Fadden in the 1930s called the Akwesasne Counselor Organization (ACO). Information on the 20th-century iteration of the White Roots of Peace is scarce, but it is evidently inspired by the much older Iroquoian “Four White Roots of Peace” story that is tied to the Deganawidah epic. The epic relates the founding of the League of the Iroquois (Iroquois Confederacy) which ended hostilities among the five tribes: “A ‘Tree of Peace’ was to be planted among the Iroquois, with its ‘Four White Roots of Peace’ extending in cardinal directions and reaching all peoples with the ‘Good News of Peace and power’;” cited in Robert A. Williams, *Linking Arms Together: American Indian Treaty Visions of Law and Peace*, 196.


15 Ibid.


17 UCD Special Collections, D-046, Box 2- “Indian-Chicano Correspondence 1951-1964.”

18 Jack D. Forbes, “The Eurindian: A Subject for Southwestern Studies,” *New Mexico Historical Review* 36, no. 4 (October 1, 1960): 346. Interestingly, in November of 1959, Forbes established the “Southwestern Branch” of the American Indian Ethnohistoric Conference—publishers of the journal *Ethnohistory*—and created a newsletter for his “branch” called “El Tatole” (Nahuatl for “The Word”). This demonstrates Forbes was passionate about ethnic Mexican indigenism very early in his career; see “New Associations,” *Anthropology News* 1, no. 1–2 (January 2, 1960): 5. Additionally, in Forbes’s Papers, there is a letter from Miguel León Portilla dated March 10, 1959. Portilla is responding to a letter Forbes addressed to Manuel Gamio regarding a study that he worked on called, “El Historiador y la Posición Social del Indio en los Estados Unidos.” Portilla tells Forbes that they are interested in reading it and urges him to send a copy.

19 My transcription from: Patricia Gonzales and Roberto Rodriguez, *Amoxtli San Ce Tojuan; We Are One; Nosotros Somos Uno*, [videorecording] = (Madison, WI; San Fernando, CA: Rodriguez/Gonzales ; Distributed by Xicano Records and Film, 2005), 5:56-6:39.

20 UCD, Special Coll, Forbes, Folder with articles.

21 Acuña commented that this mindset by middle-class U.S. born Mexicans is a type of “internalized racism, popularly called ‘colonized mentality’ by Chicano movement activists.” He continues: “It is more than a cliché that many Mexicans and Latinos want to be white, or at least consider fair skin better ... Some Mexicans, despite their strong indigenous faces, will confide that they have a French grandmother.” Rodolfo F. Acuña, *Anything but Mexican: Chicanos in Contemporary Los Angeles*, The Haymarket Series (London & New York: Verso, 1995), 8.

22 UCD Special Collections, D-046, Box 2- “Indian-Chicano Correspondence 1951-1964.”

23 UCD Special Collections, D-046, Box 2- “Correspondence 1963.” This article, like many other Forbes wrote at this time, were passed out by NAM members at local community and political events.

24 Ibid.

25 The G.I. Forum is an organization that advocates for Mexican American veteran issues.

26 UCD Special Collections, D-046, Box “Correspondence 1963.”

27 UCD Special Collections, D-046, Box “Correspondence 1963.”


30 Ibid, 3.

31 UCD Special Collections, D-046, Box 88, Folder “Movimiento Nativo Americano,” “Conference on the Native America in Southern California,” 1-2.

32 This is a short handwritten timeline of the main things Forbes recalled about the organization four decades later on July 5, 2000. UCD Special Collections, D-046, Box 88, Folder “Movimiento Nativo Americano,” “Notes on History of the Native American Movement (Movimiento Nativo Americano),” 1-4.

33 Edward Roybal was one of California’s leading Mexican-American political figures of the 20th century. He went on to serve as member of the U.S. House of Representatives from California’s 25th district from 1975-1993.

34 UCD Special Collections, D-046, Box 88, Folder “Movimiento Nativo Americano,” “Notes on History of the Native American Movement (Movimiento Nativo Americano),” 3-4.


36 On their about page, the Antonio Del Buono Elementary School states: “The school was named for Antonio Del Buono, who contributed much to the Gilroy community during his lifetime. He was active in the union organization of agricultural and cannery workers during the 1960’s. Antonio Del Buono worked with the California Rural Legal Assistance organization to provide legal services to people who could not afford it. He said, ‘A good education builds a good citizen.’” “About Our School,” Education, Antonio Del Buono Elementary School, accessed March 15, 2017, https://delbuono.schoolloop.com/cms/page_view?d=x&piid=&vpid=1262503562197.


38 This is stated in the “About the author” page in the back of the book. Enrique C. Orozco, Republican Protestantism in Aztlán: The Encounter between Mexicanism and Anglo-Saxon Secular Humanism in the United States Southwest (Glendale, Calif.: Peterins Press, 1980), n.p.

39 Ibid., 217–18.

40 Ibid., 218.

41 Ibid. Italics in original.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid., 219.

The essay was titled, “The Mexican Heritage of Aztlán (the Southwest) to 1821;” it was a mimeographed manuscript written in 1962 which was distributed from 1962-1963. Cited in Jack D. Forbes, Aztecas Del Norte: The Chicanos of Aztlán (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, 1973), 17. See footnote. Forbes states that: “As far as is known, this was the first use of the term Aztlán to refer to the Chicano homeland.” Also see typed rough draft of this essay in UCD Special Collections, Box 54, Folder “P-120 18:1.”

For more on this idea, see Laura E Gómez, Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race (New York: New York University, 2007).

This is especially true of organizations like the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA), who continuously redefine their terms and mission statement to fit the current cultural trends. For instance, at a MECHA conference in Houston almost 20 years ago, Mexika activist, Kurly Tlapoyawa, spoke on the merits of indigenous identity. At the time, it was MEChA’s position that “Chicano” was a state of mind, a gesture meant to be inclusive of their non-Chicano members. So, Tlapoyawa’s statement that the name Chicano should only be applied to ethnic Mexicans caused a commotion in the crowd. After the lecture, one of the organizers went up behind Tlapoyawa and apologized for his transgression. They just recently changed the word “Chicana/o” to “Chicanx” to reflect the current concerns over gender identity. “National M.E.Ch.A. Official Website,” accessed March 9, 2017, http://www.chicanxdeaztlan.org/.


Miner, Creating Aztlán, 32.


UCD Special Collections, “The Mexican Heritage of Aztlán (the Southwest) to 1821,” Box 54, Folder P-120 18:1, 1. In the interview with Gonzales and Rodriguez, he reaffirmed his original view: “It’s mostly a desert area, very similar native cultural traditions, overlapping language boundaries, the common history, of course, of all of the modern peoples living there. And as a result, I decided to try to come up with a name that could be used to refer to that region, because Southwest, obviously, is an ethnocentric term, northwest, also, is not accurate if you include the U.S. area. So it came to me to call this region Aztlán, and so I thought it was a large enough region that it would certainly embrace the original Aztlán.” From “Dr. Jack Forbes Interview.”

Kirchhoff coined the term “Mesoamerica” to conveniently group the similar indigenous cultures of central Mexico; see Paul Kirchhoff, Mesoamerica (S.l.: s.n, 1943).


“Hub City Carnival Sets New Mark For Community Jubilees,” Riverside Morning Enterprise, May 28, 1911, America’s Historic Newspapers.


Ibid.

Ibid., 168.

Ibid.

“Ibid., 168.

“Ibid.”

“Display Ad 51 -- No Title; Million Dollar Now!,” Los Angeles Times, September 3, 1963.

Luna notes that Yescas “choreographed” for and was a “dance partner” to Amalia Hernández. “Danza Mexica,” 254.

Pablo Poveda, “Danza de Concheros En Austin, Texas: Entrevista Con Andrés Segura Granados,” Latin American Music Review / Revista de Música Latinoamericana 2, no. 2 (October 1, 1981): 290. Original Spanish: “En el Valle de Texas hay otro grupo de gentes que, por esta necesidad que tienen de conocer las raíces de nuestra cultura, se pusieron en contacto con otro grupo que está en California. Este grupo de California no es tradicional. Este grupo se creó a través de una idea totalmente ajena y diferente a lo que es lo nuestro. Este grupo se dedica a lo que podemos llamar el show business. Incluso el nombre que llevan, Aztec Splendor, ya indica lo suficiente. Este grupo lo dirige el señor Juan Pérez, quien por algún tiempo fue danzante dentro de la tradición, pero que circunstancias especiales en México lo fueron jalando hacia el teatro y más tarde hacia el cabaret.”

I first learned about the ballet influence on danza from personal conversations over the years with “teacher” Daniel Rodríguez, a traditional danzante from Mexico City with almost fifty years of experience; he clearly expressed that the connection between Danza Azteca and ballet folklórico was a matter of fact.


For a better understanding of these contentious relationship, see Luna, “Danza Mexica.”

For an example of Andres Segura’s teachings, there is a Youtube video of a presentation he gave in 1977 (not sure of date) at the now defunct Native American-Chicano tribal college Deghawidah-Quetzalcoatl University (D-Q U) at Davis, California. Incidentally, this tribal college was founded by Jack D. Forbes. Tonatierra, The Path of Quetzalcoatl, 2012 [1977], https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GwXMco2VP9y8&feature=youtube_gdata_player. For more on D-Q U, see: Steven J. Crum, “Indian Activism, the Great Society, Indian Self-Determination, and the Drive for an Indian College or University, 1964–71,” American Indian Culture and Research Journal 31, no. 1 (January 1, 2007): 1–20.


Ibid.

“Ibid.”


His full name was Andres Segura Granados (Nov. 10, 1931 – Oct. 7, 1997). By the end of this life, he had achieved the title of “Capitán General” of the danza tradicional.

Poveda, “Danza de Concheros En Austin, Texas.” The interview was originally conducted in 1980 and was not published until the following year. As a result, some of the dates in the conversation are a year off. In the

73 José Flores Peregrino Interview, interview by Ruben Arellano, September 5, 2016. José Flores Peregrino is sometimes cited under his full name, but he commonly drops his second surname. Unless a distinction is necessary, he will be referred to only as Jose Flores here.

74 Poveda, “Danza de Concheros En Austin, Texas,” 288–89.

75 José Flores Peregrino Interview.

76 Although, scholars usually make a point to say that danzantes concheros are “mestizos,” thereby minimizing their Indianness, through the framework of indigeneity advanced here, they are considered indigenous.

77 José Flores Peregrino Interview. Original Spanglish: “... uniting la aguila y el condor to begin uniting Mexico y Latino America con un continente y una cultura indigena.”

78 For a different interpretation from a Mexika scholar-dancer-activist, see Ricardo A. Medina, “Sacred Purpose: Indigenous Teachings Informing Pedagogy of the Eagle and the Condor” (Doctoral dissertation, The Claremont Graduate University, 2014). His version of the prophecy’s origin places it among the Maya, and not the Quechus from the Peruvian Andean highlands and their “Taki Onqoy” revitalization movement of the 16th-century. Also, whereas most Mexikah construe the eagle/condor metaphor as a North/South representation, Medina arrives at a different interpretation: “The eagle metaphorically symbolizes the path of the mind, science, technology, industrialism, and masculinity. The condor represents the path of the heart, intuition, oneness, and balance – all Indigenous principles. When the eagle and the condor went their separate paths, it was prophesized that in 1492 the eagle people would become so powerful that they would drive the condors into extinction. In looking deeper into this prophecy, Indigenous people represent the condor spirit whose teachings, generally speaking, have been dormant since 1492. The prophecy now suggests that after five hundred years the eagle and the condor have the potential to once again unite, fly together, dance together and be in harmony. This balance/ harmony calls for a level of social consciousness that seeks a psychological and cognitive development directed at creating and sustaining justice in our collective lives” (13).


80 Martínez Parédez insisted, like the MCRCA did about the Aztec, that the Maya were monotheistic. He based this conclusion on linguistic comparisons and ideas borrowed from Augustus Le Plongeon—the 19th-century French-American photographer, amateur archeologist, antiquarian and author who studied the pre-Columbian ruins of America, particularly those of the Maya civilization on the northern Yucatán Peninsula. Le Plongeon believed that there was a Maya-Naga (India) connection, and that Jesus Christ spoke an ancient form of Mayan. Martínez Parédez entertained this idea as well; see footnote 16 in Lina Odena Güemes, “Los restauradores de la mexicanidad,” in Diversidad étnica y conflicto en América Latina: El indio como metáfora en la identidad nacional, ed. Raquel Barceló, Maria Ana Portal, and Martha Judith Sánchez, vol. II (México: Plaza y Valdés, 1995), 208. Martínez-Parédez also claimed to have been in contact with extraterrestrials from Venus; see Odena Güemes, Movimiento Confederado Restaurador de la Cultura de Anáhuac, 77.

81 This is quoted in a poster commemorating the 1992 pilgrimage “El Camino al Sol” (The Path to the Sun). A copy of the poster is in the author’s possession, given to him by Jose Flores.
According to Enrique Maestas, Segura “founded a group in San Juan Bautista, California and became very involved as a mentor and spiritual guide for El Teatro Campesino … His influence was significant in the formation of Chicano theater as an artistic and spiritual medium.” Cited in: Jennie M. Luna, “Danza Mexica: Indigenous Identity, Spirituality, Activism, and Performance” (Doctoral diss, University of California, Davis, 2011), 179.

Hunab Ku is the only “concept” that is found in the historical sources, but its existence prior to Christian indoctrination is questioned by some scholars; for more on this, see William F. Hanks, *Converting Words: Maya in the Age of the Cross* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 133. Hanks agrees with other scholars who contend that “hunab ku was a colonial creation” (endnote 13, pp 387). The other two “In Lak Ech” and “Panche Be” appear to be Martínez Parédez inventions inspired by his readings of Augustus Le Plongeon. For more on this, see endnote 6 in Carlos M. López, *Los” Popol Wuj” y Sus Epistemologías: Las Diferencias, El Conocimiento y Los Ciclos Del Infinito* (quito-Ecuador: Editorial Abya Yala, 1999), 200. Lopez explains that Martínez Parédez interpreted Maya cosmology in terms of the universe being a cube within a sphere. These ideas were first espoused by Le Plongeon in *Queen M’oo and the Egyptian Sphinx* (self published, 1896), 218.


Flores has a Ph.D. in English and has written and published several works over the years. His first publication was in 1977. He has taught, and continues to teach, English at various institutions around central Texas.

For more on the origins of *danza* in California, see Mario E. Aguilar, “The Rituals of Kindness: The Influence of the Danza Azteca Tradition of Central Mexico on Chicano-Mexcohuani Identity and Sacred Space” (Doctoral dissertation, Claremont Graduate University, 2009).


Both, Flores and Tejeda have remained active in the *danza* /indigenous community to the present. In a recent event celebrating “Native American /Hispanic Heritage Month” at the Palo Alto College, San Antonio, Oct. 2014, José Flores was part of a panel entitled, “The Importance of Our Indigenous Identity/American Indian, Mestizo, Mexican, Xicana/o, Latina/o.” Juan Tejeda, an instructor at the college, was also involved.

José Flores Peregrino Interview; also see Poveda, “Danza de Concheros En Austin, Texas,” 282, 290.


The New Fire ceremony has pre-invasion roots, and was held every fifty-two years; it marked the beginning of a set of years, similar to century. Guerrero does not state where the 1975 ceremony took place, and it is unclear if it was held in Mexico or in the U.S. Ibid.

The source for this “prophecy” is unknown, but I recall hearing it when I was a child. The idea that Mexican people would someday return to claim Aztlan was tied to the rise in Mexican immigration to the US.
Chapter 6
COAHUILTECAN ETHNOGENESIS, 1967-1999

Introduction

The Indian identity that developed at this time had been circulating since the early 1960s. Individuals such as Henry Orozco and Jack D. Forbes promoted Mexican and Native American unity and “Mexica” identity. Despite their efforts, their attempts at uniting Native Americans and Chicana/os did not get very far. The idea of Chicana/o indigenism had not yet caught on, and would not do so until a decade later when the twin traditions of danza azteca and Mexikayotl were imported from Mexico. By then, Chicana/os had started embracing Indianness in a more general sense. They used of Aztec and Maya literary metaphors, artistic iconography and motifs, and to a lesser degree the recognition of Indian ancestry. As historian Eric V. Meeks has pointed out about this period, “Chicanos … even while embracing their indigenous past, held onto their ethnic distinction from Indians in the present.”¹

His observation supports what Chicana/os themselves have also said about the social climate during the Chicana/o movement’s prominence. For example, Jose Flores (the danzante from Austin) recalls that in those days, Chicana/os were more interested in “the move towards assimilation.”² As a student of the great Americo Paredes, Flores remembers that Paredes was critical of assimilation and made fun of the idea asking rhetorically: “Were we heading into just being funny looking Anglos?”³ Perhaps it was influences like those that inspired the search for
deeper roots by people like Flores. It is also ironic to note that indigenists became the radical element within the greater Chicana/o cause—a movement that was already perceived as being radical.

Nonetheless, amidst the rise of Azteca-filia among Chicana/os, other indigenous identities also emerged in the sixties. In Arizona, for instance, Yaqui people who had settled there after being systematically persecuted in Mexico by the military in the late nineteenth-century began petitioning for federal recognition in the mid-sixties. As Meeks has shown, Yaqui persistence and perseverance proved a positive outcome when Congress passed Law 95-375 declaring that Yaquis were American Indians on September 18, 1975. Meeks also discusses the complicated interactions between Chicana/os, Yaquis, and other American Indians from the state of Arizona. And, although he touches on the idea of Chicana/o Indianness—vis-à-vis the Yaqui—among ethnic Mexicans, he does not explore claims of indigeneity by them. That is what this dissertation has set out to do. Thus, the following chapter bookends this study of Chicana/o indigeneity by taking a close look at a specific group of people whose indigeneity is tied to the land of their ancestors—the Coahuiltecans.

For decades, Coahuiltecans were simply known as Tejanas and Tejanos (Tejana/os), Mexican Americans, and Chicana/os. Coahuiltecans trace their lineage to Texas where they have lived for generations. At a time when most indigene-centric Chicana/os gravitated towards the default identity of Mexikah, these Tejanos looked closer to home to the Apache and the Coahuiltecans for their indigeneity.

The people that are the subject of this chapter did not begin organizing until the eighties, and when they did, it was still not in the cohesive Coahuiltecan form that it acquired years later. The initial cohort was a diverse group of American Indians, sympathetic Anglos, and Mexican
Americans who were mostly from the Austin and San Antonio areas. Some of these Mexican Americans had been active during the Chicana/o movement and had even identified as such at one time. Although, some of these people still occasionally may call themselves Chicana/os, it is clear that the preferred identity of many of them is that of Coahuiltecan and/or Native American.

Complicating matters is the issue that Coahuiltecans do not have a conventional historical continuity from the colonial period to the present, this is discussed below. In this dilemma, they are not alone, for the issue of continuity is one that other tribes have had to deal with over the years. The issue gets muddled in cases that involve intermarriage and mestizaje, such as the Chickahominy of the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Chickahominy present an interesting case study, because they were deleted out of existence after the Racial Integrity Act of 1924.

Commenting on the act that stripped the Chickahominy and other tribes of their status, Congressman Moran states:

“Orwellian,” state officials reclassified Virginia Indians as “colored” on state and courthouse documents such as birth, marriage and death records. Those who called themselves Indian risked being jailed for up to one year, marriage licenses were denied and babies wouldn’t be released from the hospital unless the “colored” ethnicity was selected.

This racially motivated act was the work of Walter Ashby Plecker who was Virginia’s first registrar of the newly-created Bureau of Vital Statistics. Plecker was a white supremacist and supporter of the eugenics movement, and he believed that Native Americans had been “mongrelized” by their intermixture with African Americans. The Chickahominy are still feeling the repercussions of Plecker’s deplorable act as they continue their fight for federal tribal
recognition. The irony here is that these are the descendants of the people who first greeted the English colonists in 1607.

Coahuiltecan issues with state agents have not been as nefarious as the example above, but they faced opposition on different fronts as they moved forward with their tribal agendas. These included funding for health and education, cultural events and community outreach, and the repatriation of the excavtedyed remains of their ancestors. These topics and how Coahuiltecans emerged to claim their indigeneity are addressed below. First, a necessary note on the historical people that are commonly referred to as Coahuiltecans follows.

**Historical Coahuiltecans**

The history of these people overlaps with those of the Querétano Chichimec of the Bajío region discussed earlier in this study. After the Bajío was “pacified” in the mid-sixteenth-century, interest in the northern periphery of New Spain started growing. The northern frontier was characterized by its garrisons, mines, and the mission communities that began springing up along this contested borderland. Spanish immigrants who came to the New World in hopes of making fortunes—the origins of the so-called “American Dream”—expected to return to their homeland but ended up staying, settling, planting roots and becoming the region’s first colonists. Enticed by the dream of large landed estates and frontier communities that promised prosperity, the need to cluster in the large cities of central Mexico gave way to the freedom of the open range.

Although, the lands of the northern frontier were considered *terra incognita*, Spaniards had made intermittent contact with Texas Indians since 1528. That year, the survivors of the Pánfilo de Narváez expedition, including Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and three others, found
themselves cast upon the inhospitable shore of the mid-Gulf coast near South Padre Island, Texas. Among the survivors was Estevanico who is considered the first native African in the Southwest and who later played a controversial role in the initial *entrada* into New Mexico in 1537. The interest in these northern regions was spurred by eager, but often mistaken, accounts by the early explorers Francisco Vázquez de Coronado y Luján and Cabeza de Vaca.

Cabeza de Vaca’s account in particular is a great starting point from which to analyze the various indigenous people that he and his fellow marooned shipmates interacted with during their epic journey. In his account, Cabeza de Vaca noted the names of many Native groups, some of which are considered to have been Coahuiltecs, such as the Avavares, Camones, Mariames, Susolas, and Yguazes. What is important about Cabeza de Vaca’s account is that in 1537, a year after his ordeal ended, Francisco Vásquez de Coronado y Luján led a group of adventurers in search of the fabled cities of Cíbola. In this expedition, Estevanico led the way but was killed at a Pueblo village when he abused the hospitality of his hosts.

Other explorers soon followed Coronado, and by 1567, Franciscan priests had made their way into northeastern Mexico and the Rio Grande valley. That year, father Pedro de Espinadera traveled from Zacatecas to the Province of Pánuco on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico in order to spread the gospel to the Natives. The following year, 1568, Francisco Cano led an expedition from Mazapil, Zacatecas to explore the region in what is now Saltillo, Coahuila. Although the actual founding date of that city is disputed, it was likely established no later than 1578. Up until 1580, Saltillo remained the northernmost point of New Spain’s northeastern claims and served as a buffer zone between Spaniards and Natives. That year, Luis de Carvajal y de la Cueva received a grant from King Phillip II of Spain “to discover and pacify a territory to be called Nuevo Reino de Leon” and declared him governor as well.
The outlined dimensions of the Nuevo Reino de Leon encompassed the northern third of modern Mexico, and its northern limit extended near present-day San Antonio.\footnote{14} After Cabeza de Vaca, Carvajal was the “first to explore the central part of Coahuila.”\footnote{15} Using Saltillo as a base, Carvajal made numerous expeditions that resulted in the discovery of silver mines, the founding of settlements, and the “entertaining [of] Indians.”\footnote{16} His enterprise was short lived, and by 1589 a slip of the tongue by his sister Francisca caught the attention of the Inquisition leading to his arrest. Carvajal was a \textit{converso} (converted Jew) from Portugal. He was charged with heresy for not reporting his sister to the religious authorities, condemned to a six-year exile from New Spain, and died in prison while waiting for the execution of his sentence.

To Catholic inquisitors of the sixteenth-century, being a heretic was probably deemed Carvajal’s greatest fault. But, even gauging from the standards of his time, Carvajal’s disturbing occupation of slave raiding and indiscriminate killing of Indians was a more despicable act. Carvajal is known to have commanded a band of “outlaws, criminals, and murderers” that made a fortune from selling Native slaves that they captured along the Rio Grande.\footnote{17} His justification for this was founded on taking vengeance for the slain survivors of three Spanish vessels which wrecked on Padre Island in 1554. It is estimated that perhaps one hundred people made it to shore, but only one survived being slaughtered by indigenous people of the area.\footnote{18} Beginning in the early 1570s, Carvajal campaigned near the Rio Grande presumably to penalize the Indians for their attack on the shipwrecked sailors. In 1580, Carvajal and his gang of “renegades who acknowledged neither God nor King” began conducting regular slave raids along the Rio Grande.\footnote{19} Slaving non-Christianized Indians and those outside of New Spain’s control was common, tolerated and often encouraged by government officials.
Following the slaver paths, Francisco Sanchez Chamuscado in 1581, Antonio Espejo in 1583, and Gaspar Castaño de Sosa in 1590 led parties into the central Rio Grande basin in search of desirable places for settlement. Around the same time, in 1589, the long-running and bloody Chichimec War had taken its toll on New Spain, and the government found itself scrambling to find a peaceful solution to the violence. Of the many grievances Natives charged against Spaniards, enslavement was probably foremost on their minds. Resisting Spanish encroachment, Coahuiltecan and other native allies fought for their lands and freedom, raided colonial settlements, and by 1590, succeeded in driving the Spanish out of their territories. Lacking the political organization and the unity necessary to mount an effective defense, the allied Indian force was unable to keep the Spanish from advancing northward and a large wave of Spanish settlers returned six years later in 1596. Conflicts between the Coahuiltecan peoples and the Spaniards continued well into the 1600s. By then, slavery had been replaced by the encomienda system which, although just as exploitative, was less destructive to Indian societies.\textsuperscript{20}

Other than the sporadic mention of nameless “\textit{indios barbos},” the sources are relatively silent on Coahuiltecan until 1674. That year, a Franciscan friar named Juan Larios and his Cotzal guides traveled north and had an interesting encounter with indigenes of the Rio Grande valley. The Cotzales were a Coahuiltecan band on their way back home after wandering too far south in search of food.\textsuperscript{21} Fray Larios called their land Coahuila, because that is the word he best understood from them.\textsuperscript{22} Being the first missionary to venture deep into Coahuiltecan country, Fray Larios spent three years with the Cotzales before requesting that more friars be sent to the region. Fray Larios’s use of the word Coahuila as the name for Cotzal territory stuck and is undoubtedly the original source. Disputes over the etymology of the term have concerned Mexican scholars over the years, but its actual meaning has never been satisfactorily resolved.
The activities of missionaries like Fray Larios slowly paved the way for future interaction between the Native people of the northern frontier and the Spanish. It should also be recalled that, as stated earlier in this study, many of the people who originally traveled north as part of the Spanish expeditions were largely Christianized indigenes and mestizos. The efforts of Fray Larios led to one of the first missions north of Saltillo which attracted members of various Coahuiltecan bands. Interestingly enough, the mission Larios established among the Cotzales was named the Mission of the Peyotes, reflecting the religious use of the hallucinogenic cactus. Coahuiltecan peoples used peyote in their religious ceremonies which were always held at night and involved ritual dancing. Since the early colonial period, when the Church worked to stamp out indigenous spirituality, any form of ceremony that involved dancing was called a mitote, from the Nahuatl for dancing. In order to discourage indigenous practices, priests demonized mitotes and associated them with witchcraft, devil worship, and even anthropophagy. On the northern frontier, missionaries used the term to refer to any ceremony where peyote was consumed.

In the decades following fray Lario’s initial forays into Coahuila, the Spanish established more missions along the northern frontier. In 1718, Mission San Antonio de Valero (The Alamo) was established along Yanaguana (San Antonio River) near an important Coahuiltecan site—the San Pedro Springs. Yanaguana was a Payaya (Coahuiltecan) word meaning “refreshing waters” and was also the name of the place on the river where various Texas Indian groups gathered at certain times of the year. Another significant mission for this study is that of Mission San Juan Capistrano which was first founded in east Texas (1716) and later moved to San Antonio in 1731. By selecting places like Yanaguana, Church officials were following the model set in central Mexico where churches were built on the ruins of previous indigenous
religious sites. This strategy assured foot traffic to the missions. By the end of the eighteenth-century, the Spanish had established eighteen missions, several presidios (forts), and numerous secular settlements as a way of firmly laying claim to the area.

It took almost two centuries for the Spanish to establish a significant presence in what the Spanish then called the Provincia de Coahuila y Texas. Spanish colonization and occupation of Coahuiltecan territory was the result of persistent exploration inspired by fables of “cities of gold” and the relentless search of mineral wealth. Both motivations drove the Spanish deeper into the northern frontier. This drive came with dire consequences for the indigenous inhabitants causing disastrous ripple effects and disturbing the balance of their societies. Disease, forced labor, and frequent skirmishes greatly reduced the Texas Indian people, and survivors were compelled to coalesce and assimilate into other more numerous groups. Complicating matters for Native Texans were the nomadic invaders from the north, the Apache. Although reports of Coahuiltecs described them as tall, slender, and of great physical prowess, they were no match for the horse mounted Apache who had learned and excelled in raiding tactics. Considering their choices, many indigenous people from distinct bands and tribes sought refuge at the missions that offered protection and provisions. In this tug-of-war, the “military protection represented by the [Spanish] soldiers was one of the principal attractions of the missions to many Indians.”

Nonetheless, the fact remains that missions were “mechanisms of subordination” that had a pragmatic purpose traceable to the Chichimec War. Tired of the protracted “war by fire and blood,” Spanish officials changed their course of action and decided to “pacify the Chichimecas by means of gift-giving… [offering them] steady gifts of corn, meat, cloth, and blankets.” Once the tactic of gift-giving proved successful in negotiating peace, the Chichimec were effectively incorporated into the “world political economy through the enticement of the
conquerors’ gifts.” The circumstances involving Coahuiltecan were different, but the
protection and provisions offered in the missions served the same objective of ‘pacifying’ them.

Life in the missions was a compromise on both sides. When Natives became apathetic
and refused to work, the friars punished them, leading many of them to simply run away. Those
who stayed at the missions endured hard times, loss of morale, and an increased death-rate that
correlated with a declining birthrate. Coahuiltecan were beset, because their traditional lifeways
were being destroyed and mission life, with its baffling moral strictures and endless back
breaking labor was often unbearable. The great dilemma Coahuiltecan faced was a double-
edged sword: if they escaped the mission, soldiers would force them back, and if they ventured
too far, Apaches raiders were never too far off. In short, this is how Coahuiltecan became
Mission Indians and helped set the foundation for what became Tejano culture.

The Roots of a Movement

The modern Coahuiltecan movement is made up mostly of people who either claim to be
or can actually trace their ancestry to Mission Indians. Historically, they have been considered
or self-identified as Mexican-Americans, Tejanos, and Chicana/os. Most modern Coahuiltecan
argue that, because of the extreme racism and extermination of indigenous people in Texas after
it gained independence from Mexico, their ancestors had to adapt or be expelled from their
homeland. Since most had close ties with ethnic Mexicans—through intermarriage and
acculturation—they decided to “pass” as “Mexicanos” rather than abandon their traditional
homelands. Unlike the Yaqui or Chickahominy, there is no “paper trail” that points to cultural
continuity from the colonial period to the present. Neither is it the contention of the author that
one necessarily exists, although there are specific cases where church documents, such as
baptism and marriage certificates, support he claims of some modern Coahuiltecs. What most Coahuiltecs have is oral family history and anecdotal evidence, and for them that is enough proof of their indigeneity and connection to the missions.

Whether or not continuity exists in the strictest sense is not the subject here, but it is worth mentioning that scholars who have studied Coahuiltecs have noted that there is a distinction between the extinction of “lifeways” and the extinction of a people. In this line of thought, it is argued that because the customs or traditions of a particular indigenous people were abandoned or forgotten over time that does not equate to the erasure of the people themselves. This argument allows for the resurgence of indigenous identity at a later date, albeit one that is asserted by its proponents and disputed by its critics. Another way of assessing the Indianness of a group whose members have assimilated into the dominant culture around them is to look for clues that might point to an evolved or transformed custom or tradition which is still indisputably indigenous in nature. In this approach, attention is placed on the appearance of cultural continuity to determine whether or not they are indigenous customs. This is done by examining the cultural components of “the people who practice them or by correlating them with comparable practices documented in historical and anthropological studies.” Both this and the previous analytical framework have their merits, and the one employed here draws from both schools of thought in a hybrid analysis of the modern Coahuiltecan identity.

It may be argued that the root of the modern Coahuiltecan identity dates to the early twentieth-century. In the 1930s, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) conducted a series of excavations in which human remains were discovered and subsequently removed from the church grounds. The impact of the removal of the remains reverberated through the decades.
In an interview, Raymond “Ray” Hernandez—descendant of Mission Indians and chief of the Tap Pilam Coahuiltecan Nations—stated that:

… a federal Works Program Administration (WPA) program removed Native American remains from the camposantos. ‘My grandfather saw this, and considered it a betrayal of the Catholic Church. Our people entrusted their culture and traditions to the Church. [The Church] didn't realize that [it] had violated the most basic human right, and civil rights, of a people. The main thing about our culture is that we celebrate death; our burial grounds are the most sacred grounds to our people …’

Hernandez, a Vietnam veteran, also recalled that while he had been away serving his country, more excavations had taken place at the mission. The excavations he referred to are those that took place in 1967. That year, Mardith Schuetz, an archeologist acting as representative of San Antonio’s Witte Museum, “directed mitigation activities at Mission San Juan in response to a request by the Catholic Archdiocese of San Antonio.” In collaboration with the Texas Historical Commission (THC) and the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), Schuetz and her team removed the remains of ninety-two remains from the burial grounds at MSJC. With the blessing from Archbishop Robert Lucey of the Archdiocese of San Antonio, Schuetz supervised excavations at the mission for the next four years.

During the course of Schuetz’s excavations, a “team of paid and volunteer archeologists … exposed human remains at Mission San Juan, [and] it was immediately apparent that some community members were not pleased with the excavation and the removal of burials for scientific study.” The local community surrounding the mission is known as San Juan/Berg’s Mill. Many of the residents have lived there for generations, and there are a number of families who “acknowledge and identify with their Indian heritage.” The combined name of the community is a reflection of the two components of the mission descendants. Some inhabited
the mission itself, while others lived in the adjacent community that was named for L. S. Berg, a nineteenth-century San Antonio promoter. The Berg's Mill settlement grew up around the ruined buildings of the first wool-washing mill in the area. In the forties, the community had a population of about 100, and with the expansion of San Antonio after WWII the community lost its separate character. By the sixties Berg's Mill was no longer acknowledged on city maps.39

Nonetheless, residents were still living on or near the mission and in the Berg's Mill community when the excavations started in 1967. Even though Berg's Mill was gradually being assimilated by the city of San Antonio when the excavations began, the community’s sense of its historical continuity was still a prominent aspect of their lives.40 Some of the residents of San Juan/ Bergs Mill who could trace their genealogy to the community for several generations claimed descent from the original peoples who built and lived in Mission San Juan. The few families who still lived on the mission grounds during the start of the excavations had the strongest case on this point.41

As the excavations continued, the displeasure and growing commotion in the community drew the attention of local media outlets who televised the discovery. Citing security concerns, Schuetz hired a couple of community residents to stand guard of the burials, noting that:

... the guards were frightened away during the night by vandals who damaged the skulls... This was the only trouble we had during the six months of work. In learning that sex, age, disease, racial description, and forgotten customs might be learned from the work, the hostility toward the excavators disappeared along with the local fear of the dead.42

Ignoring the condescending assumption by Schuetz that the “locals feared the dead,” it did not occur to her that perhaps the community felt strongly disrespected by the removal of their ancestors. This was not the first time that the archdiocese had been insensitive about allowing
the exhumation of human remains from the “camposanto,” as Hernandez put it. Furthermore, Hernandez’s comment above makes it very clear that fear of the dead was not the issue. It was the complete lack of respect for the remains of their ancestors which angered the people from the community. The 1967 excavations reminded the San Juan/Berg’s Mill community of the Church’s previous betrayal in the thirties. Citing the excavations, Hernandez recounted that they were his motivation in taking steps towards having the remains returned. Little did he realize the protracted and difficult process involved in the litigation of American Indian remains.

Hernandez and the sources are silent about what, if any, actions were taken by the community in the immediate aftermath of Schuetz’s excavations. What is known is that the artifacts and human remains were kept in the possession of the various institutions involved—especially UTSA and the greater UT system. Because these were taken from Church property, there was not much the community could do about it. Additionally, when Archbishop Lucey approved the removal of the remains, it was done with the explicit intention of allowing the UT system archeologists keep them indefinitely for scientific research. Furthermore, the agreement between all three parties acknowledged that no matter where the human remains ended up, they would remain the sole property of the church.43 This agreement between institutions of authority excluded any input from the community. And regardless of how loud the community cried foul at the perceived sacrilege, the actions of the authorities made it clear that the priorities of scientific research superseded the basic human respect for the dead.44

Not Quite Coahuiltecans Yet

As stated above, it is not clear what occurred in the years after the 1967 excavations, and little to nothing exists regarding this issue throughout the 1970s. By the late seventies, just as
interest in *danza azteca* and *Mexikayotl* increased in Texas, Chicana/os started asserting their indigeneity in a more American Indian fashion than that of an *indio mexicano*. In the previously cited interview, Ray Hernandez and Mario Garza—another early Coahuiltecan activist—recalled how they first became aware of their indigeneity. For Garza, the matter was simple—he has always known it. When asked about their opinion on the term Hispanic, he stated:

> The myth is that the Spaniards came here and intermarried, and thus the Mexican American, la raza, was born … they [the priests] started brainwashing people into believing that the Indian was inferior. A lot of people started thinking that if they became ‘Spanish,’ they would be better. This was passed on to each generation.

The journalist added: “But not so in his family. His parents always told him not to forget his Indian past.” On the other hand, Hernandez’s indigeneity only became relevant in relation to the excavations at Mission San Juan. Hernandez stated that when he was young, “his family's adherence to its indigenous customs was not openly discussed.” Although he was serving in Vietnam at the time they occurred, it was the 1967 excavations which “led him to his current role as an activist for his people.” Undeniably, the issue of repatriation played a major role in the resurgence of Coahuiltecan identity, and the following comment by Hernandez is indicative of this point:

> … the archdiocese and the historical commission reached an agreement that before they would return the bodies for proper burial they were going to do more studies on the bodies such as radiation testing, DNA extractions, and be contaminated with arsenic. There are cemetery laws, but apparently they don't apply to Native Americans.
When Hernandez made this critique of the appropriation of indigenous remains by researchers and academics, he did it from the point of view of a self-described Coahuiltecan. Before arriving at that identity, though, Hernandez and Chicana/os like him revived the Mission Indian label first.

It is difficult to say for certain how much of the Chicano movement’s affinity for indigenism played a role in the revival of the Mission Indian identity, but there was an overlap with some individuals. For example, Mario Garza maintained an indigenous identity since the late seventies while also identifying as a Chicano. Garza, like Ray Hernandez, also served in Vietnam, and upon returning pursued a college education at the University of Houston in the early seventies. There, he and a few other Chicana/os—including Jaime De La Isla, Maria Jimenez, Elliot Navarro and Cynthia Perez—were part of that campus’s Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO) chapter that pushed for the establishment of a Mexican American Studies program in 1973.\textsuperscript{51} As a student, Garza’s interests included literature, and by the late seventies he had several poems published in several Chicano publications, including the combined anthology for the Flor y Canto IV and V festivals.\textsuperscript{52} In one of his poems entitled, “Todavía Unrooted,” Garza laments spending many years away from his family and homeland:

“Todavía [still] unrooted / Someday I will replant / my roots in Texas soil / pa cuando muera [so when I die] / calienten mis huesos el sol Tejano [the Texas sun can warm my bones] / y que cubra la tierra [and blanket the land] / de mis abuelos [of my grandfathers].”\textsuperscript{53} The poem is in the familiar code-switching Chicana/o vernacular, and the last part of the verse, “la tierra / de mis abuelos” (the land / of my forefathers) undoubtedly implied an indigenous connection to the land.\textsuperscript{54}
Indigenist Chicana/os from Texas, like Mario Garza, straddled a Tejano and indigenous identity. Where Garza alluded to indigenous tropes, like “Mother Earth, in one poem, in another he used the term “chicana” to refer to his mother." It is interesting to note that, despite his affinity towards Chicanismo, Garza did not get drawn into the neo-Aztec aesthetic of the movement, nor did he adopt a Mexika identity. After Vietnam, he became involved in Native ceremonies which helped with his PTSD. While enrolled in the Ethnic Studies program at Michigan State University as a graduate student in the late seventies, Garza associated with Native Americans and attended powwows. Drawing from his own experience in the Rio Grande valley, he found many similarities with his and their cultures.

The American Indian Resource and Education Coalition

In the late 1980s, Mario Garza was living in Austin and working for the city’s Office of Cultural Affairs. One day, he read in the paper about an individual who proposed the creation of a statewide intertribal group for the purposes of addressing Native American issues in the state of Texas. The announcement caught his interest, so he decided to look further into it. At one of the group’s first meetings held in Manor, TX, Garza recalled that the individual he read about in the newspaper planned on organizing an inter-tribal group and making himself the “chief.” The people in attendance scoffed at the proposition, and that is when Garza told the group: “Hey, we’re already here, we’re Indians, why don’t we form our own group?” The group that Garza and his cohort had just formed was AIREC, which stood for American Indian Resource and Education Coalition.

AIREC formed around the time that the State of Texas’s own Texas Indian Commission (TIC) started losing official support. The TIC oversaw the “development of the human and
economic resources” of the state’s three reservations and assisted “the Texas Indian tribes in improving their health, educational, agricultural, business, and industrial capacities.” It was established in 1965 by Governor John Connally under the name Commission for Indian Affairs in order to assist the only reservation at the time, the Alabama-Coushatta Indian Reservation, after the previous agency that governed it was abolished. It underwent a few name changes over the years, and its reach was expanded to encompass the jurisdiction of the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, or Tigua Indian Community at El Paso in 1967, as well as the Texas Band of the Kickapoo Indians at Eagle Pass in 1977. Both of these tribes petitioned and eventually gained federal recognition in 1968 and 1984 respectively.

By 1985, the Tigua Pueblo and the Alabama-Coushatta had grown dissatisfied with the way the state managed their affairs and petitioned the federal government for greater oversight. This spelled doom for the already neglected TIC. By 1989, the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission suggested an overhaul of the TIC but ultimately failed to get legislation passed that would have kept it in operation. Now that Texas’s three recognized Indian groups were federally recognized, the state saw no need to keep the TIC in operation. Needless to say, civil-rights groups and American Indian activists were not pleased with the decision, but it must have been one that they had expected. The TIC employed over 100 people throughout the state mainly at the reservations and places with high concentrations of Native Americans, like the City of Dallas. The TIC’s headquarters had naturally been in Austin, the seat of the state government. It is only reasonable to speculate that one or a number of these former TIC employees and activists supported creating an independent grassroots intertribal activist group. These are the kind of people that Garza probably initially met and with whom he eventually formed AIREC.
In 1989, the first of three significant events AIREC became involved with occurred. That year, a new archeologist, Jack Jackson, was hired at Fort Hood military post to help in repatriating human remains which had come from a person who had discovered a severely looted site on private property near the post.\textsuperscript{59} Jackson took the remains to the archeological laboratory on post where they were placed in storage indefinitely. After consulting with the state’s TIC archeologist, Jackson determined that the remains needed to be repatriated. Unfortunately, the repatriation was postponed, because the state abolished the Texas Indian Commission later that year.

The second event happened on February 20, 1990, within the confines of Ft. Hood itself. That day, an archaeological survey party discovered what was later identified as the Leon River Medicine Wheel sacred site. Historically, medicine wheels are of Northern Plains origin, but they are also highly esteemed throughout Native America. As with most things indigenous, medicine wheels are also protected and governed by a federal law—the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA). In addition to the medicine wheel, the archeological survey team also discovered the remains of six individuals in a rockshelter. The remains were transferred to Texas A &M University for storage.

Later that year, on November 16, 1990, the United States Congress passed the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). The basic purpose of NAGPRA is to facilitate the repatriation of Native American human remains and the protection of their gravesites.\textsuperscript{60} Repatriation is the act of reinterring Native American human remains in a dignified and sacred way that is specific to the individual tribe conducting the ceremony. Undoubtedly inspired by NAGPRA, AIREC soon got involved in repatriation issues, and that is how they met Jack Jackson, the anthropologist from Ft. Hood. Through the protections that the act provided,
American Indian activists in Texas could at least focus their attention to that area of seemingly endless contention. With their activism growing and producing results, AIREC filed for status as a “Domestic Nonprofit Corporation” in May of 1991.61

The third major occurrence was the creation of a repatriation cemetery at Ft. Hood in 1991. When the cemetery’s creation was announced, word went out to all of the BIA tribes that had a Texas connection, but only the Comanche Tribe of Oklahoma responded to the call. Because the Comanche were the only federal tribe that participated in the formal ceremonies, the cemetery at Ft. Hood bears their name, the Comanche National Indian Cemetery. Through the assistance of Jack Jackson (Ft. Hood’s resident anthropologist), military officials donated land from the military post to AIREC for their repatriation efforts. As a result, AIREC, Fort Hood, and the Comanche Nation formed the only association that dealt with repatriation issues in the state of Texas. AIREC presented the first repatriation proposal in June of 1991, and the first reburial ceremony was held a few months later, in November. In that ceremony, several noteworthy things happened. First, the remains that were initially brought to the attention of Jackson were finally repatriated under the supervision of a Comanche medicine man. And, secondly, the Vice Chairman of the Comanche Nation officially named the cemetery and read a letter of support from the governor of Texas. The combination of all of these important details lent credibility to AIREC, but, more importantly, they also taught Mario Garza lessons that later proved useful as a Coahuiltec repatriation activist. Before people like Mario Garza could be Coahuiltec activists, they needed to establish their identity as a people first.
Coahuiltecan Ethnogenesis

Ethnogenesis is “the formation or emergence of an ethnic group.”62 The term usually refers to the origin of a specific group of people who share a similar culture, language, and geographic space. Starting sometime in the 1950s, scholars studying the various indigenous groups associated with Texas and northeastern Mexico, prior to European contact, began grouping some under the Coahuiltecan umbrella. The term itself originated in the late nineteenth-century with the Mexican scholar, Manuel Orozco y Berra, who admitted that his coining of the term “coahuiltecos” as a linguistic umbrella was solely based on geography and the lack of a better term.63 Orozco y Berra’s term was picked up by Mexican historian Vito Alessio Robles who wrote a three volume tome on the history of the province of Coahuila y Tejas.64

In the early eighties, some of the key figures that later played a role in the development of the Coahuiltecan identity were already engaged in indigenous practices. As previously discussed, Mario Garza had moved towards a post-Chicano indigenous view of himself through some of his poetry. In more tangible terms, individuals like Isaac Cardenas (Apache, Mexika and Pamaque Clan of Coahuila y Tejas) put their indigeneity into concrete practice by performing rituals passed down through his family. He is credited with building “one of the first purification lodges for the Native American [Chicana/o] community at Mission San Francisco Espada [San Antonio] in 1982.”65 When asked about where he received his knowledge of the “purification lodge,” Cardenas stated that it was part of his family tradition from South Texas.66 He also noted that “his experience with Native American cultural revitalization in southern California during the Chicano Movement of the 1970s” had inspired him to expose his people to the tradition.67 With Cardenas, we have another example of a Chicano activist who, after
witnessing indigenist revitalization elsewhere, was inspired to revive and share his own Native roots once he returned home.

By the early nineties, San Antonio was a place where indigenous people of various traditions met and exchanged ideas. The danza tradicional had firmly established itself in the ethnically Mexican city through Andres Segura’s Xinachtli conchero group. But, for the most part, concheros maintained a distance from the activities of the Mission Indians and Native American in general. The small but visible American Indian population hosted pow-wows and had their own local activist organization, the San Antonio Council of Native Americans (SACNA). Before AIREC was formed, SACNA cooperated with the Texas Indian Commission and sponsored several repatriation ceremonies in Texas, especially at a historic site just outside of Corpus Christie. In addition to these groups, there was also a small but growing and increasingly vocal contingent from the San Juan/Berg’s Mill community—headed by Ray Hernandez—who sought the repatriation of the excavated remains of their ancestors.

Ironically, the idea for the adoption of the Coahuiltecan moniker did not come from Hernandez or any other mission Indian, but from a danzante by the name of Manuel “Kuauhtli” Vásquez. There is a good reason why mission descendants did not assume one indigenous name over another. Many of them, like Cardenas above, claimed to have Apache, Tlaxcalan, and other indigenous ancestry from both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. Vásquez, whose lineage was from Coahuila, learned from an aunt that “his family called themselves ‘Tecos’.” Apparently, “Tecos” was a shortened version of Coahuiltecos. In a recent interview, Vásquez states that, at the age of fifteen, he was involved in the Cesar Chavez’s farm worker movement in Texas and also a part of a Chicano self-defense group called the Chicano Liberation Front. If true, then Vásquez’s life further supports the notion that not all Chicana/os desired assimilation. Like
Garza and José Flores (Austin *danzante*), Vásquez turned to indigenism in the wake of the Chicano movement’s aftermath. Around the age of nineteen, Vásquez decided that there had to be more to cultural activism than what he was exposed to through the movement. Eventually, he made his way down to San Luis Potosi, Mexico where he met with some friends who had just been in a ceremony with Huicholes. That is when he was introduced to the “medicine,” when these friends shared peyote with him. This seminal event transformed his life and led him to a career of indigenist causes and way of life.

As an indigenous activist, Vásquez claims to have been at the United Nations (UN) in 1986 where he met numerous indigenous leaders from all over the Americas, including Rigoberta Menchu—whom he supposedly helped in matters of translation. Vásquez also asserts that, while there at the UN, he spoke in front of the Council of Human Rights about the growing unification of indigenous peoples from the Western Hemisphere. This, he says, was the beginnings of the fulfillment of the “Eagle and Condor” prophecy. His claims are indicative of the experience of others for whom documentation exists. For instance, Chicana/o activists like Tupac Enrique Acosta, Raul Salinas, Roseanne Rodríguez, and Gustavo Gutiérrez “served as international observers to the UN’s Commission on Human Rights in Geneva in 1987.” Most of these activists were from Arizona where they were members of various organizations, including Tonatierra—which served as a major point of gathering for indigenist Chicana/os. Indeed he is saying that Chicana/o indigenists situated themselves as equals in relation to other indigenous groups. They did not hesitate to demonstrate the sincerity of their position.

Vásquez was among the initial group of *danzantes aztecas* in the San Antonio area. The only other indigenous Mexican dancing at the time were the Xinachtli *concheros* and the *matachines*; the latter are more ubiquitous throughout Mexico and Aztlan and, like the
concheros, are closely tied to the Catholic Church. Where the concheros at least acknowledge their Otomi-Chichimec roots, matachines have all but forgotten the Tlaxcalan origins of their dance. Aztec dancing likely arrived in San Antonio sometime in the late eighties to early nineties. By 1992, group Huehuecoyotl (Ancient Coyote) was established as that city’s first danza azteca of the Florencio Yescas “Esplendor Azteca” tradition. Another dance troupe by the name of Grupo Teocalli (House of Energy) also emerged at this time. Vásquez was associated with both of them, and he organized dance ceremonies that brought them together with other form around the country, such as Grupo Tlaloc (named after the Aztec rain god) from Denver, Colorado. The concheros from Xinachtli joined the aztecas in ceremony occasionally.

Also around this time, in the early nineties, Vásquez “introduced a modern form of the Temaskal, based on the incorporation of family traditions with traditions from Lakota and Pueblos Indígenas (Indigenous peoples) in Mexico.”74 The temazcal that Vásquez introduced was the Mexikayotl version of the sweat-lodge that was transmitted mainly through the danza mexica, not so much the azteca. As was explained in the chapter on danza, these two offshoots of concherismo differ mainly in their philosophy; the aztecas are still traditionally Catholic, and the mexicas are extreme indigenous purists. With evolution of modern Mexikayotl post-1970, the tradition mixed Mesoamerican and Plains Indian spiritual traditions. This neo-Mexika philosophy was promoted by “teachers” and “elders,” such as Tlakaelel (the Mexika Sundance chief) who had once been a part the MCRCA restorationists in Mexico City. Recall that modern Mexikayotl also developed into a hybrid of Lunaesque revisionism combined with indigenist forms of New Ageism and Gnosticism, and it was promoted to unsuspecting neophytes as being an ancient tradition with an unbroken lineage dating to the pre-conquest era. Many Chicana/os,
like Vásquez, convinced themselves that the teachings were authentic, and that skepticism meant questioning the very core of their own indigeneity.

Vásquez believed in what he was doing and used the *temazcal* as a means of purification for the *danzantes* and anyone else that was interested in indigenous spirituality. According to Enrique Maestas:

> During the summer of 1993, Kuauhtli Vásquez introduced me to Yanawana, and we held Danza in San Pedro Park. In the winter of 1993, I met Rick Mendoza during a purification lodge ceremony at the Refugee Aid Project (RAP) that worked to address health, safety, and other survival issues for economic and political refugees from Mexico and Central America, of which Kuauhtli Vásquez was the director. While Kuauhtli worked at the RAP, it became a site for Temaskal/sweatlodge, Danza, and a center for Indigenous community events … between 1993 and 1996, Rick Mendoza, Kuauhtli Vázquez, and others established the Naciones Coahuiltecos from the RAP as well as the Centro Cultural de Aztlan established by Ramón Vásquez y Sánchez.  

> “Yanawana” is a spelling variant of the old Payaya site “Yanaguana.” Just as Aztlan represented the Chicana/o “lost land,” for indigenists in San Antonio, Yanaguana symbolized the idyllic indigenous homeland of Coahuiltecs. Maestas also informs us that Vásquez was the director of an organization called Refugee Aid Project (RAP), and that it “became a site for Temaskal/sweatlodge, Danza, and a center for Indigenous community events.” Through RAP and the Centro Cultural de Aztlan the “Naciones Coahuiltecos” was established. This group also just went by the name “Los Coahuiltecos,” a name that Vásquez adopted from his own family’s “Teco” background.

> It is unclear if the term Coahuiltec and its variants had been in usage as a public identity before Vásquez suggested it to his fellow indigenists. Maestas—who was present when this identity first took shape—affirms that it was Vásquez who applied the term first.
Coahuiltecans will undoubtedly dispute that claim coming from Maestas, a danzante and self-identified Mexika, but that is not the point here. Regardless of who pronounced the term first, individuals, such as Mario Garza and Isaac Cardenas, already had an indigenous view of themselves long before the “Naciones Coahuiltecos” came into existence in 1993. For Garza, his identity came from his family history. For instance, when asked when he discovered his indigeneity and how he determined the original name of his people, Garza stated:

My family was from Ciudad Mier [Tamaulipas, Mexico], and my grandfather, Zaragoza Garza, was the last cacique of the Garza Band community along the Rio Grande. My grandmother was raised at the Mission in the Rio Grande. My father was involved and participated in “medicine ceremonies,” and he was always asked to petition the bride. Weddings lasted four days.

When I was young, people would ask me, “De cuales Garzas eres?” [Of which Garzas are you?]. I he replied that I was from the Garzas de Mier. When I got older, I found that my band’s name was “Miakan.” The Spanish named my ancestors “Garza” [Heron] which is a direct translation from Coahuiltecan. For the sake of survival, a lot of Coahuiltecans assumed a national Mexican identity over an indigenous one. You had to choose between staying in your homeland or being removed to reservations.

If not already obvious, Garza makes it clear in the second paragraph why indigenist Tejanos favored a Coahuiltecan identity. It was mostly due to their oral family histories that placed and associated them to the land itself. Native Tejanos did not need to assert their indigeneity through the default Mexika identity that most detribalized Chicana/os gravitated towards. Tejanos, or rather Coahuiltecans, were already home in the land of their ancestors. This explains why the issue of repatriation was so important to Ray Hernandez. He was determined to see that the remains excavated in 1967 were returned to their proper resting place at Mission San Juan.
500 Years of Resistance

In 1992, as the Western world prepared to celebrate the quincentennial of Columbus’s so-called “discovery” of the Americas, indigenous American groups from both continents staged protests denouncing the planned celebrations. At least ten years prior, various countries worldwide—including Spain, Mexico, the United States of America, and Italy as well—had set in motion plans to mark the occasion. Indigenous people from North and South America were well aware of these plans and also began organizing against the five hundredth anniversary celebrations, culminating in a 1990 anti-Columbus conference—the Intercontinental Indigenous Gathering in Quito, Ecuador. The conference was the first of its kind, and from it, a hemispheric pan-Indian solidarity developed which sparked the “500 Years Movement, representing 500 years of resistance.”

As government committees busily spent vast amounts of money in preparation for the occasion, others including scholars, artists, and history enthusiasts also produced an immense amount of material surrounding the “discovery” and the consequences of that fortuitous event. Some of these people were also contracted by government agencies to produce material for their celebrations. Their interpretations ranged from praise of Columbus to outright disgust and condemnation of his legacy. The most vociferous opposition to the celebration came from indigenous people throughout the Americas, and among the protesters were ethnic Mexicans who were sympathetic to Native American issues or who identified as indigenous people themselves. While it was widely understood that ethnic Mexicans had indigenous ancestry, public displays of indigeneity among Mexican Americans had been rare even among those who called themselves Chicanas and Chicanos (Chicana/os). The Columbus quincentenary helped change that, but there were other factors at play.
The early to mid-1990s saw an increase of activism among young people, who now called themselves Latinas/os, in response to the resurfacing of unresolved issues dating to the grievances of the Chicano movement. Throughout the country, but especially in the U.S. Southwest, racism and xenophobia were on the rise; “English-only” laws were proposed and passed as a way to target unwanted immigrants, especially those in Spanish-speaking communities. In many places, public schools were still not fully desegregated, creating a separate, and very unequal, educational environment that did a disservice to poor children of ethnic minorities and immigrants. In higher education, multiculturalism and affirmative action programs were attacked by reactionary critics who argued that the rules impinged on their rights and discriminated against white people. Intensifying matters were harsh immigration laws intended to cleanse the nation of undocumented immigrants, as well as an increased incidence of police brutality. While economic concerns and national sovereignty informed the course of immigration policy, that issue also affected policing due to the rise of violent crime among urban youth, including the children of immigrants, caught in a despairing cycle of poverty and gang activity.

All of these socio-political issues prompted young activists to look at the recent past—the Chicano movement—for guidance and direction, an in their search many found the Aztec dance groups that had formed at that time. In my estimation, this period of the early nineties is when danza azteca really gained prominence and started becoming ubiquitous in Southwestern urban centers with traditionally large ethnic Mexican populations—places like San Antonio, Albuquerque, Denver, and Los Angeles. Once immersed in these socio-cultural dance troupes, their newfound teachers exposed the neophyte members to new ideas and traditions. The new danzantes learned that the tradition they now followed belonged to an ancient and unbroken line
that dated to the pre-invasion era. Additionally, as part of a larger danza community, the neophytes joined a whole network of activists involved in indigenous causes on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. These connections were not new, for the ties between Native Americans and indigene-centric Chicana/os had been firmly established in the heady days of the Chicano and Red Power movements of the sixties and seventies.

The relationship between Chicana/o and American Indian activists, like any other, had its ups and downs, but both groups understood the importance of solidarity. Through their interaction with Chicana/os, Native Americans established a rapport with indigenous communities in Mexico since at least the 1970s. For example, in 1978, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI)—an advocacy group for Native Americans—sent emissaries to Mexico City to meet with the organization Zemanahuac Tlamachtiloyan (ZT). The ZT was an organization whose membership consisted of long-time neo-Aztecs of the Mexika strand. From that successful interaction came “the first meeting of [the] Continental Congress of the Fifth Sun on the summer solstice in June” of that same year. A few years later, in 1980, the NCAI invited the leadership of the ZT to its annual convention, further solidifying the ties between the two organizations. This coalition building proved fruitful and useful, especially during the 1992 Columbus celebration protests.

Perhaps one of the most striking ideas that emerged from the pan-Indian coalition against the Columbus festivities was the revelation of a supposed “prophecy of the Eagle and the Condor.” The origins of this prophecy are shrouded in mystery, but some researchers trace its basic elements to a sixteenth-century messianic and shamanistic religious revival movement among Quechuas from the Peruvian Andean highlands called Taki Onqoy. The name of the movement, Taki Onqoy, loosely translates to “sickness of the chant” or “dancing sickness.” As
with most prophecies, there are many versions and interpretations, but the concern here is with
the modern association of the eagle with the northern continent and the condor with the southern
one. During the Quito conference, a group of Quechua representatives shared the prophecy of
the Eagle and the Condor with the participants. John Curl, a journalist from Berkeley who was
in attendance, California described the instance thusly:

The gathering served as the place where many of the participants first heard of the
Prophecy of the Eagle and the Condor. In fact, the event's theme was the Prophecy of the
Eagle and the Condor. (I) asked some of the organizers, what the meaning of the banner
was that they were painting. They told (me) that it represented an old legend of the
Prophecy of the Eagle and the Condor.81

It is fair to say that the prior to this, the prophecy was relatively unknown outside of Ecuador. At
the conference, representatives from other parts of the Americas also shared their prophecies, all
of which forecast the emergence of a new era of indigenous unity and enlightenment.

This idea of a “new era” found a ready audience with people that blended indigenous
spirituality with New Age philosophy. Matt Remle (Hunkpapa Lakota), a Native American
activist who promotes decolonization and pan-Indian unity, describes the prophecy thusly:

_We have been waiting five hundred years. The Inca prophecies say that now, in this age,
when the eagle of the North and the condor of the South fly together, the Earth will
awaken. The eagles of the North cannot be free without the condors of the South. Now
it’s happening. Now is the time. The Aquarian Age is an era of light, an age of
awakening, an age of returning to natural ways. Our generation is here to help begin
this age, to prepare through different schools to understand the message of the heart,
intuition, and nature. Native people speak with the Earth. When consciousness awakens,
we can fly high like the eagle, or like the condor._—Inca Prophecy82
This narrative is emblematic of most versions transmitted among indigenous activists since it was first shared in 1990. Notice the casual mention of the “Aquarian Age” and how out of place it seems in a prophecy that is attributed originally to Quechuans. It is telling that a concept associated with counterculture and New Ageism found its way into a Native prophecy. It points to the problematic reality of how Theosophical tenets permeate through many modern revitalized indigenous traditions, including Mexikayotl.83

The Eagle and Condor prophecy also brings to mind an Aztec legend which states that the end of the current Fifth Sun (our current age) is nigh, signaling the start of a new age—that of the Sixth Sun. Since the seventies, Mexikas and New Agers associated the Sixth Sun legend with the year 2012 and the completion of the Maya calendric long-count. The connection between the year 2012 and the Maya end-times prophecies began at the turn of the twentieth-century, but it did not gain prominence until the seventies when New Age authors—such as Frank Waters, José Argüelles, and Terrence McKenna—popularized it. Two schools of thought emerged from this erroneous association, one was eschatological and the other transcendental. Followers of the former believed that the Maya had predicted the end of world which would occur at the end of the Maya long-count, December 21, 2012. Those partial to the latter believed that humanity would enter a new age of harmony and higher consciousness. Needless to say, neither of the two predictions materialized on that long awaited prophetic day.84

In similar fashion, Mexikas incorporated the Eagle and Condor prophecy into that of the Sixth Sun, and thus suggested, as Remle’s account does, that the meeting of the North and South American indigenous peoples initiated the coming of the new age. Because Mexikah liked incorporating spiritual practices and blending philosophical tenets of various cultures, it is easy to see how New Age philosophy manifested itself into the Mexikayotl tradition. That issue
aside, the important point here is that opposition to the quincentennial celebrations brought indigenous peoples from North and South America together in a unified voice against what they perceived as an offensive celebration of European colonization, dispossession, injustice, genocide, and oppression.

**Los Coahuiltecos**

In the early nineties, there was an upsurge of indigene-centric activity in and around San Antonio. The *danza azteca* and purification lodges gained a greater following among Tejano indigenists, and places like Vásquez’s Refugee Aid Project attracted attention from Chicana/os that were curious about Native identity and spiritual ceremonies. For years Isaac Cardenas conducted traditional family sweat-lodge purifications at Mission San Francisco de Espada. By 1992, his sweat-lodge had garnered a significant following mainly from individuals associated with Ray Hernandez and the San Juan/Berg’s Mill community. These included Hernandez himself, Rodolfo Muñoz, Mickey Killian, and Richard Garay. They were all part of the San Juan Capistrano Mission Repatriation Committee (SJCMRC).

The SJCMRC was led by Hernandez who for many years had been advocating for the return of the excavated remains from MSJC. Cardenas, Hernandez, and the rest of the committee eventually discovered that there were other Chicana/os conducting their own purification ceremonies. These other indigenist Chicanos were none other than the *danzantes mexicas* who were guided by Kuauhtli Vásquez. Finding common ground, the *mexicas* and the mission descendants began collaborating and exchanging ideas. Vásquez’s idea of a Coahuiltecan identity resonated with Hernandez who, up to this point, had not even considered it.
The year 1992 also marked the Columbus quincentennial. As was discussed at the start of this study in Chapter One, indigenous people of the Americas gathered in various cities and mounted demonstrations denouncing the 500 year anniversary of the encounter and the very celebrations themselves. Anticipating the festivities, various groups in North and South America started organized the first “Peace and Dignity Journeys” (PDJ) in the years leading up to the occasion. The journeys basically consisted of two groups of runners who began their trek from opposite ends of the western hemisphere. One group started from Chickaloon, Alaska and the other from Macchu Picchu, Peru. Starting from opposite ends, the participants ran through several hundred indigenous communities along the way until they met at a designated place in between. Participating communities helped in carrying the staffs and banners at various points and provided food and shelter for the runners. Completing their mission, both groups of runners arrived and met at Teotihuacan—one of Mexico’s most visited archeological sites—on October 12, 1992. This achievement represented a symbolic unification of indigenous peoples in the Western hemisphere against colonialism and its legacy.\(^{85}\) Believers in the Eagle and Condor prophecy noted that the PDJ marked the first stage of its fulfillment. In honor and solidarity, Vásquez and those associated with RAP hosted their own Native American ceremony in San Antonio which they observed simultaneously with the one in Teotihuacan.\(^{86}\)

By the following year, 1993, Vásquez and Jose Zepeda established the Quetzalcoatl Native American Church (NAC) which advocated for the ritual use of peyote by Chicana/os.\(^{87}\) Zepeda was a long-time *mitotero* who recalled having attended a ceremony at Mission San Juan in 1976 “with a Roadman who claimed to run a fireplace from Teotihuacan.”\(^{88}\) It is unclear who the “roadman” was, but he was likely one of many spiritual leaders of the modern Mexikayotl tradition that emerged in that period. These are the kind of connections that motivated
Vásquez’s travels to Mexico during the Chicano movement years. The search of a deeper indigenous understanding that transcended generic neo-Aztecism likely motivated Vásquez and others like him. Nevertheless, Vásquez thought of himself, not just as a Mexika, but also as a Coahuilteco, for although he had learned danza and Mexikayotl, he was also proud of his family’s ethnic lineage as “Tecos” from Coahuila. That family pride inspired Vásquez’s identification with Coahuiltecan peoples, and in turn he influenced those around him, including people like Hernandez.

In 1994, Ray Hernandez’s SJCMRC changed its name to the American Indians in Texas at the Spanish Colonial Missions (AIT-SCM). That same year AIT-SCM successfully applied for and received non-profit status as a 501(c)(3). However, the transformation of the organization was not completed until Hernandez visited Vásquez and spoke with him about “Los Coahuiltecos.” Shortly thereafter, “Los Coahuiltecos became an identity for a growing number of people associated with AIT-SCM, Huehuecoyotl, and Teokalli Quetzalcoatl.” By 1996, the Coahuiltecan identity, the religious use of peyote, the use of sweat-lodges for purification, and the performance of various danza styles (conchera, azteca, and mexica) flourished throughout San Antonio.

Unfortunately, the alliance that had emerged between danzantes and mission descendants did not last very long. By October of 1997, philosophical differences among members of Los Coahuiltecos drove a wedge between the two camps. On one side were Ray Hernandez and many of the original San Juan Capistrano Mission Repatriation Committee—including Mickey Killian. On the other were Rick Mendoza and Kuauhtli Vásquez, both whom had been instrumental in the development of the modern Coahuiltecan identity. Mendoza was of Pamaque (Coahuiltecan) ancestry and he disagreed with some of the decisions made by Hernandez.
regarding the repatriation of the remains that were finally being processed for reburial. Hernandez viewed this opposition as a threat to his growing influence in the group. As president of AIT-SCM, he reorganized the organization into the Tap Pilam Coahuiltecan Nation and in the process expelled Mendoza and Vásquez from the group.

AIT-SCM reorganized itself to reflect a more Native American structure and created the Tap Pilam Coahuiltecan Nations which was comprised of several families, or clans. They also amended the group’s by-laws to reflect the shift in focus, stating that: “the purpose of this organization … shall be to reestablish the American Indian Tribe known as the Coahuiltecan Tribe, herein after referred to as Tap Pilam, Coahuiltecos, Coahuiltecs, Tejanos, Coahuilanos, Coahuiltajanos.” Where AIT-SCM served as the bureaucratic arm of the group, the Tap Pilam (People of the Land) became the cultural channel through which the Coahuiltecan identity was promoted.

Conclusions

This chapter focused on the evolution and creation of the Coahuiltecan identity as an Indian for Chicana/os in Texas. The identity was suggested by an individual with ties to Coahuila, Mexico whose family oral history mentioned an indigenous group called “Tecos” in their ancestry. This identity resonated with other Tejanos who already viewed themselves in indigenous terms through connections to the old Spanish missions in San Antonio, specifically San Juan Capistrano. Tejanos do not have a single source of origin for their assertions of indigeneity. There were multiple channels through which Indianness arrived and was expressed. One of the earliest expressions was through the Xinachtli concheros and later with the danza azteca that was introduced through people like Kuauhtli Vásquez. Other sources of Chicana/o
indigeneity was through the traditional “purification lodges” of south Texas that were very similar to sweat-lodges from other Native American groups. Lastly, but most importantly, indigeneity was expressed through the ritual use of peyote and the mitote ceremonies.

The investigation into Coahuiltecan identity revealed few female voices. Apparently, males mainly promoted the indigenist identity. Though women in the picture, they mostly appeared in the background or their actions are rarely documented. The author spoke to a few women connected to the modern Coahuiltecan identity, and their information did not deviate much from what is presented above. However, one woman reacted strongly to the situation; Delia Enriquez offered a stinging critique of the Tap Pilam: “women didn’t really have a voice” in the organization. Enriquez is the ex-wife of the late Steven Casanova—a Chicano activist and professor at St. Cloud University in Minnesota. He was one of the founders of the Tap Pilam and headed one of the “families.” After he passed, she reluctantly took over his position in spite of the “anti-woman attitude” of the council. Enriquez eventually distanced herself from the group and focused on her activities with danza conchera.

Finally, the issue of repatriation played a key role in the evolution of Coahuiltecan identity, especially among those individuals who identified as mission descendants. To use a cliché, Ray Hernandez is the “poster boy” of that. He embodied the relentless commitment to seeing that the human remains that were excavated at Mission San Juan Capistrano in 1967 were returned to the camposanto (holy-ground) from where they taken. He was a controversial figure, but he was also adamant about his life’s mission—one that led to his adoption of an indigenous identity along the way. On Saturday, November 29, 1999, Hernandez’s decades long repatriation battle was realized. On that day, the remains of over one-hundred individuals who had been originally buried there more than two-hundred years earlier were finally laid to rest.
Hundreds of people attended the event which included a Catholic mass right before the reburial, all of which had been preceded by Native American rituals and a mitote the night before. Ray Hernandez led the final reburial ceremony, thus closing a major chapter in his life.

The Tap Pilam splintered further over the years. Mario Garza, his wife Maria, and members of their extended family constituted the next major split in 2006. Acquiring non-profit status, they started the Indigenous Cultures Institute in San Marcos, Texas to promote indigenous pride among ethnic Mexicans and continue fighting for repatriation of all the remains still held around the state. Basing their identity on Mario’s, they refer to themselves as the Miakan/Garza Band of Coahuiltecans. The band was formally recognized by the State of Texas in 2013.

In conclusion, just as the Mexika identity emerged during the Chicano movement as a channel for asserting indigeneity among ethnic Mexicans, so did that of modern Coahuiltecans. In Texas, however, the strong ties that Chicana/os had to their Coahuila-Tejano roots inspired a connection that was much closer to home—one that was rooted in local family genealogies and deep historical connections to the land of their ancestors, “la gente del mesquite.”

2 José Flores Peregrino Interview, interview by Ruben Arellano, September 5, 2016.

3 José Flores Peregrino Interview. Americo Paredes was a seminal Mexican-American historian, folklorist, ethnomusicologist, and author whose work helped develop the foundation for Southwest Studies and Mexican American studies. He spent most of his academic career at the University of Texas at Austin.


5 The reemergence of (Chicana/o) Apaches in Texas was diligently covered in an anthropological study by Enrique Maestas and will not be dealt with here. His work informs the present study and is cited throughout. Although there is some overlap, the focus here is mainly Coahuiltecans and not Apaches.

6 Several people interviewed by the author have mentioned that many of the key figures in the Coahuiltecan movement were originally involved in Chicana/o politics or simply went by that ethnic identity. Mario Garza, of the Miakan/Garza Band of Coahuiltecans, affirms that the precursor to the various Coahuiltecan groups dates to this loose collection of activists of which he was a part of from the beginning. Dr. Mario Garza Interview, interview by Ruben Arellano, June 28, 2011.


9 This is the full list of peoples encountered by Cabeza de Vaca who are considered to have been Coahuiltecans: Acubadaos, Anagados, Arbadaos, Atayos, Avavares, Camones, Coayos, Comos, Cutalchiches, Maliacones, Mariames, Mendica, Susolas, and Yguazes. For more on this remarkable story, see Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, *The Account: Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca’s Relación*, trans. Martin A. Favata and Fernández, José B. (Houston, Tex.: Arte Público Press, 1993); and Andrés Reséndez, *A Land So Strange: The Epic Journey of Cabeza de Vaca; The Extraordinary Tale of a Shipwrecked Spaniard Who Walked Across America in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 2007).


11 Ibid., 64–77.

12 Ibid., 89.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., 90.

15 Ibid., 92.

16 Ibid., 93–94.


21 Alessio Robles, *Coahuila y Texas*, 209. Fray Larios, guardian del convento de Atoyac, se trasladó a Durango, capital de la Nueva Vizcaya, y al restituirse al lugar de su ministerio, a dos jornadas, encontró a unos indios gentiles flecheros que en lugar de robar o maltratar al misionero, le hicieron saber que eran de tierras lejanas situadas hacia el norte y le “rogaban fuese con ellos, porque querían les echar agua en la cabeza.” El padre Larios trataba de continuar su viaje, pero los indios lo condujeron hacia el norte y el accedió enviando un correo a su provincial pidiendo licencia para dejarse llevar por aquellos indios que con tanta solicitud lo llamaban.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., 212. Fray Larios’s arrival to Cotzal territory and founding of Mision de los Peyotes is couched in a fabulous tale. Apparently, his fate was decided by the outcome of a ballgame between his hosts and a rival tribe. The Tobosos, who were neighbors of the Cotzales, wanted to use Larios’s head as a ball during an upcoming *mitote*. The Cotzales challenged the Tobosos to said ballgame stating that if they won, the priest would go free, but if they lost, Fray Larios would be handed over. The Cotzales lost and immediately surrounded the priest to protect him. The Tobosos shot arrows at them and missed, and the Cotzales took advantage of the situation, killing many Tobosos as they retreated. In honor of the victory, Mision de los Peyotes was built on the site of the ballgame.

24 The word *mitote* (pl. *mitotes*) describes indigenous ceremonies, especially those performed at night that involved dancing. For a more thorough explanation, refer to note 61 in Chapter 4. The word is still in usage today among Coahuiltecans in reference to conducting a “medicine meeting” involving peyote.

25 T. N. Campbell, *The Indians of Southern Texas and Northeastern Mexico: Selected Writings of Thomas Nolan Campbell* (Austin, Tex.: Published by the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory with the cooperation of the Dept. of Anthropology, the College of Liberal Arts and the Institute of Latin American Studies, University of Texas at Austin, 1988), 108. In all likelihood, the name probably refers to the San Pedro spring cluster, because it and others that lay on the Balcones Escarpment fault line and fed by the Edwards Aquifer—like the San Marcos Springs and Barton Springs in Austin—were (and still are) considered sacred by modern Coahuiltecans; for more on the springs see Gregg Eckhardt, “San Pedro Springs,” *The Edwards Aquifer Website*, accessed February 7, 2014, http://www.edwardsaquifer.net/spspring.html.

26 For more on the combined province of Coahuila y Texas, see Alessio Robles, *Coahuila y Texas*; and “Coahuila and Texas,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed April 4, 2017, https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/usc01.


Ibid.

Ibid.


Yleana Martinez, “Indios Del Norte: Hispanics in the Southwest Rediscover Their Links to Native American Culture,” Hispanic, August 1998, 48. The term “camposanto” translates to “hallowed ground,” i.e. a graveyard. The brackets are in the original quote.

Alston V. Thoms, ed., Reassessing Cultural Extinction: Change and Survival at Mission San Juan Capistrano, Texas, Reports of Investigation 4 (College Station: Center for Ecological Archaeology, Texas A & M University; San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, Texas National Park Service, 2001), 104. Mardith Schuetz worked with CASA for many years and published numerous studies and reports based on her field work, including her doctor’s thesis cited above.


Thoms, Reassessing Cultural Extinction, 18–19.

Ibid., 18.


Maestas, “Culture and History,” 497. Maestas notes that families still lived on mission property when Schuetz was conducting her excavations. In an informal conversation with a descendant of MSJC who wished to remain anonymous, he confirmed that families were still living at the mission up until the 1980s. He even showed me pictures that confirmed what he said.

Thoms, Reassessing Cultural Extinction, 19.
In the Catholic Archives at San Antonio (CASA), there are several letters between heads of the Archdiocese, the UTSA, the THC, and their attorneys that deal with the issue of “ownership of artifacts and remains found at the mission grounds. For instance, a letter dated August 30, 1996, from Thomas Drought (diocese attorney) and addressed to the Attorney General of Texas, Dan Morales, states: “The remains and artifacts are the property of the Archdiocese of San Antonio. Their collection was permitted by Archbishop Lucey under written agreement with Curtis Tunnel [Executive Director of the THC] and were released to him for analysis with the clear understanding that they were and would remain the property of the Archdiocese.”  CASA, Box: E-1-G-2, Folder: O.S.M. San Juan – Indians Buried at San Juan, “RE: Archdiocese of San Antonio – Mission San Juan Capistrano.”

Maestas used more critical language, saying: “Mardith Schuetz dug, with no standard excavation plan nor grid-system ... Digging for a museum, she was not doing much more than grave robbing. I say this because the reports do not allow one to easily retrace Schuetz’s steps.” “Culture and History,” 497.

In an informal conversation, Dr. Mario Garza mentioned that he had been an “extra” in a few movies in the 1970s. As a tall long-haired Chicano who identified as indigenous, he fit the “Indian” part well.

Martinez, “Indios Del Norte,” 46. Brackets are in the original quote.

Ibid.

Ibid., 48.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Personal communication with Mario Garza. Also see “Integration at UH – Black and Brown Perspectives,” News and Events, The University of Houston, (October 2012), http://www.uh.edu/class/news/archive/2012/october/integration-UH/.


Carrillo et al., Canto Al Pueblo, 20. Translation and brackets are mine.

In my communications with Garza, he has always maintained that he has always been aware of his indigenous ancestry which is tied to the borderlands between Texas and the Mexican states of Coahuila and Tamaulipas.

Garza does not recall the newspaper name, title, date, or name of the individual, but it was most likely the *Austin-American Statesman*. I have not been able to locate that item.

Dr. Mario Garza Interview 2, interview by Ruben Arellano, June 23, 2013.


Alessio Robles, *Coahuila y Texas*.

Maestas, “Culture and History,” 448. A purification lodge is basically what most people refer to as a “sweat lodge” in the American Indian tradition and a “temazcal” in Mexikayotl.

Maestas notes that there are “two house types built by people in south Texas. Open structures called *ramadas* were built on rectangular frames and were partially sheltered by woven grass mats. A second structure built with a dome structure was totally enclosed by coverings made from animal hides, grass mats, thatch, and sometimes mud.” Ibid., 364. Maestas cite this from Salinas, *Indians of the Rio Grande Delta*, 123.

Maestas, “Culture and History,” 448.

CASA archives, news clippings.

Maestas, “Culture and History,” 416.

Mario Madroñero Morillo, “Caminos del jaguar y el venado: conversación con Kuauhtli Vásquez, médico tradicional mexica,” *CALLE14: revista de investigación en el campo del arte, Caminos del jaguar y el venado*, 7, no. 9 (April 19, 2013): 102–13. The interview is in Spanish, and the name of the group is given as “Frente de Liberación Chicano.” The Chicano Liberation Front (CLF) was a Marxist-Leninist (M-L) radical organization associated with the August Twenty-Ninth Movement (ATM) (M-L)—a Chicano communist organization that lasted from 1974 to 1978. The ATM formed out of the Labor Committee of La Raza Unida Party in Los Angeles and officially formed at a Unity Conference in May 1974. It was one of several organizations that were part of the New Communist Movement, which were influenced by Mao Zedong and Joseph Stalin's theories on the National Question. Mary Romero notes that the CLF “was linked to numerous bombings in the United States.

71 For an examination of intertribal (inter-ethnic) human rights activism, including activities at the United Nations, involving Chicana/os and indigenous people from across the Americas, see Jose Luis Serrano Najera, “Chicana/O Indigenous Affirmation as Transformational Consciousness: Indigeneity and Transnational Human Rights Advocacy since the Chicana/O Movement” (Doctoral dissertation, University of California, 2015).

72 I met Vásquez at a danza ceremony in San Antonio in 2000, and I do not recall anyone mentioning any of this background information about him. I do recall wondering to myself why a Mexika talked about Coahuiltecos so much and even claimed to be one.


75 Ibid., 426.

76 Garza Interview.


81 Jose Luis Malvido, “Peace and Dignity Journeys: Emergence of the Eagle and Condor” (Master’s thesis, San Francisco State University, 2012), 68.


83 Mexikas I know personally admitted to me that they are Theosophists. Theosophy is a collection of mystical and occultist philosophies concerning, or seeking direct knowledge of, the presumed mysteries of life and nature, particularly of the nature of divinity and the origin and purpose of the universe. Theosophy is considered part of Western esotericism, which believes that hidden knowledge or wisdom from the ancient past offers a path to enlightenment and salvation.

84 For a critical look at the “2012 Doomsday” phenomenon, see Anthony Aveni, *The End of Time: The Maya Mystery of 2012* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2009). Aveni, an Archaeoastronomer, states that while the idea of “balancing the cosmos” was prominent in ancient Maya literature, the 2012 phenomenon did not draw from those traditions. Instead, it was bound up with American concepts such as the New Age movement, millenarianism, and the belief in secret knowledge from distant times and places.
across the Americas, including the International Indian Treaty Council, Tonatierra, and the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, coordinated several protests, marches, events, teach-ins and actions that challenged the notion that Europeans discovered the Americas” (2).

Maestas, “Culture and History,” 469.

Peyote is considered an illegal substance, and only federally recognized Native people are allowed to use it for religious purposes through Native American Church denominations.

Maestas, “Culture and History,” 477. A “mitotero” is a ceremonial practitioner, and the term “fireplace” refers to the authority given to someone by an established “Roadman” (i.e. ceremonial leader) to conduct their own peyote ceremony. At the center of the ceremonial gathering there is always a ceremonial fire used for healing, praying, and for communicating with the spirit world— hence the term.


Maestas, “Culture and History,” 475. Teokalli Quetzalcoatl was a peyote church that incorporated Mexikayotl teachings and practices; it was associated with Kuauhtli Vásquez.

The number of clans was constantly in flux due to internal changes over membership. They started with 11, then went down 7, and finally settled on 5.


It is necessary to note that the name “Tap Pilam” is not found in the colonial sources and was most likely created by the group. The anthropologist Francisco M. Mitchell, who wrote his Master’s thesis on the group, states that: “Tap Pilam is derived from [the] Coahuiltecan dialect as identified by Swanton: ‘Tap meaning ‘world’ or ‘earth’ and Pilam, ‘people…human beings’ or constructed as ‘a verb […] to live’… They literally translate Tap Pilam as ‘People of the Land’.” Francisco M. Mitchell, “The Language and Medicine Makes Us strong: Coahuiltecan Identity in San Antonio, Texas” (Master’s thesis, University of Texas at San Antonio, 2004), 33; also see John R. Swanton, Linguistic Material from the Tribes of Southern Texas and Northeastern Mexico, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 127 (Washington: United States Government Printing Press, 1940).

Delia Enriquez Interview, interview by Ruben Arellano, August 8, 2014.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to answer one simple question, one that often gets overlooked, glossed over, or dismissed altogether: How and why did a certain subset of Chicana/os, specifically Tejanos, go beyond simply acknowledging that they have Indian blood, to fully embracing and immersing themselves in particular forms of Mexican based indigeneity? In other words, the question reaches beyond the easy answer derived from mestizo explanations which are inadequate because otherwise most ethnic Mexicans would be more engaged with their Indianness. The inquiry here sought a deeper understanding of how Chicana/os “became Indian.”

This question arose from my own experience and background. Growing up in an ethnic Mexican household with a political Chicano view of myself, I was always fascinated by the iconography and allusions to ancient Mesoamerican art, poetry, and music. As I got older, I encountered people that shared this enthusiasm but took it to the next level—a modern interpretation of indigenous lifeways. In time, I began to question how it was that all the things I was experiencing through my involvement in danza mexica and Mexikayotl itself came to be a part of U.S. born Mexican American culture. In reality, this alternative lifestyle constitutes a kind of counterculture movement similar to the one that arose in 1960s Mexico with the previously discussed jipitecas.
Similar to the extreme left within hippie culture, there is also an anti-American sentiment among neo-Mexikas, both in Mexico and the U.S. It is a sentiment that is fueled by a combination of grievances over historical transgressions committed by the Spanish, Anglo, and Western-European society; current and ongoing atrocities by the same actors; and solidarity with other indigenous people worldwide against colonization and neo-liberal capitalism. The anti-Americanism is so great among some extremist individuals that they fall prey to conspiratorial thinking so as long it is against the United States. It appears to me that this thinking is a holdover attitude from the extreme wings of Chicano movement.

Still, some Mexikas view themselves as inheritors of the Chicano movement whose duty it is to carry on the struggle for civil and human rights. This image aligns nicely with that of the “guerrero azteca” (Aztec warrior) who, when filtered through the Mexika lens, transforms Chicana/o activists into Mexika warriors whose lofty goal is the complete decolonization of Aztlan, Mexico, and the entirety of the Americas. This is also not that far removed from the restorationist ideologies of Juan Luan-Cárdenas’s aztekah movement and his neo-Mexika successor Rodolfo Nieva-Lopez and his MCRCA.

For the most part, the majority of Mexicanos and Mexican Americans lost their indigenous connection during the three-hundred year Spanish occupation of what is today Mexico and the U.S. Southwest. Whatever semblance of indigeneity that remained in the mestizo culture that developed was hidden both consciously and subconsciously. The remnants of Native culture lay hidden in plain sight through the melding and syncretism of various cultures, and in time, these evolved into regional cultures. After the Mexican Revolution, the Mexican state promoted the stereotypical nationalized culture that we see today with mariachis, charros, serapes, tacos. Etc.
That the indigenous influence is evident in Mexican society, such as food, art, spirituality, and culture is not the issue, and neither are those things necessarily representative of indigeneity. Among indigenists, it is not enough to simply proclaim that one is indigenous. You have to demonstrate your Indianness in some way. Indigeneity is a matter of identity, and historically speaking, ethnic Mexicans have emphasized their native regionality—as in Tejano, Californio, and Nuevo Mexicano—and not particularly their Indianness. In effect, the work presented here examined the instances and intellectual underpinnings that gave rise to the phenomenon of embracing indigenous identity within the detribalized ethnic Mexican community. This was done by tracing indigenist ideology back to the early colonial period with the rise of romantic neo-Aztecism; through its waning during the Mexican period; and, finally, to its vigorous revival in the postrevolutionary period. After several decades of growing pains, romantic neo-Aztecism transformed into Mexikayotl, and in this last version is how it spread north into Chicanoland (Aztlan).

Even so, there those among Chicana/o indigenists who feel that identities based on the Aztecs are imperialistic, and they choose to identify with other less prominent groups. There are others still who identity with the indigenous people tied to their oral family history, such as the Coahuiltecan discussed in this study. Whether or not their culture survived the hundreds of years of colonization and repression is debatable, but those who identify as Coahuiltecan have subverted the notion of extinction by expressing that identity. Having successfully repatriated the excavated remains at Mission San Juan Capistrano gave Coahuiltecan credibility among other Native people. Nonetheless, acceptance among American Indians is not a given, for not all accept them as “real Indians.” Undeterred by these political obstacles, Coahuiltecan have
continued successfully repatriating remains despite protests by some federally recognized tribes who attempt discrediting them by pointing to their lack of federal status.

The revival of Coahuiltecan ethnic identity exposes the persistence of indigeneity, not only among Coahuiltecan descendants, but also among the greater ethnic Mexican community. There has been an increased acceptance and acknowledgement of indigeneity among detribalized Mexicans over the last thirty years, and the default identity among them has been that of Mexikah. This cultural re-appropriation is best defined by the term used at the onset of the movement in Mexico, restoration. The restoration process is then expressed through the revitalization of cultures that were long thought extinct. And because there are huge historical breaks in the timeline of both identities, cultural continuity in the strictest cannot be defended and is not the argument intended in this study. This study showed that there has been a constant affinity towards indigenous culture and identity over the course of Mexican history which has manifested itself in various forms. More importantly, what this study demonstrates that the idea of indigenous identity among ethnic Mexicans is shows no signs of abatement and is here for the long term. This raises other questions for further research.

At a time when localized ethnic identities are being absorbed into larger ones; will indigeneity among ethnic Mexicans continue to rise, or will those claims finally give way to the prevailing homogenous Eurocentric Latino label? More importantly, does revitalization provide a substantive approach for advancing and legitimizing future claims of indigeneity among Mexican Americans, and can it be sustained in the long-term? In the end, these questions tackle the sub-text of this study, which is the issue of belonging and its parallel contestation against the claims of foreignness. It must be understood, that indigenists of the stripe discussed herein assert that as descendants of indigenous people, they have the right to live and exist in any part of the
Americas regardless of legal status. This idea manifests itself in many ways including political rallies and protest marches.

For instance, in 2006, cities across the United States experienced the first major “Mega March” in support of immigrants rights. In Dallas, an estimated half a million people marched through the streets of downtown making it the largest march in that city ever, with some accounts suggesting that it was also the largest in the history of the state. These types of events are hard to accurately quantify, but as an active participant, I can attest to the march’s magnitude. At the event, my danza group, Mitotiliztli Yaoyollohtli (Heart of the Warrior), marched with signs I made with messages promoting indigenous identity. Also present were representatives of the American Indian Movement who brought their iconic flag and marched alongside a group of people that is not considered as such by many in their own community.

Among Chicana/o indigenists—whether Coahuiltecan, Mexikah, or some other indigenous identity—a prevailing attitude among them is one of indignation. Many could care less about being an “approved Indian,” as Jack D. Forbes put it many years ago. To them what counts is their acceptance and inclusion within their own communities, even if it means sometimes being at odds with card-carrying American Indians who frown on them for simply “looking Mexican.” Whether they are accepted or not is of no consequence, it is their own community that matters. Ultimately, what this study showed is that the idea of indigeneity is so deeply rooted in the Mexican psyche that it makes indigenous persistence very difficult to break.
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