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Making Racial Subjects: Indigeneity and the Politics of Chicano/a Cultural Production

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ABSTRACT

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Representations of indigeneity abound in late-twentieth-century Chicano/a cultural productions, occupying genres as diverse as the political treatise, novel, poem, and news report. The work that follows traces the construction and ideological implications of indigenous Mexican culture, or ‘Indian’ signifiers in Chicano/a cultural production, a fundamental but often overlooked feature of Chicano/a subject formation. I bring Chicano/a indigenism into conversation with two historical and social phenomenon, Mexican indigenous migrants in the US and post-Revolutionary Mexican national discourse, to explore their influences and challenges to notions of
authenticity and nationalism. “Mestizaje,” a product of Mexican post-Revolutionary national discourse, subsumes the “Indian” within the Chicano/a and ultimately within the Chicano/a political imaginary. I argue that Mexican indigenous migrants in the U.S. constitute a new critical mass that contests mestizaje and Chicano/a as potential decolonial constructs. Such socio-political projects, I argue, forces us to rethink the uses of indigenism in the production of racialized Chicano/a political identities such as “la raza cósmica” and radical epistemological frameworks such as Anzaldúa’s “mestiza consciousness.” While, the mythologization of the Mexican Indian is a strategy that initiates counter-hegemonic discourse it also simulates simultaneously undercuts the emancipatory objectives of its authors. I employ a comparative framework to conduct an analysis of Chicano/a and indigenous cultural productions and reveal the multifaceted positionings of ethnic subjects in the U.S. For example, the affiliations and divisions between Oaxacan indigenous migrant and Chicano/a strategies of decolonization bring to light the complex and contradictory impulses embedded in the relationship between first world and third world marginalized subjects who, while occupying vastly different subject positions, are bound together by negotiations of citizenship and language, as well as formations of nation, race, class, and ethnicity.
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Introduction
Undoing the Myth of Mestizaje:
Indigenous Critical Masses in the Americas

Building "Patria," Translating Nation

The socio-political campaigns of "indigenismo" and "mestizaje" were the architecture that propagated Mexican nationalism and nation-building in post-revolutionary Mexico. Indigeneity and mestizaje emerged as complimentary discourses to build the newly independent republic. Both of these campaigns had as their ultimate target Mexico's indigenous populations. "Mestizaje," the literal mixing of Spanish and Indian blood, enabled Mexico to reimagined itself as a republic of fusion, (Saldaña-Portillo, 2001). Mestizaje quickly developed into a concept of nation from which nationalist elites of nineteenth century Mexico could launch in their own struggles for independence. Through the rest of the twentieth century, the Indian "problem" was managed through various programs of assimilation or marginalization. Indians were seen as the unfinished business of modernization and policy focused on the integration of indigenous populations into mestizo life. Actual indigenous people produced anxieties
for modern Mexico because they represented an opposition to ideas of progress.

Indigenismo was developed as a counterpart to mestizaje. Creole elites discursively resuscitated the Indian warrior as the emblem of the Mexican’s people true ancestral rights, retroactively constructing *patria* through the noble Indian who struggled against the Spanish (Saldaña-Portillo, 2001). Indigenismo represented a national movement of intellectuals, writers, painters and legislators inspired to celebrate their Indian pasts. Indigenismo, the practice of selectively extolling Mexico’s indigenous ancient ancestry, ancient people, languages and culture\(^1\) was most effectively illustrated in artist Diego Rivera’s work, president Benito Juarez’s reforms and, more recently, revised by intellectuals Guillermo Bonfil Batalla and Díaz Polanco. Exploring Latin American intellectuals’ endorsement of mestizaje and its ties to indigenismo and national consolidation requires an examination of modernization pressures and national debates about the Mexican national imaginary. Mexican elites and then Mexican nationalists developed indigenismo, a racist a discursive strategy, as the logic that enabled the formation of the Mexican nation-state

\(^1\) Notable indigenist novels include Alcides Arguedas's (1879–1946) Raza de bronce (1919; Bronze race), Jorge Icaza's (1906–1978) Huasipungo (1934), and Ciro Alegría's (1909–1967) El mundo es ancho y ajeno (1941; Broad and alien is the world).
while simultaneously disenfranchising indigenous populations. Indigenous populations were seen as antithetical to ideas of progress, citizenship, and modernity and thus, resuscitated as ancient figures of Mexico’s past and celebrated as having *past* (Saldaña-Portillo, 2000). Indigenismo romantically glorify Mexico's indigenous past while avoiding the misery that the great majority of indigenous communities continued to suffer even after the Revolution. Even Revolutionary peasant leader Emiliano Zapata, who was assassinated by the new regime, was transformed by its muralists into the most striking icon of the Revolution. They emphasized, “his dark Indian eyes, alternately defiant and sad, staring out from the facades and statues adorning countless public buildings” (McCaughan, 1999). The contradictions of Mexican national identity have affected Mexicans and Mexican Americans living in the United States as well. The Chicano movement, for example, effectively appropriated much of the Mexican Revolution's discourse in a potentially powerful counter-hegemonic challenge to U.S. racism in the 1960s and 1970s. The Chicano/a movement, reached back (historically and geographically) to Mexico and its nation-building intellectuals, the perceived height of Mexican progress, for its revolutionary language.
This project examines how have these concepts traveled and
translated first in the Chicano nationalist movement and second, in gendered
Chicano cultural productions and finally, given the pressures of
globalization, in transnational texts and movements. I emphasize the
historical and political development of indigenismo and mestizaje, because it
highlights how Chicano/a notions of indigeneity have been constructed in
relation to issues of nation and national identity, underscoring how
contemporary indigenous movements and literature demand a rethinking of
these discourses in United States contexts. Thus this project investigates asks
how does Chicano/a indigenista texts collectively endorse or challenge the
ideological underpinnings of both nation and ethnic formations. Following a
discussion of the historical contradictions of Mexican nationalism, this
projects also describes various current efforts on both sides of the Mexico-
U.S. border to reconfigure collective identities and programs for social
change that challenge the limits of the old nationalist project.

While indigenista literary productions traversed ideological mutations,
their intent varied from representing and knowing to destroying, or
protecting the colonial construct of the “Indian.” Taking Bonfil Batalla’s
(1987) premise that to move beyond colonialism scholars and activist must
bury the term and emphasize indigenous groups’ self-definitions, Quechua,
Aymara, Nahuatl, Maya, Zapoteco and Mixteco indigenismo is accentuated as the generic Indianness represented in indigenista texts (e.g. the centralizing of Aztec in national projects). My goal is not a dismissal of indigenismo, mestizaje, and its variants in the United States, but rather an attempt to think through the complex processes involving identity, and how indigenous intellectuals and other Chicano/a voices contest, revise, and revamp these ideas. This project pushes to develop a critical apparatus, a critical indigenous lens, to think through issues of representation, ethnicity, race, nation, and language through close readings and analysis.

Current indigenous political and cultural revindication movements attempt to demystify this romanticized representation. For example, both Mexican institutionalized indigenismo and Chicano nationalist discourses glorified Aztec culture to the extent that contemporary Zapotec, Mixteco, Maya and Mixe, communities stay continuously invisible in the national imaginary. Contemporary indigenous print culture, like El Oaxaqueño Newspaper, contests this centralizing tendency in nationalist myths.

**Immigration to the U.S. from the Mexican South**

The greatest myth ever propagated was the myth of an all mestizo Mexican nation. Although Mexican indigenous peoples have fought for land rights, full citizenship, social services, and in some cases sovereignty, for
centuries, it has been the processes of globalization that have brought their existence out of the myth of mestizaje and to the U.S. A post-NAFTA era of globalization in the Americas has prompted unprecedented levels of migration, relocation, and exploitation of third world populations, especially of women, impoverished migrants, and indigenous peoples. As U.S. and Latin American countries grow increasingly dependant on the flow of goods and services of immigrant populations—labor, products, agriculture, and remittances--indigenous migrants are continually, territorially displaced and politically and socially disenfranchised both by their nations of origin and the U.S. Thus, indigenous communities who have undergone centuries long campaigns of genocide, assimilation, territorial displacement, racialization, linguistic, and cultural apartheids continue to be among the most invisible immigrant communities. “The exhausted rhetoric that once sustained Mexico’s long-presumed cultural cohesion—a monolithic identity now under revision thanks largely to legitimate standpoints that are defined and defended by borderland identity, by Mexico's increasingly organized and outspoken indigenous communities, and by seasonal migration and its inevitable acculturations” (McCaughan, 1999).

While various nation-states of the Americas have dealt with their respective “Indian problem” in historically specific ways, the context of
indigenous subjectivity in the Americas has been a systematic silencing and historiographic erasure of the indigenous as speaking subject. Rather, 'Indian' has been strategically deployed as a concept, myth, and category to serve as a story of origin, making the community that invokes it cohere, vouching for its authenticity. Historically, indigeneity has been selectively incorporated into national narratives of origins, intimately linking the project of nation building and the marginalization of indigenous subjects. Yet, in the face of systematic oppression, indigenous peoples have continually restaged their presence within the state at local and national levels. The rise of indigenous activism and literary and cultural production at the beginning of the millennium in Latin America (Zapatista revolt in Chiapas, APPO protests in Oaxaca) directly challenge and disrupt traditional concepts of the ‘Indian’ as pre-modern, victims, passive, silent, or as merely "informants."^2

While countries in Latin America have engaged in ongoing projects to contain indigenous populations, the economic pressures of hyper-globalization has forced populations of Mexican indigenous people, or

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indígenas, to relocate to the U.S. Their presence in the U.S. has dramatically disrupted two distinct but related narratives of race and ethnicity.

Indígenas and Mexican Americans hail from the same country, yet, they have distinct relationships to the Mexican state, given their divergent historical processes between them. Such differences have rendered mestizos and indígenas two different kinds of Mexican citizens and, consequently, two different kinds of Mexican immigrants. The U.S. “racial order” does not tolerate such nuances in ethnic identity--a Mexican is a Mexican. The indígena presence also muddles notions of indigeneity with regard to American Indian populations in addition to challenging U.S. notions of nation and citizenship. In the U.S., American Indian status, like African American status before it, is determined by blood-quantum. Conversely, in Mexico indigenous status is determined by a combination of linguistic, ethnic, cultural and social constructions. Such collisions of racial structures between Mexican Americans and indígenas or American Indians and

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indígenas underscore the need to further interrogate the uses of Mexican indigeneity, ‘Indian’ signifiers, and indigenous myth in cultural production. Oaxacan indigenous communities, for instance, locate themselves in relation to other bodies of knowledge, histories, and languages that complicate Chicano/a “knowing” of Mexican American ethnicity and race. Mexican indígenas triangulate their identities between the US, Mexico, and their specific indigenous affiliations. The triangulation between nation-states and indigenous ethnic communities is a new configuration of Mexican American identity that in an instant, brings to the surface assumed shared histories, languages, political agendas, and geography among people of Mexican descent. Given the current condition of indigenous people around the globe (immigration flows, traditions of protest, and revindication movements) I suggest that the presence of an indigenous critical mass in places like California, in mainstream culture, and in grassroots cultural and political movements intervenes into racial paradigms that cannot, yet account for indigenous people.

Through a lens that centers on questions, issues, and representations of indigeneity and its configuration in Chicano and Chicana texts as well as in emergent US indigenous cultural production, I aim to set in motion a set of inquiries into the relationship between ethnic studies and indigenous
studies through a comparative analysis that understands Mexican indigenous and Chicano/a subjectivity as undergoing separate processes of identity formation. I argue that Chicano/a writers and intellectuals’ articulations, representations, and imaginings of indigeneity have relied on a stable “usable” indigeneity in Aztec figures such as La Malinche to articulate a political imaginary. Such imaginings, I suggest, have had epistemological repercussions that are manifested in the concepts of mestizaje, Aztlan, hybridity, and borderlands that problematically embed histories of indigenous erasure within their intellectual projects and/or render indigenous subjectivity and experience as existing outside of the political, cultural, historical, and global forces that have informed Chicano/a subjectivity. I argue that the continual restaging of the indigenous figures and indigeneity in Chicano/a cultural production reflects a rootedness in the nation and nationalistic projects predicated on the concept of “authenticity” for a political voice. A national(istic) indigeneity is a regulated indigeneity.

This project aims to underline how indigenous communities, writers, and performers theorize their political and cultural conditions in the world. In the U.S., and most importantly for this project, the only available articulations of Mexican indigeneity have occurred within Chicano/a cultural production. Chicano/a writers, from the inception of the Chicano movement
and through its revisions, have consistently articulated, claimed, imagined, deployed, traced, and performed Mexican indigeneity. So, if we are to interrogate Mexican indigenous subject formation in the US, we cannot do so without excavating Chicano/a indigeneity to examine how it has informed national and local notions of race, ethnicity, community, citizenship, language, and self-determination. It is the Chicano/a indigenous cultural milieu that contemporary indigenous peoples enter in the U.S. Chicano/a indigeneity is often constructed as the center on US non-American Indian indigeneity and increasingly contemporary Mexican indigeneity is the periphery.

Fundamental shifts in traditional disciplines like anthropology, history, and political science, which have taken into account the contemporary indigenous subject, coupled with the plethora of indigenous articulations/representations in Chicano/a cultural production have spurred my thinking of the role of indigeneity in Chicano/a identity formation and indigenous subjectivity as it exists in transnational indigenous communities.⁴ Rooted in my research and activism within Oaxacan transnational indigenous communities, Chicano/a indigeneity seems at odds with third world indigenous subjectivity. US-born indigenous people, who readily

identify as Latino/a or Mexican American, refuse Chicano/a history, subject positioning and politics because of the ways indigeneity operates within Chicano/a cultural production. This presents a quandary for ethnic studies because US-born indigenous subjects are hailed as Chicano/a in institutional settings and in canonical Chicano/a texts because of their Mexican ancestry; yet, they reject this interpolation and political genealogy as representative of their experience, because it privileges a national imaginary in which they are non-existent suggesting that existing paradigms for understanding race in the US are insufficient for understanding the increasing heterogeneous Latin American populations in the US.

Given the presence of indigenous subjects in the US, their relationship to Chicano/a identity, and their statuses, both indigenous and ethnically marginalized subjects, the following questions emerge at the intersection of nation, Chicano/a literature, and third world subalternity: What are the limitations and contributions of indigenista influences in Chicano/a texts? How does language become a site of resistance for both indigenous writers and Chicano/Latino writers?

Moving beyond traditional approaches to indigeneity has involved an interrogation of the Chicano/a framework in relation to contemporary indigenous populations and other bodies of knowledge, specifically Latin
American studies. By focusing on manifestations of indigeneity in Chicano/a print culture and indigenous cultural production in the US, we can theorize indigenous forms of knowledge that critically contribute to other ways of thinking, speaking, theorizing, and experiencing notions of self-determination, gender, citizenship and transnationalism. Through a critical analysis of indigenismo, mestizaje, race and ethnicity and nationalism as well as by engaging indigenous print culture, political and social organizing, this project examines the discursive constructions of identities in indigenista Chicano/Latino cultural productions. While I counter the widely held belief that indigenous subjectivity is Chicano/as subjectivity and vice versa, though operating within the same historical contexts, cultural references and political aims, I find it more productive to see these two identities as separate but at times connecting as a result of significant cultural processes (e.g. immigrant rights and racialization in the US) and globalization. In other words, Chicanos/as and indigenous people have undergone colonial processes that have resulted in similar yet incongruent positionings. By focusing on Oaxacan cultural production in Los Angeles, for instance, we can separating out third world indigeneity and first world Chicano/a subjectivity allowing an incisive critique of the global processes that render
marginalized people invisible, while still acknowledging the differences of power in our various subject positions.

Each chapter of my dissertation works across genres to show that indigeneity mediates constructions of gender, race, sexuality, and ethnicity for people of Mexican descent. The first chapter “Nations, Nationalism and Indígenas: The ‘Indian’ in the Chicano/a Imaginary” focuses on the early years of the Chicano movement to analyze constructions of indigeneity by Luis Valdez, Alurista, and Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzalez. I focus on the restaging of Aztec mythology, culture and history in the emergent Chicano political imaginary of the 1960s to argue that Chicano political figures created a masculinist discourse of indigeneity that heavily relied, in form and ideology, on Mexican discourses of nation building, recasting indigenous subjects as authentic, yet simultaneously, rendering them invisible. I explore the construction of the Chicano ethos and draw out the connection between Chicano revolutionary discourse and concepts of indigenismo and mestizaje as articulated by nation-building projects of Mexico. The masculinist and centralizing role of indigeneity in Chicano cultural production and have laid the groundwork for theoretical models that reproduce indigenista understanding of indigeneity. I pair this early articulation of Chicano indigeneity with a discussion of the Oaxacan
community through a reading of the pan-indigenous celebration “La Guelaguetza” to point out the disconnections and lapses between the various articulations of indigeneity. I argue that contemporary indigenous texts critique national consolidation in Latin America and the US as attempts to excise linguistic and cultural difference by articulating an identity that is regional not national and revindicating their local and pueblo languages.

In chapter two “‘Sexing’ El Movimiento: Gendered Print Culture and Indigenous Archetypes in Chicana Feminism” I explore how gender complicates indigenista and Chicano/a discourses of indigeneity. I examine the reemergence of these nationalist roots in Chicana feminist epistemologies. Chapter two examines the emergence of a “gendered print culture” during the Chicana feminist movement as a critical site for the emerging feminist consciousness among Chicanas. Though various newspapers and articles, Chicanas resignified indigenous myths and archetypes to find their voice as speaking subjects. Through an examination the figure of La Malinche and the trope of “la chingada,” I discuss the discursive strategies Chicanas employed to contest patriarchy and misogyny of the Chicano movement. Chicanas developed a hermeneutics of indigeneity that ultimately centralize the female indigenous figure as mother and originator of culture and resistance. Such imaginings have led to the
development of Chicana epistemologies and theories of the “borderlands” and “mestiza consciousness,” and interventions into ideas of nation and woman. Although these bodies of knowledge transgressed the boundaries of Chicano nationalism they continue to problematically assert the nation-building projects of Latin America.

Chapter three “Topographies of Indigeneity: Mexico and the Transnational Chicana Subject” discusses one of the few Chicana transnational texts, *The Mixquiahuala Letters* (1986). The epistolary novel, I argue, moves beyond a Chicana rendering of the chasm between diaspora and home, mainly by moving beyond the borderlands and expanding the map of mestiza consciousness to include Oaxaca, Veracruz, and the Yucatan. Teresa, the Chicana protagonist, significantly engages Mexico—landscape, history, and her place within that imagined an real space—testing and eventually exposing the boundaries of mestiza consciousness beyond the borderlands. I suggest that the politics of indigeneity that Castillo engages fuses racial and sexual politics to indigeneity by exploring the tensions between woman/man, tourist/native, and diaspora/homeland. The final chapter “Epistemic Ruptures: Indigeneity and Latinidad in Los Angeles, or, Oaxacalifornia” examines the multiple and conflicting strategies of citizenship as portrayed by Latina women in literary texts and film. Using
the play *Real Women Have Curves* (1997), its cinematic adaptation *Real Women Have Curves* (2000), Oaxacan pageant Diosa Centeotl and its publicity to argue that both Mexican indigenous migrant and Latina identity⁵, in the U.S. perform gendered strategies of inclusion in the body politic of the U.S. in response to narrowing definitions of citizenship, discriminatory legislation and policy, and heightened discourses of nativism of the 1990s. This analysis offers insight into how Latina popular culture and contemporary indigenous cultural productions demonstrate the dynamics and intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality, consumerism, and citizenship.

⁵ An emergent identity centered on a pan-ethnic understanding of race and ethnicity from Latin America.
Chapter One
Nations, Nationalisms, and Indígenas:
The ‘Indian’ in the Chicana/o Imaginary

Representations, appropriations, and performances of indigeneity abound in Chicano Movement cultural productions. While the Movement which sought to redress the unequal economic, social, and historical conditions of Mexican Americans in the United States, a survey of Movement writings from the mid-1960s to the late-1970s reveals the centrality of Aztec history, culture and iconography in engendering Chicano identity, culture, and nationalism. The romance with Mesoamerican culture and myth was a parallel cultural movement to the emerging socio-political movement, representing the cultural component of Chicano the civil rights movement. The project of “discovering” Chicanos’ buried and erased “Indian past” by “privileging and valorizing indigenous ancestry and culture” has been broadly conceived as “indigenism” and rapidly became the favored discursive strategy for early Chicano writers, poets, and performers.
depicting the political awakening of Mexican Americans. Until recently, very little critical work has addressed the complexity and paradoxes of Chicano indigenism, or, the “stylistic appropriations of indigenous cultural forms and traditions by non-indigenous artists and intellectuals.” Yet, it is the paradoxes that make the study of Chicano indigenism an exciting and a potentially volatile topic of study. While the “practitioners of indigenism have ancestral and cultural ties—however weakened by the passage of time—to indigenous peoples,” indigenismo itself has “a complex history of negative criticism in Latin America” in the public policies and cultural practices spearheaded by the post-Revolutionary Mexican mestizo elite to deal with the “Indian problem” (Contreras, 2008). The nation-building effort in post-revolution Mexico involved a reimagining of the nation as mestizo, a strategy, which resignified indigenous people from an ethnic population to a class designation. The governmental institution of indigenismo ultimately ensured the discursive disappearance of indigenous populations, they were no longer a part of Mexico’s present and future, rather, they were frozen in an ancient past symbolizing Mexico’s ethnic roots. Thus, I begin with Chicano/a Movement and its strategic textual restaging of Mesoamerican

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indigeneity in order to trace the epistemological links between Chicano movement indigenist poetics and discourses of Latin American nation-building. The project of unraveling the complexity of Chicano indigenism is also a project of unearthing and making visible the links to nation-building projects in Latin America, projects aimed at marginalizing and erasing indigenous populations.

In an attempt move toward a critical discourse on indigeneity, I examine the historical conditions that produced pervasive notions of indigeneity in the Americas—in Latin America these were the nation-building projects of the early twentieth-century and in the US, the Chicano/a movement—offering insight into the epistemological developments of mestizaje in Chicano/a studies, in an effort to untangle the narratives that generate notions of ‘Indianness’ in the US. I argue that even in its most progressive imaginings, indigeneity constructed and represented under the guise of the state or in nationalist discourses is in actuality a regulated indigeneity. Thus, by rereading foundational Chicano movement in relation to Latin American indigenismo allows for the necessary critique and acknowledgements of difference and interconnectedness of indigenous identities and histories so readily obscured my nationalist projects on both sides of the border.
Mesoamerica and the Chicano Movement

Early on, poets, performers, and writers, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, Luis Valdes, and Alurista created a lexicon of Aztec mythology in Yo Soy Joaquin, El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán, and La Plebe forging a Chicano ethos, which had as its primary goal and grievance a critique of the racial, social, and economic marginalizations of Mexican Americans in the US. In Yo Soy Joaquin (1967) Gonzáles writes, “I am Joaquín, lost in a world of confusion, caught up in the whirl of a gringo society, confused by the rules, scorned by attitudes, suppressed by manipulation, and destroyed by modern society.” Gonzales captures the sentiment that had framed the Mexican American experience. They held a second-class status in society as citizens, laborers, and producers of knowledge. Gonzales’ “Joaquin” is “confused, scorned, suppressed and destroyed” by the “gringo,” or Anglo, society he is “caught up in.” When the poem begins, Joaquin, the Chicano everyman, is merely a reflection of dominant society’s disdain for him and he, in turn, cannot exert his self-determination as a result of this construction.

Chicano activists and writers believed that Chicano self-determination was intimately tied to economic and political opportunities and the resulting Chicano/a political agenda sought improved working conditions, equal access to education, civil rights, and representation for all people of Mexican
descent. Given the historical and social conditions of Mexican American disenfranchisement, it is clear why Chicanos/as gravitated to a battle cry like the one Gonzales offered. Yet, as the calls to action and activism in poetry grew, Chicano poetics increasingly relied on the glorification and uplifting of an ancient indigenous ancestry to undo their “confused, scorned, suppressed and destroyed” experience. Chicano/a movement texts narrated the tension Chicano writers perceived between Mexican Americans and the US nation-state, linguistic anxieties, and political and cultural self-determination. The ancient Indian figure was resuscitated as the source of resistance and revolutionary thought and Mesoamerican culture as a common history that all Mexican Americans shared.

As Latin American studies scholars have argued, the indigenous figure has been deployed by nationalist elites in pursuit of various political, cultural and national agendas while methodically placing their indigenous contemporary counterparts under erasure (Saldaña-Portillo 2002; Bonfil Batalla 1987; Díaz Polanco, 1997, McCaughan, 1999). Yet, for Chicanos coming into political consciousness, embracing and celebrating a common indigenist past was an avenue through which they could begin to rewrite the status of a conquered people. As *Yo Soy Joaquín* illustrates, Joaquin begins
as a meek and denigrated figure, but through the naming of his Indian ancestors is empowered. Gonzales continues:

I am the mountain Indian,  
superior over all.  
The thundering hoof beats are my horses. The 
chattering machine guns  
are death to all of me:  
Yaqui  
Tarahumara  
Chamala  
Zapotec  
Mestizo  
Español.  

Joaquin not only embraces his indigenous ancestry, but becomes Indian himself. Becoming Indian was the first strategy employed by early writers, establishing an ancient indigenous ancestry regardless of their actual historical relationships to a tribe, people, language, or customs. Gonzales positions Joaquin as a valiant “mountain Indian” riding a horse, ostensibly to evade the “chattering machine guns” which are ultimately the “death of all of” him. It is this use of indigenist rhetorical strategies that expose the oversimplifications and homogenizations of the emerging indigenist poetics in the Chicano political imaginary. The voice projected as ‘the’ Chicano voice is clearly gendered male and moves easily through time and space. Multiple identities are subsumed into an indigenous and revolutionary 

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collectivity whose narrative voice is enunciated as a historical male subject. The “males who inform Chicano cultural identity have names Joaquin, Cuauhtemoc, Juan, Diego but the females are nameless abstractions” (McCaughan, 1999). Chicanos are positioned as any and all historical indigenous subjects. “Yaqui, Tarahumara, Chamala, Zapotec” are subsumed in the figure of “the mountain Indian.”

While the aims of such cultural texts were to unite Chicanos by crafting their own modes of self-representation, scholars Rosa Linda Fregoso and Angie Chabram suggest that “this representation of cultural identity postulated the notion of a transcendental Chicano subject at the same time that it proposed that cultural identity existed outside of time and that it was unaffected by changing historical processes.” When it came to indigeneity, specifically, Chicanos could not see that their “mimetic notion or representation obfuscated the fact that the naming of cultural identity was not the same thing as cultural identity” (Fregoso and Chabram, 1990). As the Chicano movement seemed to import and celebrate pre-Columbian Aztec culture as a liberatory strategy, when examined through a critical indigenous studies lens, the limits of mimesis are visible. Gonzáles’ characterizations of Benito Juarez, Mexico’s president, are especially relevant. He writes

I fought and died for Don Benito Juarez, guardian of the Constitution.
I was he on dusty roads on barren land as he
protected his archives
as Moses did his sacraments.
He held his Mexico in his hand on
the most desolate and remote ground which was
his country.
And this giant little Zapotec gave not one palm's
breadth
of his country's land to kings or monarchs or
presidents of foreign powers.

Gonzáles continues in the tradition of mythologizing history's "great men."

In Mexico's national imaginary, Juarez, an Oaxacan Indian, is Mexico's
beloved leader of the Reform period, resisting French occupation and
instituting a new Republic.\(^8\) Attune to Juarez's significance as a political and
cultural figure in the Mexican national imaginary, Gonzáles positions
Chicanos alongside Juarez as guardians of justice and democracy ("I fought
and died for Benito Juarez"). Mexico's new constitution and forefather
embody the possibility of new citizenship in Mexico and Chicanos as
discerners of such righteousness. In the Chicano quest for political
representation, Juarez is a father figure from which the spirit of a new
country can be inherited. Yet, Chicanos overlooked the darker side of
Juarez's presidency and land reforms. Guided by European liberalism, he
broke-up "the ancient communal landholdings of indigenous communities
which ultimately facilitated the creation of a landless rural work force and

\(^8\) Juarez was from San Juan Guelatao in Oaxaca, MX.
the concentration of rural lands in the hands of the primarily Spanish-
descendant oligarchy.” He laid down the foundations for “progress and
development” which required the subordination of indigenous worldviews
and practices to the rule of state power and liberal property rights law
(McCaughan, 1999). The paradox of Chicano indigenism is that even as they
celebrate the Indian forefather of Mexico who’s vision of Mexico did not
incorporate indigenous peoples, Chicanos simultaneously rely on racialized
tropes of indigeneity through Juarez.

On the one hand the “dusty roads and barren land” signify a pre-
modern Mexico, the Mexico that has yet to be, and the “archives” the idea of
national progress and development ushered in by the Reform, there is a
simultaneous narrative othering of Juarez as Indian. References to Juarez’s
Zapotec indigeneity are the subtext of passages that also register as a pre-
modern Mexico. The “desolate and remote ground” hearkens back to
Juarez’s place of birth, San Pablo Guelatao, Oaxaca, and is a stand in for
humble origins or simplicity; the “archives” he protects, his indigenous
heritage and ways of knowing. But it is the reference to Juarez as the “giant
little Zapotec” that ultimately marks him as Indian. While Gonzales readily
identifies him as Zapotec, an indigenous group from Oaxacan, it is his use of
“smallness” that is most problematic. In Mexico, the diminution of
Oaxacans is a common practice to racialize them as Indian. Indians from southern Mexico are stereotypically thought of as short or little and terms such as *Oaxaquita*, or little Oaxacan, circulate throughout Mexican vernacular. Gonzáles elevates Juarez's in part because of his indigenous status, but he simultaneously resuscitates racialized tropes of indigeneity to imbue him with power. In describing him as a “giant little Zapotec” who fights off foreign powers, Gonzáles is compelled to idealize him yet marks him as Indian, a discursive strategy that renders him the familiar “noble savage.”

The two-pronged discursive strategy of empowerment in Mexican indigenism, ancient Mesoamerican ancestry or myth and Mexican national history, reveals a deeply flawed logic. Chicanos have sought to legitimate their presence in the U.S. by laying claim to U.S. southwest through the notion of Aztlan and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The myth of Aztlan was, according to the Aztecs, a mythic homeland that lay to the North of Mexico city. Seizing on the libratory potential of such a narrative, Chicano indigenists employed the Aztlan myth to legitimate their presence in the US by arguing that they we residing in their ancestral homeland and thus, could not be called out as ‘illegal’ or ‘alien’ to the land. Similarly, Chicanos sought legitimacy and power through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The
Treaty ensured that Mexican land grants would be honored and that Mexicans would be granted full citizenship during after US annexation of the southwest. Together these claims make-up the core of Chicano historical primacy, but as Contreras has pointed out, this logic is fundamentally contradictory. She writes,

Rather than complementing each other, [these claims to the Southwest] contradict and compete, despite the idea of historical primacy that lies at the foreground of each...one is an assertion of land rights based on an indigenous myth, and, the other are mestizo claims based upon a Mexican national identity and the settler privilege bestowed by Spanish and Mexican land rights.

What Contreras is pointing to here are the “contradictory impulses” of Chicano indigenism. I would like to take her argument a step further and suggest that these “contradictory impulses” in Chicano indigenism are the result of the privilege of mestizaje. The concept of mestizaje, in particular, has been consistently rearticulated in Mexico as the logic of independence movements and the nationalizing efforts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Because a mestizo is a combination of both Spanish and Indian legacies it ensures that the mestizo speaking subject can inhabit both subject positions. Mestizaje ensures that Chicanos can be both indigenous and
mestizo, Aztec and Mexican, Chicano and Indio, Spanish and Nahual. Luis Valdes' "La Plebe" most pertinently illustrates the privilege of mestizaje.

Initially, Valdes reiterates a longing for an ancient past and the resuscitation of the Indian within the Chicano:

Our people are a colonized race, and the root of their uniqueness as Man lies buried in the dust of conquest. In order to regain corazon, our soul, we must reach deep into our people into the tenderest memory of their beginning... Man has been in the Americas for more than 38,000 years...it is presumptuous, even dangerous, for anyone to pretend that the Chicano, the "Mexican-American," is only one more in a long line of hyphenated-immigrants to the New World. We are the New World."

If we follow Valdes' narrative, the historical trajectory leads us from the protesting Chicano to ancient indigenous figure and back to the contemporary Chicano in the barrio. In the US inner city, Chicano indigenism and mestizaje take on a new valance through the idea of "residual indigeneity," that is, all aspects of contemporary Chicano life are in one way or another traced back to Indian roots. The circuitous evolution of the Chicano establishes them as authentic Americans, superceding the Anglo presence and infusing Mexican American cultural practices with authority through a myth of origin.

Chicano barrio culture is similarly recast as indigenous:
The presence of the Indio in La Raza is as real as the barrio. Tortillas, tamales, chile, marijuana, la curandera, el empacho, el molcajete, atole, La Virgen de Guadalupe—these are hard-core realities for our people. These and thousands of other little human customs and traditions are interwoven into the fiber of our daily life. América Indígena is not ancient history. It exists today in the barrio, having survived even the subversive onslaught of the twentieth-century neon gabacho commercialism that passes for American culture...Frijoles and tortillas remain, but the totality of the Indio’s vision is gone.” (xvi)

In Valdes’ assertion of Mexican American culture in the barrio, the Mexican urban ghetto, “Américan Indígena” is only a “residual Indian identity,” that is, when Valdes identifies indigenousness within the Mexican Americans context, it is in cultural objects, iconography and only in opposition to Anglo society. As Rodriguez y Gibson reminds us, in such terms “indigeneity functions as a reactive and oppositional category of identification—its most powerful meanings lie in opposition to something it is not. Because it is reactive, it is flawed as an indication of authenticity which is itself a flawed anti-colonial strategy” (Rodriguez y Gibson 2003). Indigeneity is responsible and speaks to every aspect of Chicano inner-city life since the Indian is always within the Chicano. Chicano indigenism does not give us a nuanced understanding of indigeneity; rather, indigeneity is presented as an extension of Chicano subjectivity, history, culture, and memory.
Early in the twentieth century, mestizaje began to constitute citizenship in the post-revolutionary republic. Under the minister of education Jose Vasconcelos, mestizaje was indelibly linked with revolutionary citizenship with the dissemination of his text *La Raza Cosmica/The Cosmic Race* (Saldaña-Portillo, 2002). He argued that the Latin American mestizo constituted the race of the future bringing together all of the strengths and virtues of the major races, black, white, yellow, and red (Vasconcelos, 1925). Racial mixture became the guiding philosophy of Mexican policy and legislation. The political project of mestizaje established the boundaries of indigenous identity in the national imaginary. Indigenous people were either recast as peasants, a working class group, and no longer by cultural difference. While nationalism incorporated Indian difference as a source of historical and cultural pride, mestizaje subsumed the contemporary Indian in the ancient past and within the contemporary Mexican citizen. As Contreras points out, “it was non-Indians who devised indigenismo… post-Revolutionary indigenismo represented another formulation of the ‘Indian’ problem… an exercise in subjugation through which the dominant white/mestizo population was able to solidify and extend its control over Indigenous communities” (page).
Rather than direct a critical eye at this moment in Mexican history, Chicanos during the Chicano movement completely misread the political implication of mestizaje for indigenous people, failing to see the inherent racism in the national project. Lux and Vigil write their essay “The Chicano RedisCOVERs his Indian past” in 1978: “In Mexico of the 1930s, the Indian origin of the Mexican People was accepted with pride. Yet the Mexican American, because his image of the Indian was the same highly distorted one held by the Anglo, could not accept his Indianness (94).” The selective uplifting of Aztec indigeneity is a nationalist project whose contradictory and paradoxical impulses have only until recently been critiqued despite the fact that indigenismo and mestizaje functioned as ideological weapons of dominant Latin American cultural politics. No amount of Chicana/o appropriation can dispel its negative potential because marginalization if indigenous populations has been written in to Mexican legislation and public policy and continues, to this day, as a point of contention that is very much alive through the logic of mestizaje (Rodriguez y Gibson, 2003).

Rampant Mestizaje

The current framework available to theorize gender, race and nation in Chicano/a studies is mestizaje, circulating as a privileged discourse and
dominant paradigm for understanding contemporary issues of race, gender, and sexuality in cultural studies and literature. Like Chicano indigenism, mestizaje began as another method or strategy for liberation, because it accounted for the fusing, overlapping, and dynamism of culture and race. In mestizaje, biology subsumes the Indian, freezing any autonomous indigenous identity in pre-Colombian Mexico, the Indian remains safely in the past.

Scholars have taken the literal mixing of Spanish and Indian blood, Malinche as mother and Cortes as father, to produce a framework from which to theorize marginalized identities in the US and the various mixtures and contours of ethnic identity. Yet, despite mestizaje’s ability to account for the uneven spaces that Chicanos/as inhabit like the borderlands, many Native studies scholars have challenged the notion of mestizaje, or hybridity, because of how it positions the Indigenous subject. Mestizaje necessitates indigenous history and subjectivity be contained within a mestizo body. Thus, within the Chicano/a formulation of mestizaje, indigenous speaking subject can only exist through a resuscitated indigenous past.

In a special issue of the journal Studies in American Indian Studies (SAIL), co-editor Inés Hernandez-Avila takes the issue of mestizaje head-

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on, writing “it is the Mexican cultural heritage of mestizaje which makes Chicanas/Chicanos most suspect to Native peoples in the U.S., and it is Mexico's history of colonization and the attendant consequences to indigenous peoples over the course of centuries that creates an invisible but palpable wall between the two communities” (Hernandez-Avila, 2003). For Indigenous peoples, mestizaje is a Mexican tool of oppression used against its indigenous populations. Because Mexicans then moved onto tribal lands and displaced or colonized American Indians, mestizaje with its positioning of Chicanos/as as originary peoples of the Southwest hardens that perception. But Mexican indigenous peoples, too, are suspicious of Chicanos/as for their use of mestizaje. For indígenas, the performance of indigeneity by Chicanos/as is most “suspect.”

Writer and theorist Gloria Anzaldúa takes up the US-Mexico geopolitical border to challenge the cultural, social, and political power structures operating in what she calls the “open wound (herida abierta).” In her opening chapter “The Homeland, Aztlan” she famously writes “The U.S.-Mexican border es una herida abierta where the third world grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture.” Anzaldúa captures the trauma of living in the borderlands, it is
visceral and violent and home all at once. The grating and bleeding of the border is produced by an “unnatural boundary,” that displaces and restages the colonial encounter of the Spanish and Indians. Thus, this “hemorrhage” is the birthing process of border culture. In Anzaldúa’s depiction of hybridity, the edges of the wound agitate one another when they come together, whereas in traditional uses of mestizaje, the heterosexual fantasy of Malinche and Cortes sutures over the violence of the conquest. Anzaldúa’s text promises a move beyond the biologized narrative of mestizaje and its conventional uses, to locate its destabilizing potential in a new “Chicana cartography” that refuses stasis and is in a “constant state of transition” (Saldívar-Hull, 1999). In “Movimientos de rebeldía y las culturas que tracionan” she further extends her notion of borderlands to include cultural, sexual, gendered, linguistic and spiritual sites of mestizaje. Anzaldúa’s theory of hybridity proposes a disruption of binaries and artificial boundaries, crafting a fronteriza (borderlander) subjectivity that exists in an uneasy liminality. In this context, the mutability of racial identities holds liberating potential but exists on shifting ground that nothing, even mestizaje, is never fixed.

Anzaldúa’s rearticulation of mestizaje proposes a feminist challenge through a Chicana hermeneutics that potentially “disrupt the assumption and
place of the Chicana/o as mestizo, the Mexican as mestizo, and the Indian as Mexican” by “resituating them within a transnational frame that would address the power relations among such positionalities” (Saldaña-Portillo, 2001). But, as scholars Josie Saldaña-Portillo and Robert Irwin have noted, she proceeds along a familiar path of difference that harks back to the nationalist paradigms of the Chicano movement. In tracing the “contact zones” of neocolonizing entities that have occupied, surveilled, and dominated the Southwest and those exploited, removed, and managed, Anzaldúa creates an “us” versus “them” historiography. With no mention of the Indian groups who also inhabited the same spaces, Indians are again displaced in her account of the Southwest. Anzaldúa positions Chicanos/as as and mestizos as the originating people of the Southwest, and does not take up her own challenge of a “new mestiza consciousness.” For Irwin, Anzaldúa examination of Mexico rehearses Mexico’s own internal hierarchies with respect to the borderlands, namely, Mexican American culture as a product of transculturation of central Mexican culture to the United States. Nowhere is this more apparent that in her engagement with indigeneity. Her references are Nauhual, her myths are Aztec and she heavily relies on Vasconcelos’s *La raza cósmica* (Irwin, 2001).
As in Mexican constructions of mestizaje, Aztec culture is the central paradigm for understanding Mexican American culture, politics, and decolonial strategies. The multiple shifting subjectivities of the new mestiza consciousness “Coatlíque-Cihuaacoatl-tlazolteotl-Tonantzín-Coatlaloepuh-Guadalupe” that Chicana feminists point to as “another name for Chicana,” are all maternal figures of Aztec mythology (Alarcón, 1997; Saldívar-Hull, 2000). While the invocation of the various Aztec goddesses represents stages in the movement toward a mestiza consciousness the Indian figure remains conspicuously static. The landscape of the borderlands buzzes with movement. “Mexican children kick their soccer balls across” and the “sea cannot be fenced./el mar [the sea] does not stop at border,” rather it moves and crosses over like the people, wind, and culture. Yet, in the topography of the borderlands, as nations are built on “the skin of the earth” which “is seamless” the land “was Indian always/ and is./ And will be again” (25). Mestiza consciousness is dependant on a static Indian figures, indigenous places, and memories for meaning. Indianness appears as a base element from which and upon which, mestizaje can be built. For Chicano/a cultural theorists, mestizaje is liberation because it challenges oppositions, racially and culturally, and thus creates dynamic, interstitial spaces in which marginalized peoples can contest dominant paradigms. Yet the ontological
roots of mestizaje do not allow a dynamic, equally shifting indigenous figure. For Indians, mestizaje continues, even in its most radical forms, to engage a politics of erasure.

For Chicanos/as, locating a voice of resistance required the appropriation of an “authentic” indigenous history. Deploying indigeneity as a strategy for liberation collapsed the performance of indigeneity with actual indigeneity. Chicanos/as, intentionally or not, internalized what Deloria calls an “archaic brand of authority” in their version of “playing Indian” (Deloria, 1999). It is this side of mestizaje, indigenismo, which “remains a strategy that is fraught with conflicted histories and potential meanings, thus limiting the range of affiliations that Chicana/o nationalism can create with contemporary Indian people (Rodriguez y Gibson, 2003). Mestizaje and it’s uses, like it or not, depends on the erasure of contemporary indigenous subjects and nostalgia for a past one. In this context, it is clear why mestizaje is an ineffective framework for articulating and understanding indigenous subjectivity and inhibits the revolutionary imagination we can come up with. As reiterated by Hernandez-Avila, “from an indigenous perspective, this history [of mestizaje] is what makes it difficult if not impossible for Native peoples to swallow theoretical perspectives that purport solidarity but actually perpetuate critical stances which assume the right to re-conquer.”
In the same special issue of SAIL, Anzaldúa addresses her understanding of indigeneity, which for some has been at the heart of Chicano/a appropriation of indigeneity, in an interview with the editors. She writes, “I think that about 75% of DNA is an amorphous record of all past lives and past lives of ancestors. If this is true la india in me will never be lost to me.” Her contemplations are at first, predictable. Relying on DNA, the Indian is literally captured within her, and therefore always already known to her. Anzaldúa is the India and the India is Anzaldúa and thus mestiza. They tease out indigenous and Chicano differentiation by interrogating disciplinary divides between American Indian studies and Chicano/a studies. Anzaldúa responds:

Chicanos weren't raised in reservations, nor were we raised identifying as Indian. I grew up in a Mexican ranch community, not an Indian community. Chicanas cannot claim to be members of indigenous people of norte ámerica unless their particular mix pertains to US tribes. We can't represent Indian women, nor tell their stories.

Anzaldúa’s response highlights the ways in which nationally produced “racial orders” butt up against one another. The current “knowing” of race and established dominant racial paradigms in the U.S. shape notions of indigeneity not only between American Indians and the state, but also between Chicanos/as and American Indians and I would argue, Chicanas/os
and Mexican Indians. In the US, policy and legislation determine Native affiliations, and since Chicanos/a do not have access to that “particular mix” of Indianness, difference is acknowledged. The state forces differentiation, on the level of policy. The current understanding of indigeneity in the U.S. determines indigeneity through blood quantum, which in turn determines tribal membership, and reservation residence; this understanding of indigeneity differs significantly different to Mexican policy:

I've always claimed indigenous ancestry and connections, but I've never claimed a North American Indian identity. I claim a mestizaje (mixed-blood, mixed culture) identity. In participating in this dialogue I fear violating Indian cultural boundaries. I'm afraid that what I say may unwittingly contribute to the misappropriation of Native cultures, that I (and other Chicanas) will inadvertently contribute to the cultural erasure, silencing, invisibility, racial stereotyping, and disenfranchisement of people who live in real Indian bodies. I'm afraid that Chicanas may unknowingly help the dominant culture remove Indians from their specific tribal identities and histories. Tengo miedo que, in pushing for mestizaje and a new tribalism, I will "detribalize" them. Yet I also feel it's imperative we participate in this dialogue no matter how risky.

I believe that the “fear” Anzaldúa describes is brought on in part by earlier uses of indigeneity as a strategy of legitimating the Chicano/a political imaginary. In order to affirm legitimacy, differences were obscured in their imaginations. But, these discursive strategies ultimately perpetuated
anxieties about authenticity and belonging in each other's communities
(Rodríguez y Gibson, 2004).

Further, the "fear" that Anzaldúa describes is Alarcón's "crisis of meaning" with a twist. Rather than a crisis that ensues from speaking not as wife/mother, this crisis is brought on from speaking not as Indian/native/indigenous. Here Anzaldúa is aware, albeit painfully, of the privileged of mestizo discourse, and of her own positioning as a Chicana. While Chicanas might share a history of loss of land with indigenous peoples, that history reverberates differently for either group with vastly different material realities. Anzaldúa, here, *is* taking up her own *fronteriza* challenge in disrupting the assumptions of commonality between Chicana and indigenous political and culture identities and naming the uneven power relations among these positionalities as *miedo*. *Miedo*, the Spanish word for fear, is not weighed down with the cultural baggage of Aztec iconography, rather, it is the shifting of power among and within marginalized groups. The notion that a mestiza might have be more empowered than an India is really too much to bear. Anzaldúa quickly distances herself from "Chicanas," writing "too often the foremost Chicana feminists have erased indigenous specificity; indeed, they have unknowingly subsumed our*¹⁰

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¹⁰ Italics in the quote are my own.
subaltern subject positions.” I believe that this visceral, shifting, disorienting, terrifying unveiling of difference and sameness is the borderlands Anzaldúa has worked so hard to articulate.

**Oaxacalifornia: Indígenas in a Post-Movement Era**

On January 1, 1994 the EZLN staged an uprising on the starting date of North American Free Trade Agreement. The Zapatista movement and its claim to universal citizenship and land rights was a momentous occasion for Indigenous populations throughout the world. As the work of Latin American and Chicana scholars illustrates, Zapatismo has increasing become a framework through which transnational connections between Mexican Americans and Indigenous populations have been fashioned. While such scholarly endeavors have been greatly productive, I would like to draw attention to a significant diasporic Indigenous population from Mexico established in Los Angeles. The Oaxacan community in Los Angeles hails from the state of Oaxaca from southern Mexico, as is the most ethnically diverse Mexican state. The “Oaxacalifornian” community is especially significant because they are, currently, the only indigenous community that staged nationally recognized cultural events in the US and they produce a newspaper, “El Oaxaqueño,” which travels transnationally. They are also
pertinent to our discussion of Chicano/a indigenism because Oaxacans are under the name racial, economic, and legal pressures Chicano/a authors continue to address. Moreover, Oaxacan Americans, the US born children of Oaxacan immigrants will inevitably engage Chicano literature and cultural productions in university classrooms where they will challenge and question the politics of Chicano/a indigenism and mestizaje. Mexico’s monolithic identity is now under revision thanks largely to legitimate standpoints that are defined and defended by borderland identity. More pertinent to this discussion are the identities marshaled by Mexico's increasingly organized and outspoken transnational indigenous communities, by seasonal migration and its inevitable acculturations. Emergent transnational communities like the Oaxacan community in Los Angeles are challenging Mexico’s and the US’s long exhausted rhetoric of long-presumed cultural cohesion (McCaughan, 1999).

The first-ever U.S. Guelaguetza festival was held in 1987 at Normandie Park, a small neglected urban park in the Pico-Union area of Los Angeles.\footnote{The Guelaguetza is the annual festival celebrated in Oaxaca, a southern state in Mexico, in which the seven regions of the state come together to celebrate their respective indigenous populations. Each region sends a representative indigenous dance troupe that participates in the “Lunes del Cerro/ Monday of the Mountains” celebrations that are La Guelaguetza. The term Guelaguetza comes from the Zapotec, referring to the courtesy of mutual exchange. The festival honors the corn god, was partly appropriated} Over the years, the park had become an informal meeting place
for Oaxacan indigenous migrants, its central location in the heart of Oaxacan indigenous LA\(^{12}\) and two basketball courts made it ideal for basketball matches, socializing, and impromptu meetings. Their insistence on coming together around regional, Oaxacan indigenous affiliations, whether through friendly *pueblo* (township) basketball rivalries or by speaking *dialecto* (dialect),\(^{13}\) Oaxaqueños found ways to reconstitute their indigenous transnational communities in LA by transforming places like Normandie Park into autonomous, indigenous public spheres. In August of 1987, when the various Oaxacan communities came together as the Organización Regional de Oaxaca/Oaxacan Regional Organization (ORO) to celebrate the pan-indigenous Guelaguetza festival traditionally celebrated in Mexico, it galvanized hundreds of Oaxaqueños living in LA, staging the first major transnational socio-cultural event of the LA indigenous migrant community. In the twenty years since its inception, the Guelaguetza has undergone sustained reproductions throughout California underscoring the impact of its significance as a cultural force constitutive of US indigenous identity. The

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\(^{12}\) The areas known as Pico-Union and mid-Wilshire. A small section of mid-Wilshire is known as “Yalalagtown,” named after Yalalag, a small village in Oaxaca and birthplace of many of the ORO organizers.

\(^{13}\) While locals call their various indigenous languages—Zapoteco, Mixe, Mixteco—and variations “dialects,” linguists recognize these languages as established language systems and not dialects.
festival’s translation across the US/Mexico border and its growth into seven, locally and corporately sponsored cultural events, dramatizes the intersecting strands of globalization and racialization that indigenous migrants engage as transnational subjects. As transnational migrants, indigenous peoples occupy competing, contradictory, and predictable positions as racialized subjects across the US and Mexico. Such positions, I argue, are deeply rooted in colonial, national and Chicano/a imaginings of indigeneity.

In Mexico, the Guelaguetza operates primarily as part of the tourist industry. As a tourist attraction, the Guelaguetza is the basis of Oaxaca’s annual economy, and thus an event the majority of indigenous people are economically prohibited from attending. As a state sponsored event,\textsuperscript{14} the stadium is filled with Oaxaca’s elite and international visitors. Related to distant practices of celebration involving indigenous communal cooperation and sharing of resources, the Guelaguetza was first co-opted by the Catholic Church and then the commercial industry, which capitalized on southern Mexico’s picturesque scenery and indigenous population as a marketing tool. In Oaxaca, the Guelaguetza itself has become the emblem of a cultural industry erected to profit, specifically, from showcasing Oaxaca’s indigenous diversity, a marketing strategy Mexicans are keenly attuned. As

\textsuperscript{14} Initiated by Oaxacan governor Francisco López Cortés in 1932.
journalist Herman Bellinghausen from *La Jornada* emphatically states, “the fact is, the Guelaguetza is a grand celebration of who holds the political and economic powers of Oaxaca, disguised by the hypocrisy of typical Creole racism. The Indian is the colorful background in a celebration of the master... now we enter the grounds through Ticketmaster or American Express.”¹⁵ Bellinghausen’s statement powerfully illustrates how “Indianness” has been transformed into an exotic, curious spectacle for consumption within firmly established tourist circuits under the guise of pan-indigenous celebration. The Guelaguetza operates as such a powerful sign of internal colonialism that when the *Popular Assembly of the People’s of Oaxaca* (APPO) protested state repression in June 2006, the burning of the Guelaguetza stage marked a victory in the “people’s” takeover. But, if in Mexico the deployment of pan-indigeneity is a sign of oppression and appropriation, in the US it has come to mean solidarity and, even, a strategy of decolonization for the indigenous communities crossing the border into the U.S.

The contradictory status of the Guelaguetza as a colonial and exploitative construct in Mexico and its elevated status for LA grassroots indigenous organizations as a tether to “home,” underscores the complex and

¹⁵ The translation is my own.
contradictory positionings of transnational indigenous migrants as racialized
global subjects. Not only are transnational migrants navigating juridical
frameworks as undocumented bordercrossers, they are also moving between
socio-cultural notions of race and ethnicity. Further, indigenous identity
continues to take on a new valence in the twenty-first-century given the
(dis)identifications of U.S.-born Oaxacans and their own shifting meaning of
“home” and ethnicity. In the US, “home” signifies interpellation as Mexican,
brown,” immigrant, and “illegal.” In Mexico, “Oaxacan” or Indian is read
as backward, pre-modern, and ignorant. The multiple political and cultural
resignifications of “Indianness” highlight the intersection of the US and
Mexican nation-state and their respective racial frameworks. Within these
racial frameworks, the concept of “indigeneity” is deployed to
disenfranchise indigenous populations in one context while, simultaneously,
engendering indigenous identity in another.

The interpellation of indigenous people as “Mexican” and
“immigrants,” in the US, overlays and bends nationally determined subject
positions for indigenous people, which, in turn, shape the contours of
indigenous subjectivity. In other words, the increased involvement of
indigenous people in global circuits of economy, labor, and migration
continual reorders categories like that of “Indian” “Chicano/a” and
"immigrant" from its Latin American context to ethno-racial structures of categories like "Indian" "Chicano/a" and "immigrant" in the U.S. Building on the scholarship of "Oaxacalifornia," the socially constructed cross-border public space by indigenous Mexican migrants, this article takes up the complex interventions into Mexican national identity and their epistemological legacies in radical U.S. political identities by the transnational Oaxacan press in California, as indicative of larger transformations and subversions of race and nation-state in the US by indigenous migrants. Taking cultural productions by Oaxacan indigenous communities in the US as a starting point, I examine the multiple articulations of indigeneity in the ethno-racial imaginary of people of Mexican descent.

In an effort to think through the contours of indigeneity within a US context, I turn to the considerable Mexican indigenous presence in CA. Los Angeles is a significant location in considering indigenous political, cultural, social and economic growth in light of migration patterns to California since the 1960s with the large numbers settling in southern California in the

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1980s. The socio-political organizing and cultural production of Los Angeles Indian communities provide an alternative way to theorize indigeneity as it reshapes the concepts of race and ethnicity in the national categories of Mexican and Mexican American.

While Los Angeles is home to the largest population of Latinos/as overall, it is also home to the largest Oaxacan indigenous communities in the U.S. A southern state in Mexico, Oaxaca is considered one of the most ethnically diverse regions with a demographic that is primarily indigenous. Indian communities in Oaxaca are organized into townships (pueblos) and identities are principally constructed around these very local affiliations, each town distinguishes itself through language, custom, dress (huipiles), music, agriculture, and trade. While the atomized Indian town might very well be the legacy of colonial rule, with distinct huipiles, patron saints, and genealogies marking, differentiating and organizing Indian labor, in Oaxaca and throughout Mexico, pueblos are the social, cultural and political center of contemporary indigenous life. Within the township, some no larger than a few thousand people, political involvement, social organizing, and everyday

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18 Saldaña-Portillo argues that the atomized Indian town each with their distinct huipiles, were instituted by Spanish encomenderos as a way to separate, organize and manage Indian labor in Mexico. She argues that the very layout of Indian towns with the Church at the center, and marketplace are reminiscent of Spanish colonial towns.
life are dictated by strong familial ties, systems of reciprocity, religious beliefs. For indigenous people in Mexico “territorialization” of and in these towns establishes identity, making indigeneity primarily an ethnic/cultural difference. In other words, one who identifies as “Yalalteco” (from the town of Yalalag) does so in relation to geography and location and not as a distinctive racial identity. Historically, movements to “de-indianize” people involved removal from communal lands, pueblos, and cultural assimilation into urban areas. Given this tension between state and pueblo and the relationship between peoplehood and territory raises interesting questions as indigenous migrants not only temporarily reside in the US, but also establish permanent communities outside of the pueblo and still identify as indigenous.

Like many migrants, severe poverty has prompted indigenous peoples to move from the pueblo to urban areas and most recently, transnationally to the U.S. Since the 1980s, a migration pattern has emerged between Oaxaca and California, migration that produced “determinational communities.” Framed by anthropologists and sociologists as “transnational communities” or “translocal communities,” these concepts refer to groups of migrants

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whose daily lives, work and social relationships extend across national borders. Transnational communities are grounded by the combination of their sustained cross-border relationships and the sustained reproduction of their cultural legacy in the US. In 1990 Nagengast and Kearney coined the term “Oaxacalifornia” to represent the ways Oaxacan indigenous communities have reorganized themselves in California to bring together their lives in the US with their communities of origin, sustaining a deterritorialized community from which new forms of social, civic and cultural engagement emerge (Fox, 2004). It is these more abstract indigenous notions of “home” that have established Los Angeles as the hub from which Oaxacan indigenous people reestablished their communities and continue to (re)create and reaffirm their Indian identities in the face of multiple racializations as Mexican immigrants in the U.S. and as Indians within Mexican American communities. In other words, while indigeneity is subsumed within national categories of mestizo or Mexican, it is also simultaneously subsumed in those categories where whiteness remains dominant, thus, nation retains its privilege in the (re)writing of the indigenous presence. The dual subordination in Mexico and the U.S., both as migrants and as indigenous people, are the point of departure from Chicano/a studies for analyzing collective identity formation.
Because indigenous people constantly reassert their identities as Indian in both local, pan-ethnic, and transnational cultural production, indigeneity produces what Fox calls “conceptual puzzles” once one recognizes ethnic differences among Mexican migrants. Writing about these collective identities he says,

Mexican migrant and Mexican indigenous collective identities complicate widely held ideas about race, ethnicity, and national identity. Though these three concepts are often used interchangeably when discussing Mexicans in the United States, race, ethnicity, and national identity are not synonyms. If these three concepts are analytically distinct, then where and when does one leave off and the other begin? Second, when migrant and indigenous identities overlap, as in the case of indigenous Mexican migrants, then the conceptual puzzles about the distinctions between racial, ethnic and national identity are sharpened.

At the heart of Fox’s assessment is an awareness that current conceptual frameworks are unable to conceptualize indigenous subjectivity, needing to “catch up” with the ethnic diversity of Mexican migrant population in the U.S. The current dominant paradigms of race in the US subsume indigenous people into a racialized category of Mexican rendering them invisible. In actuality, the racialization process of indigenous people as Mexican immigrant is the second racial hierarchy indigenous people are inserted to, as noted earlier. For instance, if first Yalaltecos had to become Mexican
instead of from Yalalag, now they must be hailed as Mexican, immigrant, or “brown” all of which add up to “illegal” in the U.S. public imaginary. While previous studies focus on migrant labor, remittances, and political economies, this study on indigenous identity focuses on cultural productions in the U.S., specifically El Oaxaqueño Newspaper and La Guelaguetza festival, the first print culture and the latter performance, by indigenous people and organizations. The construction and strategic uses of pan-indigenous identity in the U.S. context facilitate a discussion on the reimaginings of “indigeneity” as an ethnic/racial category tied to land in responding to the ever-increasing global systems in which Indian people operate and signals a shift in the ways we conceptualize Chicano/a identity.
Chapter Two

"Sexing" *El Movimiento*:
Print Culture, Indigenous Archetypes, and Chicana Feminism

During the 1970s Chicanas became increasingly discontent that their efforts and participation in the Chicano movement were being dismissed at both the local and national levels. While they labored alongside their male counterparts, Chicanas were prevented from taking leadership positions, holding office and publicly representing the leading organizations of the time. 20 The male leadership of the Chicano Movement utilized the already established structures of misogyny in Mexican culture and nationalism to reinscribe dominant gender relations onto their relationships with Chicanas participating in the Movement. The sexism Chicanas experienced on a day-to-day basis stemmed from the male-dominated institutions like the Catholic Church, long-held national narratives of women as traitors or “sellouts” (*vendidass*), as well as cultural beliefs figuring women as submissive wives and daughters. In an effort to challenge both the sexist notions born out of

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Chicano nationalism and craft their own voice as women of color in the U.S., Chicanas historicized and resignified indigenous female figures like La Malinche, an Aztec woman vilified for being Cortez’s translator and lover and Coalticue, a goddess who gave birth to the moon and the stars.

During the Movement Chicanas turned to the pantheon of Aztec goddesses to symbolically contest the belief that Mexican American women were *vendidas* for being feminists. By speaking from the position of the treacherous woman, la Malinche, Chicanas crafted a feminist genealogy. This chapter will examine early Chicana feminist writings in Chicano newspapers and university journal *Imagenes de la Chicana* along with writings by early Chicana feminists to situate the importance of “gendered print networks” in feminist debates. I focus on their turn to indigenous mothers and archetypes to argue that while these figures and paradigms offered liberatory possibilities for Chicana feminists, the paradigmatic shift to and discourse of “native woman” in Chicana epistemologies reproduces the ethno-nationalist project begun by Chicano nationalists.

*Mujeres and Hermanas: Early Chicana Feminist Struggles*

As a social movement protesting the inequalities affecting Mexican Americans in U.S., the Chicano movement, ironically, did not extend its
agenda of equality to critique to its own gendered structures and practices. The internal contradictions of the Chicano movement forced Chicanas to assess the rewards and limits of their participation within the movement, reinterpret the historical and contemporary experiences of Chicanas, and investigate the forces shaping their experiences as women of color in the U.S. (Garcia, 1989). As early as 1973, the Mujeres por la Raza caucus was formed as a subdivision of the Raza Unida Party, but despite their incremental progress, cultural and social norms ensured that issues regarding sexual health, gendered wage difference, child care, and domestic violence were never significantly addressed. Moreover, ideas about ‘la familia,’ or the family, symbolically extended from kinship loyalties in Mexican families to racial loyalties in the Chicano movement. Chicanas were harshly rebuked for interracial dating, multicultural political alliances, and for publicly airing “dirty laundry.” Even as Chicanas faced continual censorship, they forged productive spaces within the active newspaper and journal communities where they could develop their ideas on feminism as well as rally more women to the emerging feminist movement.

Chicana activists Marta Cotera, Adelaida del Castillo, Anna Nieto Gomez, and Enriqueta Longeaux Vasquez emerge as key figures in early

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Chicana feminism for their publications of feminist articles, columns, and newspapers. In the early part of the 1970s Anna NietoGomez’s *Hijas de Cuauhtemoc*, Bernice Rincon’s *Regeneración*, and Enriqueta Longeaux y Vasquez’s *El Grito del Norte* formed the basis of a feminist communication network where Chicanas urged Chicano activists to take the next step in liberation by joining the fight to eliminate sexism within their communities and organizations. Chicanas voiced their concerns, formalized their intellectual efforts, and forged new strategies of “collective self-knowledge” through their print networks. In the quest to develop feminist spaces, early Chicana feminists *recrafted* the Movement’s cause by utilizing a “rhetoric of difference” in newspapers and magazines produced locally (on college campuses) and distributed nationally (Dicochea, 2004). Print culture emerged as a strategic site in which women of the Chicano movement could intervene and contest masculine hegemonic discourses. The success of new forms of gendered political solidarity and participation in political organizations was preceded by the existence of a gendered print community that engendered a Chicana feminist consciousness (Blackwell, 2003). The print culture serves as an unofficial record of Chicanas participation in the Movement as “contestant agents in the making of history and culture.”

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newspapers and magazines produced by early Chicana feminists enable a “sexing” of the Movement, and thus a “sexing” of Chicano/a historiography (Perez, 1999).

The previously untold story of the undergraduate political organization Chicana Colectiva on the Stanford campus in 1974 is another facet of early Chicana feminism that exceeds the parameters of the formulations of Chicano political organization. In 1973 at Stanford University, Carol Castillo taught a class entitled “Chicana Consciousness in Writing.” The women who enrolled in the classroom were young Chicana students, many away from their families for the first time, most the first in their families to attend college but all looking to determine their relationship to the revolutionary political activism of the Chicano Movement. A collective effort emerged from the class to publish a journal whose aim was three-fold: to create a space in which self-identified Chicanas could circulate their writings, document the Chicana experience in the US, and foster a support network that extended outside the campus and into their communities. Published a year after its conception, Imagenes de la Chicana follows what is fast being identified, but largely understudied, tradition of
Chicana print media. A compilation of prose, criticism, and poetry, *Imagenes* aimed at knowing “the multi-faceted woman that [is la Chicana].”

In the first publication, they make the case for their cause to their fellow Chicanos/as on campus.

As most Chicanas have seen it, there is really one movement, because both are interwoven, each a part of the other. The Chicana struggle is not an offshoot the Chicano movement but it is the next step from within the movement to bring together Chicanos and Chicanas even more closely together to form an even stronger *unidad.*

Rita Sanchez challenges the separatist impulse of Chicano nationalism, halting the critique that feminism was a threat or a treacherous turn for Chicanas. Rather, she proposes feminism as a necessary development in Chicano/a political consciousness even as her tone is quite conciliatory, relying on the trope of the family by emphasizing “closeness” and “*unidad*” (unity) to make the case for feminism.

For the Chicanas at Stanford “*unidad*” also translated to pan-Latino political organizing and collectivity. “Chicana Colectiva: A Need in

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Chicanas," narrates how Chicanas from Mills College and Stanford came together as a feminist political activist group.

What resulted from the meeting was a Chicana group called the Chicana Colectiva... we first needed some political education in order for all of us to grow to the same level of political consciousness. We decided to discipline ourselves... so we decided to read Palante\textsuperscript{25} and have a sister from the Puerto Rican Student Union who was on campus come and rap with us. The sister’s name from PRSU was Hilda, a beautiful very together Puerto Rican... and she turned us on to everything she knew and she continued meeting with us.

The impetus for forming the \textit{Collectiva} emerged from two distinct but related needs. On the one hand, the women felt that MEChA,\textsuperscript{26} the other Chicano political group on campus, was unwilling to respond to the changing needs of Chicanas, on the other, Chicanas had their own desire to forge a woman-centered consciousness, exceeding the rigid boundaries of Chicano nationalism. Chicana consciousness was articulated not only in response to


\textsuperscript{26} The Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA) was an organization with chapters on various campuses. The organization and name “signified the commitment to confront social inequities and to reject assimilation into the dominant society, commitments to be fulfilled through student militant activities both on campus and in the community.” Juan Gómez-Quiñones, Juan. \textit{Chicano Politics: Reality and Promise, 1940-1990}. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990.
the ongoing sexual politics of the Chicano Movement, but on their own
terms and in relation to other women of color on campus.

The move to seek out the experience and knowledge of a Puerto
Riqueña is significant because it locates an alternate mode of acquiring and
sharing knowledge. In her discussion of the development of Las Hijas de
Cuauhtémoc, a Chicana feminist journal produced out of Cal State Long
Beach, Corinne Sanchez tells of how new Chicana recruits were assumed to
be less politically knowledgeable than their male counterparts and charged
veteran women activists with “politically educating” them (Blackwell,
2002). Unlike the Colectiva at Stanford, many Chicana political
communities on other campuses came into being as defunct strategies of the
male-dominated leadership. Leaving the new Chicana recruits in the charge
of more established Chicana activist had a dual purpose, not only was the
labor of education disproportionately displaced onto the women, the male
leadership could potentially restrict the political activity of established
Chicana feminists. Hijas, originally organized by MECHA and UMAS, was
first formed as an organizational mechanism for women’s political education
within the student movement. The nationalism that the youth groups enacted
mirrored the organization of the Mexican family, with a father as the head of
the family, or as Chabram-Dernersesian reminds us, “nationalism has a
preferred male subject as the guideline imbued with a masculine, patriarchal ideology.”

In the Colectiva, the dissemination of knowledge was not based on a hierarchical structure, but based on equilibrium between speaker and listener. “Political education,” in the Colectiva, was about testifying to one’s own story, “rapping” was a form of testifying to one’s own personal experience of coming to a political consciousness. Testifying to their experiences was seen as an airing of dirty laundry, laundry that should be kept within the Chicano family. Such airing subjected Chicanas to charges of betrayal bordering on treason whenever they have challenged the machismo and patriarchal structures and practices of their communities and movements. According to McCaughan, “Chicana feminists often have faced even harsher censorship than have their Mexican sisters. In part because the Chicano movement,” whose discourse was so derivative of the Mexican Revolution’s nationalism. “The legacy and preoccupation with the question of ‘authenticity’ implied a machista (roughly, male supremacist), and many Chicanas hesitated to attack such an elemental aspect of the constructed identity.” (McCaughan, 1999)

Significantly, Hilda, the Puerto Rican feminist student activist, remained with the group and together they formed the first Chicana feminist
collective on campus. When Chicana, Latina, or other women of color work across difference to form a political identity, a new politics emerges, a concept Stuart Hall identifies as a “politics of articulation.” Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano proposes that Hall’s *politics of articulation* is useful in theorizing the multiple subjectivities of the self. She argues that Chicana writers such as Anzaldúa insist on difference that is concretely conceived as “the fact that every identity is placed, positioned, in a culture, a language, a history.” This conceptualization of difference enables a *politics of articulation*, in which the connections between individuals and groups do not arise from ‘natural’ identity but must be articulated, in the dual sense of ‘expressed speech and ‘united by forming a joint.” What the formation of the Chicana Colectiva renders visible is a *politics of articulation* that has always been an integral part of the development of a Chicana subjectivity.

As young Chicanas began to come together and intervene into their participation in the movement, a larger critique of the intersection of sexual politics and nationalism emerged. Chicana activists further disrupted the sexual politics of the Chicano Movement by calling attention to gender difference by calling attention to the “a” of Chicana. As Chabram-Dernersesian points out, “Chicano identity is written with linguistic

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qualifiers—o/os—which subsume the Chicana into a universal ethnic subject that speaks with the masculine instead of the feminine and embodies itself in a Chicano male" (Chabram-Dernersesian, 1992). The Colectiva crystallizes what it means to speak as a “Chicana” because moments in which things take on a proper name requires that ‘the imagination also be a political weapon.”

Thus every utterance of the term “Chicana” itself, while pointing to a sociohistorical moment of resistance, is always a political act because it embodies a process of identity that allows for multiple processes of subject formation. The invocation of the term “Chicana” to identify the emerging feminist consciousness and not the general term “la raza” or the plural “Chicanos” insists on the feminine “a,” acknowledging difference and retain the civil rights agenda that the larger Civil Rights movement fought for while developing a feminist agenda that specifically addressed the needs and concerns of the women of the Chicano movement. A central paradigm of speaking as a Chicana was the reimagining and reframing of indigenous female archetypes.

La Malinche and Indian Mothers

In a widely circulated essay on Chicano/a indigeneity authors

Guillermo Lux y Maurilio Vigil meticulously locate what they consider

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traces of Indianness in Chicano/a culture and society. While the authors identify indigeneity in predictable places (food, language, etc) they also offer an interpretation of political culture, gender relationships and sexual practices as indigenous. They write,

Other influences of our Indian past on Mexican and Mexican Americans culture may have been more covert or gone unnoticed because they were generally consistent with Hispanic cultural traits. Among these are the patriarchal tradition in which the father is the unchallenged head of the family. In Indian cultures the woman walks behind the man and generally performs most of the chores including tasks as plastering the adobe hut.

Rather than revealing the overlapping of Spanish and Indian cultural practices, a variation of mestizaje, the authors reveal how indigeneity was recruited to oppress women and exploit their labor. Chicana feminists had to contend with the continual assertion that their subordinate positions hailed from the much-revered Aztec legacy. The only way to compete with such a narrative was to revive their own pantheon of feminine Aztec figures. Among the most reviled Aztec female figures in the Mexican and Chicano imaginary was La Malinche. In order to challenge the root of Chicano

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29 The essay "Return to Aztlán: The Chicano Discovers His Indian Past" first appeared in *The Chicanos, as We See Ourselves*, edited by Arnulfo Trejo in 1979, it has since been anthologized in the collection by Anaya and Lomeli.
misogyny was to contest the implicit nationalism in Mexican narratives of La Malinche.

Mexican identity is located in the trauma and violation/seduction of La Malinche. While pre-Colombian culture was the source for Chicano movement’s unifying language, their interpretation of the conquest placed the blame of the fall of the Aztec empire at the feet of the Indian woman La Malinche. The misogyny targeted at the historical figure of La Malinche,\textsuperscript{30} like the exaltation of Aztec culture were rooted in earlier attempts at defining Mexican identity and Mexico as a nation. By all available accounts, Malinche was an Indian woman of noble birth who became Cortes’ translator and lover. She gave birth to Cortes’ child, the first mestizo in the Americas and is, thus, seen as the mother of the Mexican people. The conquest has played a key role in defining Mexicanness and has occupied a central space in the Latin American and Mexican psyche. The myths from that period have been “described, interpreted, and converted into a symbolic myth and reinterpreted by each successive generation” and the “characters of the dramatic spectacle sustain both Mexican” and I would add, Chicano/a history (Cypess, 1991). The saga of la Malinche, above all else, has acquired

\textsuperscript{30} She is also known as “Malintzín” and “Doña Marina.”
mythic status as a cultural icon due to the unknowability of her collaboration with the Spanish.

In Mexico, the most notable “description, interpretation, and conversion” of the la Malinche appeared in Octavio Paz’s *Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950). In the chapter “Sons of the Malinche” Paz takes up the phrase “Viva Mexico, hijos de la chingada” (Long Live Mexico! Children of the damned one), a Mexican patriotic saying, to provide an etymological study of the word *chingar*\(^\text{31}\) in order to trace the various violations in Mexican history. His study begins and ends with the Malinche, *la chingada*, writing, “who is la chingada? Above all, she is the mother.” He argues that Malinche the traitor functioned in the national imagination as the symbolic mother of the Mexican people and her illicit affair with Cortes defined Mexicans as mestizo people and the illegitimate offspring of colonial rape and/or sexual betrayal (Pratt, 1993). Paz further argues that cycles of violation since la Malinche have retarded Mexican progress and denied the country its “true” history. In his interpretation of La Malinche’s role in the conquest, she emerges as the Mexican Eve who initiated the subjugation of the Mexican people as a passive, yet violated and thus treacherous mother. La Malinche has occupied such a central role in the Mexican psyche.

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\(^{31}\) "Chingar" translates to "to fuck or screw."

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precisely because the sign of “woman” and “nation” have been collapsed in the figure of La Malinche’s, her translation and sexual relationship with Cortes comes to represent the violation of the nation, but also the hidden treachery of every woman. This image of woman—as whore, traitor, and damned— informs the Movement’s understanding of the role of women in the political, historical, and cultural arenas of the Civil Rights movement.

When Chicanas called for a focus on sexism and how it shaped the gender relations of the Movement, Chicanos relied on the trope of La Malinche as a traitor or vendida (sellout) to bait feminists and dismiss their grievances. For Chicanos, the Chicana gendered dissent and collaboration with the White feminist movement was proof of the hidden Malinche within them. It is no surprise, then, that the earliest Chicana feminists sought to recover and reimagine La Malinche or Doña Marina by unveiling the misogynist lens through which she had been interpreted (Nieto Gomez, 1974; del Castillo, 1974; Calendaria, 1980). Reclaiming Malinche served a dual purpose for Chicana feminists, one immediate and the other long term. In la Malinche Chicanas found a model of protofeminist resistance, a woman who defied the expectations and strictures of her role as a woman and was thus an agent of history—one who acted rather than one who was acted upon. Malinche’s embrace of Hernan Cortes was read as an instance of her agency.
as she navigated two oppressive systems--the nation that betrayed her and the colonizer that needed her--much like the Chicanas involved in emergent feminist movements developing a feminist ideology between the Chicano nation that exploited her and the White feminist movement in which she was invisible. Previously, it was only Chicano males who had names (Cuauhtemoc, Moctezuma, Juan Diego, and so on) and the females were nameless abstractions. As opposed to appearing as historical subjects, women were positioned as the metaphors for the emotive side of Chicano collective cultural identity, as “faithful” wives or “suffering” Mexican mothers (McCaughan, 1999). Malinche offered a radical departure form Chicano indigenism. Not only did she have a name, she was disobedient, and “unfaithful” to the Aztec empire.

Chicanas provided a much-needed critique of the uses of culture to subjugate women in the Chicano movement and produced a hermeneutics from which to theorize gender difference. But more significantly for this project, it is through the revisions of La Malinche that we get the Chicana engagement with indigeneity. It is the intersection of indigeneity and Chicana feminism that brings me to the second purpose La Malinche has served in the emergence and development of a Chicana feminism. La Malinche, as a historical figure, sign, and indigenous woman functioned and
continues to function as the epistemological roots of Chicana feminism, Chicana historiography, and Chicana sexuality (Alarcón 1981, 1989; Moraga, 1983, Perez, 1999). While early Chicana feminists sought recourse in the image of La Malinche, Chicana feminist studies has also epistemologically rooted itself in studies of La Malinche as a way of theorizing nation, gender, agency, subjectivity, and social activism. Precisely because La Malinche is a stand in for woman and woman a stand in for nation, Chicana feminists “can claim their agency through Malinche” since “Malinche is the ‘nation’s’ nightmare, the betrayer, the sole reason for the loss of the nation...she is always everywhere.” Thus, for “Indias/mestizas/Chicanas La Malinche reinscribes women’s agency in Chicano/a myths, histories, tropes, taxonomies, and so on, La Malinche cannot be avoided, encoding all sociosexual relations and cultural relations” (Perez, 2000). The plethora of studies on La Malinche in cultural, feminist, queer, and ethnic studies reflect the depth to which she as an archetype, sign, palimpsest resonates globally.

In *Borderlands*, Gloria Anzaldúa works to recuperate La Malinche, in particular, by telling her story in ways that openly challenge official versions of it. She writes, “the worst kind of betrayal lies in malting us believe that the Indian woman in us is the betrayer.” Anzaldúa reworks other
components of the official history that helped constitute Chicano identity. She counters romanticized versions of Aztec culture, for example, by asserting that "male-dominated Azteca-Mexica culture drove the powerful female deities underground" (Carson, 2004). She challenges commonly held notions about the conquest of Mexico that have long informed nationalist discourse, asserting that the Aztecs were defeated by the Spaniards not because of La Malinche's "betrayal," but because "the ruling elite had subverted the solidarity between men and women and between noble and commoner" (Carson, 2004). The familial drama of la Malinche and Cortes, and the literal mixed-race child they produced lay the groundwork and continually inform US Chicano/a epistemologies. Chicana feminists, in particular, have developed the theory of mestizaje as a powerful concept in Chicano/a and border studies to address theories of "third space" or nepantla (Anzaldúa, 1987; Brady, 2002; Sandoval, 2000; Perez, 1999; Hull-Hull, 2000). Chicana theorists and writers identified the specific geographic locale of the U.S.-Mexico border as the "borderlands" a place where the "first world grates up against the third and bleeds." Anzaldúa created a Chicana hermeneutics that radically reordered the way we study history. Most pertinently to this project, the new mestiza consciousness she developed
brought the female deities “driven underground” a central trope of Chicana subjectivity and history.

In *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Chela Sandoval theorizes the psychic space the mestiza occupies. She argues that Chicanas develop an “oppositional consciousness” or theory of “resistance to dominant—Western, white—ideology.” Calling her theory “differential consciousness” Sandoval describes the “activity of [oppositional] consciousness” as

“differential” insofar as it enables movement “between and among” ideological positionings (the equal-rights, revolutionary, supremacist, and separatist modes of oppositional consciousness) considered as variables, in order to disclose the distinctions among them. In this sense, the differential mode of consciousness functions like the clutch of an automobile, the mechanism that permits the driver to select, engage, and disengage gears in a system for the transmission of power. The differential represents the variant; its presence emerges out of correlations, intensities, junctures, crises.

The mestiza lives in the borderlands, a topographical space where multiple cultures and ideologies “meet, clash, and grapple with each another,” differential consciousness functions as a strategy of resistance for the mestiza and other subjugated peoples (Carson, 2004). As Mary Louise Pratt argues, “while subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they
absorb into their own, and what they use it for” (Pratt, 1992; 1993). For Chicanas, resisting dominant culture, be it Chicano nationalism or U.S. hegemony, meant invoking and deploying indigenous mothers and goddesses.

The recruitment of La Malinche as originator of feminism in Chicana studies suggests what Alarcón argues as “woman’s over-determined signification as future wives/mothers in relation to the “symbolic contract” within which women may have a voice on the condition that they speak as mothers” (Alarcón, 1989). While in the Mexican national imaginary and Chicano political imaginary la Malinche is locked into a role of treacherous mother, by contrast, in Chicana feminist frameworks she is reclaimed as a decolonial strategy. But when Chicana feminist writing is read within the context of Latin American, transnational indigenous subjectivity in addition to Chicano nationalism, the assertion of la Malinche as “mother” remains troubling. While on one front Chicanas theorize the “crisis of meaning” that results from the desire to “speak from a different position other than that of mother or a future wife/mother,” La Malinche, and by extension Aztec mythology is continually invoked as the site from which knowledge, memory, ethics, sexuality, and writing spring forth. Chicanas developed their own set of relationships to nation and representation vis-à-vis the
gender politics of La Malinche. La Malinche, even in her resignification continues to be exactly what Chicano ethnonationalism has constructed as authentic, an ancient, non-speaking subject who is above all of Aztec nobility. Once again, indigeneity within the context of nation and nationalism is a regulated indigeneity.

But even as Chicana studies scholars effectively address issues of nation, gender, sexuality and colonialism, there seems to be a hollow space in studies of La Malinche, especially with respect to indigeneity. Even as she is read through a variety of lenses, the gaze on La Malinche remains the same, as over-determined signification as ‘mother’ and ‘mestiza.’ I would like to consider how the narratives of Malinche as feminist, Malinche as Chicana have become a totalizing narrative for female indigenous subjects. Chicana feminism is a necessary theoretical framework when interrogating questions of collective ethnic political identities in the US. In tracing indigeneity in Chicana writing and theorizing illustrates how gender interventions were made in Chicano nationalist discourses through the indigenous female figure. Chicana feminism provides a powerful framework for theorizing the various displacements and internal colonizations of Chicanos/as in the US. Chicanas pushed the boundaries of the unified Chicano front to unveil Chicana subjectivity as nuanced, layered,
complex, and continually on shifting ground, negotiating the relationship between race and the nation by tracing their various historical exclusions. Despite the seemingly liberatory possibilities of Chicana indigenismo,

"The" Native Woman in the Chicana Imaginary

In a 2001 collection entitled Re-Emerging Native Women of the Americas: Native Chicana Latina Women's Studies, editor Yolanda Broyles-González puts together a reader that "unfolds an indigenous vision of a continent without borders" insisting on bringing "to the fore Chicana nation but not conceptualized as separate from other indigenous women." The collection promises to move beyond the specific locale of the U.S.-Mexico of mestiza consciousness to theorize a hemispheric understanding of indigeneity in the Americas. Broyles-González departs from "the common academic and governmental practice of separating "Chicana/Latina/Hispanic women" and "Native Women" and proposes a "Chicana nation and more." The decolonial power of such a project lies in the decentering of the U.S, and Mexico as the only sites in which to think through indigeneity in relation to Chicanas/os. At times Broyles-Gonzalez slips into the uses of an indigenist poetics, describing the readings of the anthology as "interwoven in a fine braid. The indigenist perspective in one strand." The "Indian braid" is a Chicana feminist signifier that connotes "Indianness" and as an aesthetic
is uplifted and celebrated an embrace of “the” Indian woman, La Malinche, within all Chicanas. Yet, even as the editor seemingly forges a new interpretation of indigeneity, it is not clear how or in what context she uses the tradition of the “indigenist perspective.”

Following in the Chicana tradition of naming to become a female speaking subject she writes, “Chicanos/as often use the term ‘raza,’ short for ‘raza humana’ or ‘the people.’ It is among my preferred term because it comes from the people, has been in circulation for generations, and resonates with other tribal names.” The invocation the term raza signals to this reader that the collection will not resignify previous articulations of Chicana indigeneity but relying on the Chicano Movement meanings if indigenism to conceptualize indigenous women in the Americas. For decades after Adelaida del Castillo’s 1974 essay “Malintzin Tenepal: A Primary Look into a New Perspective” reclaiming la Malinche as a victim of Aztec patriarchy, the effect of such a socio-historical project was profound. As illustrated in Cordelia Candelaria’s 1981 essay “La Malinche, Feminist Prototype” la Malinche served as a paradigmatic figure for Chicana feminist theory (Alarcón, 1989). In the twenty plus years since these foundational essays on Chicana subjectivity were written, the Malinche paradigm unwittingly created a category of “the” native woman. Malinche and
mestizaje are always the only context in which Mexican indigeneity can exist, and the default Indian is always the Chicana. This poses a irreconcilable differences and separations with other Native/Indigenous women. Again, the introduction to *Re-Emerging Native Women of the Americas* is helpful in illustrating this conundrum.

Broyles-Gonzalez writes,

> this volume strongly reflects the re-emergence of *indigenous consciousness* among Chicanas during and after the Raza Movement...Chicanas rediscovered their nativeness and ancient roots on the Americas continent of Anahuac. The impulse could be called Mesoamerican consciousness or indigenous consciousness. The reemergence of indigenous consciousness is ongoing.

The language of "re-emergence" is too closely allied with the project of recovery set out by Mexican Creole elites. "Re-emerging indigenous consciousness" carries with it the cultural baggage that refused to acknowledge that contemporary indigenous people and consciousness do not have to be recovered. A survey of the contents reveals that all the predicable centers remain intact. Indigeneity continues to be exclusively refer to U.S.-centered and Northern Mexican tribes, practices, and perspectives. Rather than thinking through a gendered indigeneity hemispherically and benefiting from the juxtaposition of differences between, for instance, the project of sovereignty (U.S.) and autonomy (Latin America) or language, the
collection bundles mestizaje and Chicana indigenismo to privilege an Aztec-centered hermeneutics over any kind of indigeneity. She reasserts the domination of mestizaje in thinking about race, gender and indigenous subjectivity writing “consider the fact that every person this planet is culturally mixed, yet typically uses only one label. There are no “pure” cultures. Indigenous peoples are no exception.” While Chicana feminism initiated necessary interventions into Chicano nationalism, they did so by mirroring the strategies employed by Chicano nationalists. The reclaiming of Indian mother held some liberatory possibilities for early Chicana feminists, it has maintained a dominant role in Chicana hermeneutics that unwittingly others those indigenous subjects that do not claim a mestizo identity.
Chapter Three
Topographies of Indigeneity:
Mexico and the Transnational Chicana Subject

Ana Castillo has attained an iconic status in Chicano literature similarly to Maxine Hong Kingston Asian or Alice Walker in African American literature. While she is most known for her magical realist novel *So Far From God*, in her first novel *Mixquiahuala Letters*, she presents us with a transnational Chicana subject who travels to the depths of Mexico to find “home.” The epistolary novel moves beyond a Chicana rendering of the chasm between diaspora and home, mainly by moving beyond the borderlands and expanding the map of mestiza consciousness to include Oaxaca, Veracruz, and the Yucatan. Teresa, the Chicana protagonist, significantly engages Mexico—landscape, history, and her place within that imagined an real space—testing and eventually exposing the boundaries of mestiza consciousness beyond the borderlands. The politics of indigeneity that Castillo engages fuses racial and sexual politics to indigeneity by

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exploring the tensions between woman/man, tourist/native, and diaspora/homeland.

As Teresa moves through Mexico, she is constantly faced with the question of being a "native." Given the parameters of mestizaje Teresa is at once "native" because she hold the Indian woman within her, yet this paradigm continually leads to her feeling of dislocation when the Mexican "natives" do not recognize or welcome her into the homeland. Ultimately, I contend, that the kind of Chicana indigenism she enacts and its inability to contend with the conflicting notions of home and "native" is a critique of the Chicano ethnonationalist project and Mexican patriarchy. The Mexico Teresa encounters also poses challenges to her own understanding of herself as a transnational subject. While Teresa presents an Anzalduan mestiza in the character of Teresa, Castillo also revises this paradigm by exposing the privilege of mestizaje. In southern Mexico Teresa only encounters male indigenous speaking subjects who reestablish the misogynist and patriarchal boundaries, thwarting the possibility of her idealized transnational citizenship. Positioning Teresa as the only female indigenous speaking subjects because she is mestiza, reveals how the mestizo paradigm, the Indian trapped within the mestiza subject, in the end silences indigenous subaltern subjects.
Landscape and Belonging in Mexico

It is in Mexico's landscape of ancient ruins and construction as Mexican American “homeland” that critically inform Teresa’s subject position as a transnational Chicana subject. Mexico is so integral to Teresa’s sense of self, because like for most Chicanos/as, it continually reemerges on her cultural and geographical radar. The borderland paradigm, the “contact zone” created between the US and Mexican geo-political border, has fundamentally structured Chicana subjectivity in the US. The borderlander, or fronteriza, continually crosses the border, living between and among the cultural spaces of Mexico and the US, maintaining a transnational circuit between “el otro lado” (the other side) and the US. Chicana feminist Saldívar-Hull theorizes the fronteriza identity by narrating the common experiences of living on or near the border. She writes, as child “I crossed over almost every weekend, shopping at the parian, sometimes went to the hairdressers... Mom and Dad may have insisted on their Americañness, but with my grandparents I constantly crossed back and forth to el otro lado to retrieve the basic necessities of our lives” (3). Saldívar-Hull’s memory of growing up in the borderlands illustrates the racial and ethnic tensions that emerge for immigrants and Mexican Americans under the pressures of acculturation. While, her parents insisted on “their [and the family’s]
Americanness,” they were equally interconnected to Mexico through language, customs, and in their daily lives for “necessities.” While the *Mixquiahuala Letters* is not a border novel, Teresa *is* a borderlander, traveling to Mexico throughout the novel. I argue that in the traveler Teresa, Castillo extends the borderlander paradigm and Chicana transnational map to include Mexico City, Oaxaca, Veracruz, and the Yucatan. By having the Chicana transnational subject move to and through southern Mexico, Castillo explicitly integrates a Chicana indigenist poetics, through Teresa’s relationship to the landscape and her imaging of Mexico as homeland. Teresa embodies a king of Chicana indigenism inherited from early Chicana feminists; yet, as she comes moves through Mexico as a woman, US immigrant, and even tourist her Chicana indigenism becomes a hindrance. It sets her up to continually be alienated and dislocated from her perceived “homeland.” Castillo’s brand of indigenism reifies and plays out Teresa’s desire to belong through the tensions that emerge between her departures and returns, “nativeness” and “foreignness,” men and women, and race and ethnicity.

Teresa has her own childhood memories of Mexico. She writes to Alicia, Mexico city “revisited time and again since childhood, over and again as a woman, i sometimes saw the ancient Tenochtitlán, home of my
mother, grandmothers, and greatmother, as an embracing bosom, to welcome me back, and rock my weary body and mind to sleep in its tumultuous, over populated, throbbing, ever pulsating heart” (98). It is through the remnants of Tenochtitlán that Teresa accesses Mexico. One of the ways Teresa navigates through Mexico beyond the borderlands is by forging a transnational identity through indigenous monuments and landscapes. The indigenous ruins are memories handed down over generations, compelling her to return and find spiritual and bodily healing in the homeland. Kandiyoti suggests that Teresa enacts a tourist sensibility that frequently involves a quest for access to history, the monumental is a logical starting place. While Kandiyoti points to the paradox of returning to the “homeland,” one is not a native but a visitor or tourist, I see Teresa’s quest for indigenous Mexico as a paradox of the mestiza consciousness.

The borderland paradigm and Teresa’s expanded radar of Mexico intersect through the uses of the indigenous past, ruins, and people to create a fantasy about Mexico. Castillo’s spatially expanded notion of Mexico is still heavily rooted in Chicana indigenism, relying on an Anzaldúaian notion of a “mestiza consciousness” that emerges from living in the borderlands. The borderlands paradigm is pertinent to Chicano/a imaginings of Mexico and Chicana subject making because it establishes an expectation that
Mexico in one way or another remains accessible, whether through folklore, geographically, and products beyond the borderlands. Thus, the Mexico Teresa encounters as an adult is incompatible with the Mexico of her childhood.

Teresa’s first visit to Mixquiahuala as an exchange student, initiates the first cycle of acceptance and rejection. As the novels’ title suggests, Mixquiahuala is the place from which Teresa always speaks and, thus, her experience in Mixquiahuala is always already framing Teresa as a speaking subject. As a young woman Teresa imagines that Mexico will be a haven for her, a cultural home to return to and she dutifully works “odd jobs for the tuition and the boarding expenses” so she can study in Mexico (Castillo, 24). But, when Teresa finally arrives at her much anticipated Mexican school, she discovers that she worked

Only to find the school with the heavy Aztec name just a notch above fraudulent status. My shock bore a 3 inch hole into my native spirit, expecting to study with and under brothers and sisters only to find California blonds and eastern WASPS, instructors who didn’t speak Spanish. All this made worse by the general attitude that no one had any objective but to undergo an existential summer of exotic experiences” (24).

Much of the Chicano/a experience of Mexico, as I have discussed earlier, heavily relies on Mesoamerican ancestry to provide a directly link to that
ancient past and supplanting Spanish and US colonization. Teresa, not surprisingly, expects to feel right at home at “the school with the heavy Aztec name” but her “native spirit” is wounded when she does not experience a sense of continuity and oneness with the people. Teresa struggles to find an affinity with her host. Frustrated by being read as foreigner, she writes “didn’t they tell anything by Indian marked face, fluent use of the language and undeniably Spanish name? (25).” She identifies as the students and teachers who join her in Mexico, those who will use Mexico as a mere backdrop to their own existential and exotic experiences, as foreigners. Initially, Teresa’s motivation to visit to Mexico City is spurred on by her own Mexican heritage and the migratory patterns of departure and return that have constituted Chicano/a subjectivity, yet, this same perspective has established a false sense of connection and oneness. Teresa’s sense of belonging is further disrupted by her visit to Mixquiahuala and the indigenous women she encounters.

Mixquiahuala is “a pre conquest village of obscurity, neglectful of progress, electricity notwithstanding. Its landmark and only claim to fame were the Toltec ruins of Tula…[where] native women washed, beat clothes against polished stones; Indian children with streaks of blond bathed and splashed” (26). As a “pre conquest” town, Mixquiahuala conforms to
romantic notions of indigeneity anticipated by the visitors. At any time or in any place, one can find a pristine town unmarked by globalization where the women still hand wash clothes on “polished stones.” One might expect this kind of indigeneity to resonate especially powerfully for Teresa and Chicana readers. Castillo presents a compelling image of an indigeneity that is resilient, even as it has undergone mestizaje as evidenced by the “streaks of blonde” in the children’s hair. The children are mestizo much like Teresa herself, living and maintaining a connection to their Indian country, mothers, culture, and land. By framing Mixquiahuala as a pre-conquest village, Mexico remains accessible to the peripatetic Chicana.

As the group takes a hike through the rugged terrain “along the muddy river that wound and cut through the heart of Mixquiahuala,” Teresa is once again uneasy in the landscape. She writes to Teresa “my tennis shoes were ruined and the edges of my slacks were caked with mud when I lost my footing and would’ve ended up in the river” (26). Teresa displays a clumsy attempt at navigating the landscape and her ruined shoes and mud caked slacks are proof of her inability to transition easily into “authentic” Mexico. While not injured, Castillo shows Teresa to be an outsider within the homeland. The confrontation with the Mexican indigenous landscape is more awkward than jolting. Castillo forces the reader to rethink the affinity
between indigenous Mexico and Chicana subjectivity as forged by Chicana indigenism. Further, Teresa’s uneasiness in Mixquiahuala speaks to the limitations of mestiza indigeneity outside of the southwest and the borderlands. On the one hand, Teresa anticipates feeling a oneness with her “brothers and sisters,” what Kandiyoti calls the “single social continuum” of transnationalism. Teresa enacts the ideal of transnationalism, believing that there is a “continual ribbon that connects her, spatially and through time” to indigenous Mexico. Mestizaje is the ribbon that connects her to other Mexicans because she too has an “Indian in [her]” and therefore has access to the rest of indigenous Mexico (52). On the other hand, as Teresa moves deeper into Mexico and deeper into the Indian land she so longs to connect to and cannot seamlessly incorporate herself. The “Indian in her” fails her, showing her more as a tourist and foreigner. Although Mexico City and Mixquiahuala continually existed “as part of the map of a transnational circuit for Teresa's family,” her experience of Mexico as an adult vastly differs from the nostalgia of her youth.

Oddly enough, Alicia enjoyed telling people that Teresa was from Mixquiahuala despite her misadventure. She posits that perhaps Alicia did so to “explain the exotic tinge of yellow and red in my complexion, the hint of an accent in my baroque speech, the indiscernible origin of my being (26).”
Teresa has not taken on Mixquiahuala as her place of origin, but has been placed there by her own Andalusian friend. Even though Teresa has a vexed relationship with Mexico, others will read her as “Mexican,” and as Teresa suggests here, to complete an image of the exotic, a relationship to indigeneity (“the indiscernible origin of my being”). The trip to Mixquiahuala illustrates that Teresa exists within two racial frameworks. As a Chicana going to Mexico to discover her origins, she operates as part of the Mexican diaspora, leading her through various cycles of rejection, acceptance, longing, and belonging vis-à-vis Mexico. At the same time, Teresa exists within the U.S. racial framework, as indicated by Alicia’s desire to root Teresa in Mixquiahuala. She has no control over how she is read by others in dominate society, thus, to other, Teresa is a native of the land, even as she is dislocated by the very land she is connected to. Paradoxically, it is this misreading of Teresa as an ethnic and transnational subject that drives her to seek a Mexican homeland.

Teresa is initially drawn to Mexico due to the conditions under which she lives in the US, what Quintana calls "external forces." According to Quintana, when Chicanas attempt to define themselves in cultural, ethnic and feminist terms, there are implication for them, namely a nostalgic look to the past, in Castillo’s novel the nostalgic look to the past is a nostalgic
look to Mexico. Socio-political conditions for people of color in the US opens up Mexico as a place in which to heal the wounds of racism in the diaspora, thus, Mexico is a perceived utopia for the children of working-class immigrants. Traveling through the Yucatan, Teresa has in her mind a paradise for her future children. She writes

I thought of the city I’d been brought up in, where dark skin and a humble background had subjected me to atrocities. The children that I’d have wouldn’t know that persecution. They wouldn’t suffer at the hands of the ignorant, but would be raised in a land where copper-colored flesh was the norm, above all, they would have a sense of belonging. (68)

In the Yucatan, home to a vast Maya population, Teresa believes that the “atrocities” of social and class oppression she has experienced, as a dark skinned child of immigrants, will be healed. She indulges the construction of a home and a homeland for her children that is free of racial and ethnic oppression, a stable and welcoming place. The Yucatan, specifically, offers continuity and reinstates cultural legacy and memory given that it represents the other “great site” of Mesoamerican civilization. Teresa expects that Mexico will affirm her sense of self of self and recognize her as one of their own, a mirroring effect that confirms her origins. Castillo positions Teresa as a “modern (experimental) ethnographer,” produces a personal narrative
that mediates between an objective descriptions of the Mexican American experience distilled through a feminist lens (Quintana, 1990).

The unrealistic fantasy of Mexico as healing homeland is abruptly jarred by the continual rejection Teresa experiences in Mexico. Upon her arrival during her first visit, Teresa experiences a sense of alienation not knowing how she is read by her fellow students and host writing “I’m not certain what your first thoughts were of me, studying the dark newcomer from across the dining room table.” Sitting at the dinner table as an American visitor in the home of her Mexican hosts, she is at once perceived as American by the Mexicans, an outsider. Yet, for the some of the Mexicans she encounters, she is the wrong kind of American. She says of her teacher, Sr. Aragon “i, had dark hair and Asian eyes, must’ve like the daughter of a migrant worker or laborer in the North...i was nothing so close to godliness as fair-skinned or wealthy or even a simple gringa with a birthticket to upward mobility, but the daughter of someone like him except he’d made the wade to the other side” (27). As Mexican American with dark hair and Asian eyes, code for Indian, Teresa is the wrong kind of Mexican for Sr. Aragon. As a poor Mexican American she will not gain acceptance as a "returnee" to the bosom of Tenochtitlán. Her Indian looks do not help her integrate into Mexican culture; rather "they are suddenly turned
into targets of the Mexicans' inferiority complex before the more respected gringo tourists" (Oliver-Rotger 2003).

The distortions and alienation of the return to the homeland take further hold as Teresa begins to encounter Mexican culture also rejects her as woman and for being a feminist.

society has knit its pattern so tight that a confrontation with it is inevitable...When we returned to Mexico together we met our destiny at every stopover, pueblo, city café, on any bus, street, the coast, peninsula, and central plateau. The reason it was so blatantly painful, to the point that it made you cringe at the sound of the male voice, was that we had abruptly appeared in Mexico as two snags in its pattern. Society could do no more than snip us out (65).

The tightly knit pattern that Teresa and Alicia inevitably encounter during their visits to Mexico is sexism and misogyny. Their attempt of transnational belonging are thwarted "gendered distortions of the nation," they are suspicious for being women and for traveling alone (Kandiyoti, 2003).

Throughout the Mexican landscape, at every meeting place in every geographic location the voice of men is a menacing reminder that they can not be incorporated into the Mexican landscape, but instead will cast off, or snipped out. Mexico is at once the site of nurture and yet also suffocating, or as Teresa writes "Mexico. Melancholy, profoundly right and wrong, it
embraces as it strangulates." Like Anzaldúa before her, Castillo shows us that the elements of transnational identity that theorists find liberating, such as the "multiplicity of belonging, the possibility of multi-local attachments, and the ease of frequent travel and returns, all of which are available to Teresa, are no remedies for patriarchally defined national identities."

(Walter, 1998) Teresa's Mexican identity, as the overarching racial transnational ethnic or racial category, is subsumed by its gendered character. As an immigrant she is cast out of the US and as woman she is snipped out of Mexico. Contrary to the multiplicity of belonging (both in the homeland and in the space of migration) that transnational theory proposes as available to immigrants, Teresa suffers from a lack of belonging both in the diaspora as well as in the homeland. Unlike her childhood memories passed down a matriarchal line, Teresa's adult experience in Mexico is one of rejection and estrangement, she experiences a cultural crisis of dislocation.

Teresa undergoes such estrangement in Mexico, as a legacy of the nationalist project initiated by Chicanos of the Movement and revised by Chicana feminists. While Teresa presents an Anzaldúan mestiza in the character of Teresa, Castillo revises Anzaldúa's mestiza as she has her travel into the depths of Mexico. Teresa looks to Mexico as a utopian solution to
her "existence-in-crisis" prompted by the "atrocities" she has experienced. While some Chicano/a studies scholars looks upon Teresa's dislocation and alienation as caused by being "caught between these two polarities, moving closer to self-discovery by drawing and synthesizing usable aspects from both Anglo and Mexican cultures, weaving a complicated present out of the past and future options" I believe Teresa's dislocation is actually a legacy of the tension between Chicano nationalist and its roots in the Mexican nationalism project. Although in her later writings Castillo embraces an essentialist notion of Chicana indigenism, in Mixquiahuala Letters, she is most aware of the potential fallout for Chicanas in adopting Chicano indigenist/nationalist rhetoric. Castillo provides a critique of the nationalist project in a poem in which she recalls being among the ruins of Oaxaca. Teresa writes

Finally we ended the cesspool
Twirls of our 20s
That will be remembered always
We/ Shared a jar of Noxema. In the musk halls
of a sacrificed temple at the ruins of Monte Alban
you changed your tampon
before the eyes of gods, ghosts, and scorpions
while I watched for mortals. (22)

Teresa is glad to be rid of the growing pains of her youth, much like the 1980s ushered in a new era of Chicana feminism. The transnational subject
crafted by Chicana feminist and writers, the “fronteriza” subject, revises the mythic uplifting of Aztec culture to include female deities and figures. While Chicanos only adopted Mexican rhetorical strategies, Chicanas forge a subject that lives geographically, and psychically between Mexico and the US. Traveling to the ancient ruins and indigenous landscapes of Mexico seems like a home coming for Teresa, offering history, memories contained or produced by fabulous monuments of ancestral significance, as she moves through Mexico, Chicana fronteriza subjectivity shows its seams. Chicanas are both visitors and "natives" to Mexico among the ruins. The expectation is that they will be at home given the narrative of Chicano indigenism, yet sacrificed ruins of Monte Alban are not refreshing but dank.

Among these ruins, Teresa and Alicia’s gender is an inseparable reality from their connection with each other and the ruins they roam. There in an inseparable connection between gender and a history of conquest. The camaraderie that the women have forged has been in opposition of gender roles. Rather, they find their own notions of beauty in their shared jar of Noxzema, a beauty product. As they move transnationally, their gender does not melt away or become invisible, rather, their sex is made even more explicit among the ruins of an ancient past in Monte Alban. The ruins represent a time long past, but on the other hand, those ruins have been
resuscitated by Chicano ethnonationalism and resignified in ways that require that women work collectively. Chicano nationalism, as embodied by the ruins, Mexican patriarchy and the misogyny of la Malinche require that Teresa watch for mortals. There is a shared collectivity here.

Tourist/Native in the Homeland

The novel’s momentum derives not only from Teresa and Alicia’s various imaginings of Mexico but the trips they take into it as well. As they trek through Mexico, especially its more southern regions, its indigenous regions, Teresa expects and is invested in her own self-discovery through these Indian places in Mexico. Teresa positions herself at time as native and at times as tourist, incongruous positions that are always rendered through the male gaze. I would like to focus on the trips takes to Acapulco and the Yucatan to theorize how Castillo engages and constructs Mexican indigeneity through masculinity in order to sort through the dialectical positions of tourist/native and man/woman.

In Teresa and Alicia’s first visit to Mexico, they venture to Acapulco where Alicia falls in love with an Indian caretaker, Adan. They stay at the empty hotel he manages for three days initiating Alicia’s utopic love affair. Although the women are staying in a hotel in a Mexican resort city, Castillo
positions Teresa and Alicia as non-tourists. For instance, even though the women are guests at the hotel, the “linenless beds, cobwebs and roving tarantulas, the barren pool, and lack of electricity or water,” show a defunct tourist site. The hotel ceases to be place for tourists and is home to the Indian caretaker and the women. Teresa further situates herself as a native writing, “tourists know of a different Acapulco, one of skydiving, gliding through air, waters skiing, dancing to rumba music on marble terraces, English-speaking guides and colorful, bargain-filled markets.” Instead, Teresa’s Acapulco is the racial and economic underbelly of Mexico. She continues, “Our Acapulco was of Mexicans who were black and kinky-haired with shackled history, grease-covered mechanics, people who watched us slyly with unsympathetic notions of our vagabonding, and Adans who wondered what it would be like to make love to the infamous North American white woman” (33). On the one hand Teresa wants to claim a local, or native identity through her affiliation and access to the “kinky-haired history and grease mechanics” of Acapulco. On the other, Adan’s desire for the “North American white woman,” the male gaze, resituates Teresa, via Alicia, as a foreigner.

The tension between tourist and native oscillates between how Teresa sees herself within Mexico and how Mexicans see her and this tension
consistently falls along gendered lines. As the women travel, their journeying turns into a constant struggle for acceptance. The women’s movement through Mexico is seen as pleasurable “vagabonding” while for Teresa it operates more as “relentless woe,” a fact that becomes most apparent when Adan’s wife returns from her village to expose his infidelity, breaking Alicia’s heart. Like in so many touristic quests, Mexico merely becomes a backdrop to a coming of age story, the turbulence of youth and heartbeat. Teresa is continually indistinguishable form a mainstream “American” by indigenous figures and in indigenous places and she herself embraces her tourist impulses. She writes of returning to Mexico “there was a definite call to find a place to satisfy my yearning spirit, the Indian in me that had begun to cure the ills of humble folk distrustful of modern medicine; a need for the sapling woman for the fertile earth that nurtured her growth. I searched for my home. I chose Mexico.” The incongruous pairing of tourist and native actually lies in her essentialist notions of Indianness in Mexican American identity. Teresa imagines Mexico from the perspective of diaspora coming home, “her travel within Mexico reveals another layer of disjunction as a result of the difference between being a native and being a tourist...travel frustrates expectations of touristic, racial, and narrative fulfillment in the mother country” (Walter,1998).
As a Chicana Teresa seeks in her travels a quest for an authentic Mexican identity for herself that is inflected with a racial and ethnic understanding of the Mexican American experience abroad, but this quest can only take the form of a tourist quest. Teresa continually invokes an indigenist, nostalgic, and maternal imagining of Mexico that has at its center a desire for incorporation. Yet these imaginings are what render her an outsider, thus she neither belongs to the country she is escaping nor the place from which the "Indian in her" comes from. She relies on "books and curiosity [that] give [her] substantial reason to seek the past by visiting the wealth of ancient ruins that recorded awesome, yet baffling civilization. I planned out a route: I would settle in Mexico." Like many tourists, Teresa is connecting to her homeland through ruins, monuments, and cultures that have past. Drifting through the everyday of travel, describing the awe of sites seen for the first time, romantically linking oneself to them, Teresa reveals how the mestiza consciousness is linked in unexpected ways to tourism in the third world. The way that Chicano/a imaginary constructs indigeneity, as exclusively mestiza/o, it is not surprised that Teresa finds the Indian within her and among the ancient ruins of past "baffling civilizations."
As a mestiza, Teresa is in search of her origins when she travels to Mexico and is thus racked by anxiety about not belonging, because the Indian places and people she encounters resituate her as “American” because of her touristic impulses. Often, Teresa is indistinguishable from other visiting foreigners even though she does not have any class privilege like the other travelers and yet back “home,” she too would be seen as a foreigner. While the trope of return often involves a recovery of what has been lost in the time away, the two discourses of homecoming and traveling often exist in a state of incongruity in the novel much like man/woman and native/tourist.

As Teresa and Alicia travel, their greatest marker as tourist is their gender. As the women travel through Mexico they are seen as foreigners because they roam unaccompanied by a male companion. Thus, her failure to conform to a patriarchal definition of “woman” thwarts Teresa’s inclusion into Mexican society. In Veracruz for instance, during dinner a young man approaches the women stating that he and his friends knew they were foreigners, but were trying to determine if they were from South America or if they were “gringas.” Teresa refuses to answer but joins the men anyway for drinks. Ironically she is hailed as White even though in the US she would be labeled Mexican, “gringa” would never be available to Teresa. Teresa is
excluded from both national imaginaries, in one because of her copper skin and in another context in spite of it. She writes “[i]n spite of the copper color of their skin” it is their blue jeans and their accent make them suspicious” that hardly a word was said between them. As tourists, the women were “timid because of [their] foreignness and tried [their] best to remain as inconspicuous as possible, as if our presence suddenly discovered might cause our new surroundings to vanish.” Teresa is so far removed from “native” Mexico, which in this case is also indigenous Mexico that, that travel is another kind of displacement because she is constantly on the verge of losing the experience.

As “gringas” and as women in Mexico they are subject to the stereotype of the ‘liberated woman,’ loaded with connotations of sexual availability. While the tension between them and the country they traverse is most evident in their continual efforts to claim their “bronzeness” it is their sex that continues to displace them. During the same visit to the Yucatan another local Teresa meets unambiguously tells her “I think you are a liberal woman,” much like a sentence brought down by a judge. Teresa feels all her all her defenses stripped away. She knew that in “that country ‘liberated woman’ meant something other than what we had strives for back in the United States. In this case it meant a woman who would nondiscriminently
with any man that came along.” Teresa distances herself in that instance from Mexico, referring to it as “that country,” no longer her Mexico. In “that country” only certain kinds of women belong in the patriarchal definition of Mexicaness, “the renegade-vagabond-wayfarer traveling women, such as Tere, do not.” (Kandiyoti, 2003). The label of “liberal woman” make visible that women’s identities as full-fledged transnational subjects are jeopardized by boundaries erected by patriarchal definitions of belonging. The seamlessness of community and culture, idealized by both some transnational theories, is fractured by gender.

In the depths of Mexico, Teresa falls short as a tourist as well as a native. She is at once tied by a racially and ethnically inflected history yet, for patriarchal Mexican men a judgment of ‘liberal woman’ reinstalls the border between themselves and the Chicana. While the Mixquiahuala Letters “emphasizes the postmodern alienation and fragmentation of individuals in the borderlands, their dislocation in an interstitial cross-cultural nepantla,” such alienation and dislocation is brought forth by hyper-masculine, treacherous Indian men and suspicious women (Walter, 1998).

**Transnational Women and ‘Indian’ Men**

The relationship Teresa has to Mexico is significantly mediated by her desire to belong and be recognized as a ‘native’ of the homeland by Mexicans. It is jarring when the Mexicans she encounters identify her as foreigner, tourist, or simply “gringa.” By hailing her as such the locals also construct and exacerbate the gendered tensions between the two female travelers in relation to beauty, sexuality, and desirability. The bearers of male gaze, interestingly, are always embodied not as Mexican but Indian. Indigeneity is continually manipulated throughout the novel, a stand in for Mexico’s rejection and betrayal of the diaspora, in this case embodied by the transnational Chicana subject. Adan, the Indian caretaker of the Acapulco for instance, turns out to be a treacherous unfaithful man, who breaks Alicia’s heart, Teresa is then left to reassemble the broken parts. While the ancient Indian monuments and regions (Yucatan Oaxaca and Veracruz) seem to represent Teresa’s desire to belong, she is often nostalgic for them, actual indigenous men and women represent the failings of the “heterosexual erotic contract” (Alarcón, 1993). Castillo exposes the racial/gender tension of the Chicano-Mexican relationship,” a relationship in which a Chicana transnational subject operates within a much more complicated racial-gender system” given the presence of the Indian figure. (Ibid.)
In the opening letter of the novel, for a trip to Mexico, she is trying to find transportation back to Mixquiahuala. Her cousin Ignacio who’s “been trying to get into films” but whose “dark complexion, and Huichol-like features stand in the way of Hollywood discovering him” offers to drive Teresa and Alicia back to Mexico. She is soon discouraged by the other women in the family because he has “become rotten like all men” beating his wife and having illicit affairs (20). Ignacio sets the tone for future interaction Teresa will have with Indian men as tries to make her way back to the homeland. The tensions between Teresa and Alicia erupt as they vie for Indian men, who in the end prevent he inclusion into Mexican society by erecting boundaries along patriarchal and misogynist definitions of belonging.

In letter eighteen, notions of beauty and desire come to a head dissolving the female bonding Castillo foregrounds in the novel. While in Oaxaca beauty crisscrosses the border between the US and Mexico overturning on itself to render a compromised Chicana speaking subject. Teresa writes to Alicia:

you said i’d acquired the body most desirable to men of the region. i scoffed at your remarks...men’s glances on the street, their apparent pleasure with eyeing me told you that skinny was fine for high fashion but did no good
when what you wanted to do was appeal to men’s passions. (62)

Within Alarcón’s “heterosexual erotic contract” in order for a female speaker to recover the full meaningful impact of herself, she still must address how that self figures in the contract. In the US the boundaries of this contract hold at its center a European model of beauty so Teresa’s sense of self is one of exclusion, while in Mexico, the contract hold Teresa’s fuller figure at it’s center. Teresa’s body continues to be the site of both reproduction and the erotic; despite her position as outsider, foreigner, or tourist (Alarcón, 1983). In Acapulco, the Indian men desire Alicia for her Anglo beauty while in Oaxaca the indigenous men are drawn to Teresa. In either case, the relationships with men are problematized and render the shifting and multiple forms of existence in indigenous Mexico. The women are so torn by the heterosexual erotic contract that they continually need to revisit Mexico because they are unable “to pull apart the entanglement in your memory. Sensing, in the end, it all had to have meant something, that, if we were able to analyze, it would be pertinent, not just to benefit our lives, but womanhood.” The borders that bar Teresa from full-fledge transnational citizenship are the different national, ethnic, and gender collectivities she belongs to.
While the Indian men critically shape Teresa’s transnational citizenship, Indian women are not present during their travels as speaking subject. While many appear in their “bright and shiny skirts, hair bound and hidden behind rebozos” those who do speak, speak “only in their native dialect and donned in traditional costume.” The only representation of female speaking subject is Teresa herself, who because of her mestizaje always carries the *india* within her. Castillo creates a dialectical structure between the Indian man and the mestiza woman. I believe that she creates this tension in part as a critique of the nationalist project of the Chicano Movement, which gagged women in the US and Mexico voiceless through vilified figure of la Malinche. Male indigeneity refracts our previous notions of the elevated heroic Indian figure. Yet, by making the mestiza the solitary female indigenous speaking subject, Castillo problematically silences women not speaking as mestizas. *Mixquiahuala Letters* fuses racial and sexual politics to indigeneity by exploring the tensions between woman/man, tourist/native, and diaspora/homeland.
Chapter Four
Epistemic Ruptures:
Indigeneity and Latinidad in Los Angeles, or, “Oaxacalifornia”

The turn of the twenty first century has been a pivotal time for people of Latin American descent in the Americas. Rapid globalization between the U.S. and Latin America has exponentially magnified the migration of people to the U.S. The shift of populations have created complex and contradictory political, social, cultural landscapes that are tied to and reify notions of race and ethnicity, but at the same time these cultural landscapes also underwrite alternative negotiations of US race and ethnicity for U.S. Latinos32 and, as we will see later, indigenous populations in Los Angeles. The presence of Latin American immigrants and their U.S.-born children typically triggers,

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32 I use the term “Latino/a” and on later references, the shorthand of “Latino” to refer to men and women of Latin and Spanish-speaking descent in the U.S., including indigenous populations throughout this chapter. “Latina” is used for female-specific references. I also use nationality or regional descriptors (i.e Mexican, Oaxacan) when it will provide additional information. I opt for “Latino/a” in this chapter instead of “Chicana” in my discussion of El Oaxaqueño, Diosa Centeotl, and Real Women Have Curves because it signals a post-Chicano/a Movement era in which Oaxacans and consumer productions theorize their own subject formation as separate from “Chicano/a” history and identity. Yet, “Latino/a” continues to acknowledge that racial and class constructions people of Latin American descent undergo.
for the conservative sectors of US society, two nativist responses; first, a fear of the “Latinization” of US society and second, stricter notions of “citizen,” resulting in harsher governmental policies for attaining citizenship. While nativism and immigrant backlash are not new phenomenon to US society, globalization has ensured that greater numbers of people bear the weight of such attacks and that discourses of immigration are racialized as originating “south of the border.” Indeed, the topic of Latino immigration persists in national discourses of border security post 9-11, economy and labor, “American” identity, health care, education and language acquisition, and crime and prison overcrowding, illustrating the salience of Latinos and immigration in the US national imaginary.

Current national discourses on immigration racialize Latinos and immigrants by collapsing a racialized demographic with an issue and casting both out as ethnic Others. As a result, anxieties about citizenship and belonging shape day-to-day realities for Latinos, regardless of their actual legal status, precisely because policy makers find immigrants all at fault for social and economic woes. Anxieties about belonging are further heightened by the continual lack of “meaningful responses” to the plight of immigrants, marginalized people and citizenship by the US government, thus, questions about citizenship affect and shape processes of ethnic identity formation.
(Oboler, 2002). Given the pressures exerted onto Latinos to continually define and legitimate their citizenship—legal, cultural, and otherwise—Latinos engage, articulate, and perform citizenship in contradictory, complex, and public ways in arenas that have less and less to do with legalities and more with cultural strategies of belonging. Given the strict exclusions of undocumented subjects from citizenship leaves the social and cultural realm to articulate ways of belonging. One must ask what role culture plays in citizenry movements and how are cultural practices political? In other words, how do Latino struggles and strategies for democratic inclusion expand and redefine strict definitions of U.S. citizenship from exclusively legal understandings to cultural ones in which full-citizens and undocumented residents both exert pressure on the state and other citizens for civil rights. As demonstrated by the Spring Marches of 2006, Latinos (legal citizens, residents, and undocumented immigrants) understand themselves as political subjects in the U.S. who can/should place demands on the state and fellows citizens for full access to rights. That is not to say that cultural citizenship replaces the need or desire of legal citizenship, rather, cultural and social arenas are the sites in which Latinos engage and challenge exclusive and marginalizing articulations of citizenship to stage their presence as “citizens.”
The notion of citizen, as a political subject, is more useful to describe the realities within Latino communities. In this way, immigrants who might not be citizens in the legal sense or who might even be in this country illegally, but who labor and contribute to the economic and cultural wealth of the country, are recognized as legitimate political subjects claiming rights for themselves and their children, and in that sense as citizens (Flores and Benmayor, 1999). People who are not recognized as citizens but who nonetheless struggle for citizenship are what Stuart Hall calls “new citizens,” that is, people who have come into being as new categories of persons who make claims on both their fellow citizens and the state (Hall and Held, 1990). Our understanding of “new citizen” is further enriched when theorizing indigenous cultural productions. Indigenous people are in the process of being recognized as “new citizens” within their home country through land rights debates as they also negotiate citizenship in the US. Indigenous transnational migrants are becoming “new citizens” in two places, on different fronts, and within two distinct racial systems. If we think of Latinos, including indigenous immigrants, as political subjects, we can then speak of citizenship in Oboler’s “meaningful ways,” that is, speak of the specific historically constituted, politically verified, and socially conditioned and differentiated relations within and across ethnic
communities (Oboler, 2006). It is my intent to take up the cultural productions of Latino and indigenous communities to examine how they stage their presence as citizens, breaking from previously articulated Chicano/a notions of community and race. One of the challenges of such an endeavor is the heterogeneity of the various Latino communities. The term “Latino,” itself, is only one of many labels produced for and taken on by the multiethnic, linguistically varied, racially diverse, and politically mixed population of people of Latin American descent, but I use it here because people of Latin American descent increasing use Latino to describe themselves and to cast enough of a wide net that it allows me to identify larger trends across Latino cultural productions.

Thus, this chapter examines the multiple and conflicting strategies of citizenship as portrayed by Latina women in literary texts, film, and print media. Focusing on the play Real Women Have Curves (1990), its cinematic adaptation Real Women Have Curves (2000), the indigenous pageant “Diosa Centeotl” and its publicity to theorize the shift from local, or specific, identities from Chicana or Oaxacan to more broad-based identities Latina and Indígena, respectively. Consumer culture has enabled a universal category (Latina) at the expense of jettisoning any overt, politicized relationship to the nation-state, like in the term “Chicana.” Likewise, this
same consumer culture has alternatively enabled indigenous groups, like Oaxacans, to enter the public sphere in order to make manifest their collectivity as a people in an emergent transnational economy. As we will see in the publication “El Oaxaqueño” and specifically the publicity surrounding the pageant “Diosa Centeotl,” indigenous subjectivity reflects similar shifts from previous local or “pueblo” identities to a more broad-based “indigena” identity that is touted as “authentic.” The shifts in collectivity, I argue, signal an epistemic shift in Chicano/a studies around race. Both Latina consumer culture and Oaxacan indigeneity radically depart in previous articulations of cultural production and mestizaje. Both instances are connected to each other by the political forces that tie the U.S. and Mexico vis-a-vis their respective minority underclasses, especially around race and gender. These texts illustrate gendered strategies of inclusion in the body politic of the U.S. in response to narrowing definitions of citizenship, discriminatory legislation and policy, and heightened discourses of nativism of the 1990s. This analysis offers insight into how Latina popular culture demonstrates the dynamics and intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality, consumerism, and citizenship. In these texts the construction of a Latina and the female indigenous body are deployed to construct a cultural citizenship that challenges exclusive notions of belonging. Ultimately, I contend that
despite their status as “illegal aliens” and in the face of the racialization of “immigrant” the authors stage their presence as citizens by embodying a new kind of U.S. Latina citizenship that transgresses official/legal US discourses of nation and citizen.

**Gender and Cultural Citizenship**

Latinos have reached some of the highest levels of visibility and invisibility in the U.S. In political arenas they are continually rendered invisible as political actors, spotlighted threats to economic stability and national security, while in cultural and consumer arenas, Latinos are highly visible as markets, consumers and audiences even though very few have penetrated mainstream cultural production. The contradictory positioning of Latinos as political subjects and consumers can be most visibly traced over two instances of protest, the Los Angeles riots of 1992 and the Spring Marches of 2006. While the legal realities of immigrants have not substantially changed from 1992 to 2006, citizenship is not easier to obtain and Latinos as still the target of intense Nativism, the cultural milieu has dramatically transformed, a shift credited primarily to the emergence of a consumer “Latino market.”
During the riots of 1992 Latino communities were criminalized and unfairly targeted by LAPD who used INS officials to arrest suspected looters. In contrast, by the mega marches that spread nationally during the spring of 2006, Latinos as a demographic had reached several benchmarks, namely, a population growth of 30 million. The benchmark prompted the US census to declare Latinos the largest minority in the US in 2003, signaling a multibillion dollar “Hispanic marketing” growth (US Census Bureau, 2003; Davila, 2002). Given this trajectory, it becomes evident that the redirection of discourses from an emphasis on legal citizenship to cultural/consumer citizenship has framed the Latino experience at the turn of the century. In other words, Latino subject formation in the US occurs between the interaction of legal and cultural forces prompted by the processes of globalization. Or as Juan Poblete reminds us,

Latinos are often structurally forced to displace themselves to the US by the combined effect of the destructuring of their living conditions in their countries of origin and the demands for cheap labor in the country of destination...thus, they are being reterritorialized ethnically and economically as consuming publics. They partially stop being citizens (at least in the classic sense of the term) in order to constitute themselves or be constituted as consumers (Poblete, 2006).
In thinking through Latinos as “new citizens” and the contradictory status they hold in the national imaginary, gender plays a critical role in Latino reimaginings of citizenship in the US. From its inception, Latinos have had a problematic relationship to the US nation-state, since the constitution disenfranchised them as citizens, but the constitution also excluded women as citizens. These racial and gender exclusions underpin contemporary struggles for citizenship and render visible how the category of “woman” is continually deployed to make the nation cohere (Kaplan, Alarcon, and Moallem, 1999; Rosaldo, 1998; Yuval-Davis, 1997). Further, gender also plays a critical in the constitution of Latinos in the US, since consumerism refers not only to purchasing habits, tastes and trends but also to the circulation of female bodies, images, and labor. Specifically, the hyper-sexualization, circulation, and racialization of Latina bodies in popular culture, icons like Jennifer Lopez, Shakira, and Salma Hayek, are examples of how women function as a sign, a stand-in not only for concepts ranging from beauty, sexuality, and desire but for nation, home, tradition, and authenticity. Race and gender are both necessary in theorizing Latino citizenship since the current era of globalization also subordinates, regulates and exploits women in particular ways. The maquiladora industry at the US-Mexico border and the systematic killing of these women, are instances of
how women of color are contained at the edges of nation-states and transformed into expendable producers of goods and economies for the US and Mexico. Within the US, hyper-sexualization, circulation, and racialization of Latina bodies in popular culture are instances of how women function as a sign at the center of the nation-state (by Latino industries, no less), upon which concepts ranging from beauty, sexuality and citizenship are forged. The iconic location of ethnic women and their presence in commodity culture is an inescapable affirmation of the centrality of gender in articulations of Latino/a cultural citizenship and the US national imaginary (Güzman and Valdivia, 2004). But women also exceed the confines of the nation-state and consumer culture and articulate/perform their identities out of the nation-state’s purview. On local and community levels, women negotiate their own positions in relation to the nation-state on their own terms. As I suggest later, in a place like Los Angeles current forms of reterritorializations heavily borrow and are informed by these kinds of cultural productions. Thus, Latina strategies of belonging are indispensable to Oboler’s “meaningful discussions” of citizenship. As Yuval-Davis urges us to consider,

In order to be able to analyze people’s citizenship adequately in the era of globalization, ethnicization, and the rapid pace at which relationships between nation states and their civil
societies are changing, citizenship should be best analyzed as a multi-tired construct which applies at the same time to membership in sub-, cross-, and supra-national collectives as well as to the nation state.

In this project, “memberships in sub-, cross-, and supra-national collectives” that Latino/a citizenship is organized around are ethnicity, gender, and consumer culture and their engagement, resistance, and rearticulation of official constructs of citizenship is their response to continued marginalization.

Renato Rosaldo’s concept of “cultural citizenship” is fruitful for thinking through the multiple ways in which Latinos/as claim membership in society as they struggle to build communities, claim social rights, and to be recognized as active agents in society in the face of their continued legal, economic, and social marginalizations. “Cultural citizenship is a deliberate oxymoron,” writes Rosaldo, “the pairing of words that do not go together comfortably,” the juxtaposition cautions us against assuming that either culture or citizenship are all-encompassing but instead, urges us to look at how and to what extent these concepts act upon each other. Culture interprets and constructs citizenship, just as the activity of being citizens, or political subjects, affects how we view ourselves (Rosaldo, 1989; Flores and Benmayor, 1998; Rosaldo, 1998). Thus, “cultural citizenship” offers to
attend to vernacular notions of citizenship and practices that bridge the discourses of the state and everyday life of citizenship and culture (Silvestrini, 1998). This is the critical framework that has been employed in Chicano/a studies to study and theorize cultural production. In its classic sense, cultural citizenship, because it attends to the vernacular notions of citizenship, works from the position that Chicano/a cultural production is “opposition or resistance culture.” At the end of the twenty-first century, we find that globalization poses a new kind of challenge to our understanding of “cultural citizenship.” Latino/a subject formation in the US occurs between the interaction of legal and cultural forces prompted by the social and economic processes of globalization.

**Real Women Have Curves (1990)**

Written between 1989 and 1990, *Real Women Have Curves*, is explicitly framed by a political lens. Based on playwright Josefina Lopez’s experience as an undocumented resident and sweatshop worker in Los Angeles, the original text raises questions about naturalization, labor exploitation, political activism, body image, and gendered collective identities. Ana, the central character, is a young feminist working in her sister’s sweatshop to earn enough money to send herself to college. As both
a young woman and Americanized Latina, Ana casts both a first world feminist’s and youthful (generational difference) gaze onto her relationships with the other immigrant women in the sweatshop. Central to Ana’s lens are the various inscriptions placed upon Latina bodies but also the inscriptions she fashions onto and about herself. Lopez presents Ana as a “Generation Ñ” scribe and Chicana situating her as both witness and agent of her historical moment. In the opening scene, Ana who is at the factory starting her workday has escaped to the bathroom to think and write after being scolded by her mother.

Yeah, yeah I know! I’m not a kid. (Ana reaches behind the toilet and gets out a notebook and pen) I only come because my mother practically drags me out of bed and into the car and into the factory… Is it selfish of me not to want to wake up every morning at 6:30 a.m., Saturdays included, to come work here for 67 dollars a week? Oh, but such is the life of a Chicana in the garment industry. Cheap labor…” (Act I Scene 1 pg 10).

Lopez presents a decidedly feminist figure in young Ana, having her identify as “Chicana feminist” locating her within a very socio-historic moment but also a feminist tradition. By positioning Ana as a “Chicana scribe” Lopez participates in a Chicana epistemological tradition of consciousness raising through writing. It is the literal writing in her journal that represents the first kind of inscription that Ana embodies. As Anzaldúa suggests in “The Path of
the Red and Black Ink”, Chicanas are always writing within the larger contexts of the continent and its layered histories, thus the act of writing itself is thus an act of self-creation. For Ana, the “layered histories” are that of labor exploitation, the beauty industry and immigration all present in the factory and her “self-creation” is that of a scribe and it is her writing which will enable her to transcend the conditions of the factory. Writing is a strategy for building a “new mestiza” or Chicana consciousness. It is Ana’s journal and writing throughout the play that situates her both as a witness and agent change.

The weeks get longer and I can’t believe I’ve ended up here. I just graduated from high school...Most of my friends are in college...It’s as if I’m going backwards. I’m doing the work that mostly illegal aliens do... No “undocumented workers”...or else it sounds like these people come from Mars... Soon I will have my “Temporary Residence Card,” then after two years, my green card... I’m happy to finally be legal, but I thought things would be different...What I really want to do it write...” (Act I Scene I pg 10)

While it seems that Ana is mostly manifesting the angst of youth (she wants to establish her independence from her overbearing mother, join her peers in their endeavors) she is also resituating her identity within the factory in relation to the other workers and within the US in relation to the nation-state. Ana is ashamed and angry that she is doing the work of “undocumented
workers,” rhetorically distancing herself from the other workers, yet in the following lines we find out that she too is one of the “undocumented workers” that she wants to dis-identify with. Ana is drawing a class boundary between her and the other older immigrant workers. The difference here is one of acculturation, although not a legal citizen, Ana imagines herself wants to be more than a laborer. Her aspirations are tied to her material reality but also to a broader deeper sense of belonging to the nation-state. As David Gutierrez suggests, “Mexican Americans’ views about Mexican immigrants were part of the historical evolution of Mexican Americans’ own sense of culture and political identity.” Although Ana is undocumented, she has already claimed an “American” identity independent of her legal status. “The constant influx of Mexican immigrants, or in this case the presence of her co-workers, into US Mexican communities continually compelled Mexican Americans of all walks of life to consider, and to make choices about, questions of personal identity and the salience of their own ethnicity (Gutierrez, 1995). The constant suspicion of legal citizenship and the social stigma of being “illegal” engender a tension, for Ana, between immigrant worker and American citizen. Ana’s sense of belonging is tied to her aspirations, her identity as a writer, and sense of
being a liberated woman among those who are yet to be liberated and not her labor.

While the familial collaborative efforts of keeping Estela’s garment factory afloat weigh heavy on Ana’s sense of self throughout the course of the play, it is in those collective efforts of economic survival that Ana finds the longed for sense of belonging. Ana and the other workers through a series of lively discussions, forge an affiliation based on they exclusions within the fashion world since, most of the women in the factory including Ana were overweight. Her closing monologue narrates the arc of Ana’s self-realization,

I always took their work for granted, to be simple and unimportant...I wanted to show them how much smarter and liberated I was, I was going to teach them about the women’s liberation movement, about sexual liberation and all things a so-called educated American woman knows...in subtle ways they taught me about resistance. About a battle no one was fighting except themselves. About loneliness of being women in a country that looks down on us for being mothers and submissive wives...As for me, I will settle for a second-hand typewriter and I wrote an essay on my experience and I was awarded a fellowship. When I came back the plans for making the boutique were no longer a dream, because now I only wear Estela Garcia’s boutique, “Real Women Have Curves.” (Act II, Scene IV)
A close reading of the play reveals the legacy of the Chicana feminist movement in the evolution of the character of Ana. Ana critiques the privilege of Anglo feminist discourse, when she refers to “so called educated American woman.” to reassert Chicana critiques of race and gender. Lopez reasserts Chicana critiques of machismo, male-dominated Mexican American family structures, specifically, she is critical of machismo, in her reference to “loneliness of being women in a country that looks down on us for being mothers and submissive wives.” By narrating the key shifts in discourses about race, class and gender by feminists, Lopez restages in the play the Chicana feminist movement from within the sweatshop. The sweatshop itself becomes a space in which the women claim a space of their own, a space in which they dictate the terms of their belonging. If the play dramatizes the intersectionality of labor, gender, and race, the film on, presents a much different Ana and relationship to the women in her family and the sweatshop. The celluloid Ana is an upward mobile Latina that is shaped primarily under the specter of the male gaze. The film was produced during the growing popularity of Latina consumer culture chic. Lopez, as a co-screenwriter of the 2002 film, opts to re-envision her play as primarily a family drama. Although the film’s backdrop continues to reflect a working-class experience (it is still set in her sister’s sewing factory), its central focus
is the relationship between mother and daughter. The film signals a shift away from previous collective forms of feminism and presents a broad-based Latina consumer sensibility.

**Real Women Have Curves (2002)**

In 2002, Hollywood newcomer Mexican American actor America Ferrera and veteran Mexican American actor Lupe Ontiveros\(^3\) appeared on the Oprah Winfrey Show to promote their new film *Real Women Have Curves* (2002). While for the Oprah show their presence might have simply seemed like yet another film promotion, their appearance on the show also signaled a crest in the arrival of a new Latina chic.\(^4\) Not surprising, the show’s line-up revealed the various, often competing, discourses that construct contemporary US Latinidad.\(^5\) In the first half of the show, Oprah interviewed Salma Hayek as Hayek promoted the newly released *Frida* (2002). At that time, Hayek herself was already one of the most prolific Latina actresses in Hollywood having successfully capitalized on her accent,


\(^4\) A Latina chic and visibility that began in the mid-1990s with the death of Selena Quintanilla, a biopic was later released in which Jennifer Lopez took the lead role. This role

\(^5\) Here I use Isabel Molina Guzmán and Angharad N. Valdivia’s broad definition of Latinidad as “the state and process of being, becoming, and/or appearing Latina/o” because it captures both the internal and external processes and markers of ethnic difference the former being the marketing and political mechanisms and the latter self-identifications with assertions of difference and specificity. Guzmán, Isabel Molina. "Brain, Brow, and Booty: Latina Iconicity in U.S. Popular Culture." *The Communication Review* 7.2004 (2004): 205-21.
"dark" features and the eroticization of her body to construct herself as an "authentic" Latina actress (Guzman and Valdivia, 2004). Likewise, Hayek’s hyper-sexualized Frida was viewed as the authentic depiction of Kahlo’s life and went on to received six Oscar nominations, including one for Hayek’s role. In the U.S., Hayek represents the Latin American side of Latinidad—a hyper-erotic, linguistic Other squarely located in Mexican history, customs, art, and aesthetics. By contrast, Ferrera followed Hayek as the English dominant, youthful face of US Latina identity. Hayek and Ferrera, promoting both their images and films, present a careful mix of Latin American and Americanized referents and projections, specifically, Latin American sexuality and U.S. Latina upward mobility; the former coded as hypersexual, homosexual, saucy spicy, and the latter as young, hip, cosmopolitan, and middle-class.36

The increased visibility of Latina actresses and images increased in the mid-1990s on several fronts including the publication of Latina Magazine (1996) and the success of Tejana singer Selena Quintanilla and her tragic death in 1995. A Selena biopic was quickly in the works directed by well-known Latino director Gregory Nava—El Norte (1983), Mi Familia (1995). The Puerto Rican dancer and singer Jennifer Lopez was to play

36 In the following months Hayek would go on to produce America Ferrera in the runaway ABC hit Ugly Betty (2006) and launch her into stardom.
Selena amid critiques of the racial politics of that choice—Selena fans wanted a *Tejana* to play the role. Nonetheless, Nava went ahead with Lopez, making her the highest paid Latina actress to star in a lead role. The meteoric rise of Lopez as a Latina icon, and the debates about her casting were primarily focused on the shape of her body—both Lopez and Selena were know for their ample posteriors—what Mendible and Figueroa call a “Selena aesthetic” (Figueroa and Mendible, 2003). While this focus on the physicality of Latina bodies opened a more “inclusive diversity [of] physicalities” the Latina body also “suddenly became only a Latina body, racially marked for cultural and commodified circulation” (Figueroa, 2003). In Lopez’s film *Real Women*, issues of weight and body took center stage.

The power and appeal of the Oprah Show comes in Oprah’s ability to craft herself as every woman and nowhere is this most apparent than in her rhetoric on body image, weight loss, and self-esteem. Her most recent slogan “I have been every size, I have been every woman,” lays claims to knowing the vulnerabilities and experiences of all women by way of their physical size. In engendering a connection between the self and clothes size, she can access every woman’s experience, since she herself claims to have been every size. So, when Ferrera appeared on the Oprah show to promote *Real Women Have Curves*, Oprah focused on the “Curves” content of the
film. While the discussion on weight and body image in the context of the Oprah show configured the film as a text that championed the aspirations of all women, the promotion of the show signaled the reconfigurations occurring in Josefina Lopez’s rewriting of the play.

The film was reconceptualized at the center of two interconnecting narratives, one Ana’s relationship to her own “excessive” body and concurrently, Ana’s tumultuous relationship with her overbearing mother who desires to keep Ana chaste and at home not in New York attending college. While the narratives were present in the play to a lesser degree, the tensions between mother and daughter and weight and self-image were contextualized in the communal setting of the sweatshop and around questions of immigration and citizenship. The play endorsed the collectivity of the workers. In the film, previous anxieties about immigration and belonging are jettisoned in favor of a well-worn Latino family drama, strikingly similar to Nava’s previous depictions of immigrant Latino families. By keeping the focus exclusively on Ana’s weight issues and parental relationship, Lopez created a Latina text that was easily digestible and familiar to its audience. In other words, by moving the subtexts of the film to the forefront of the narrative Lopez created an entry into the Latina experience thus “Americanizing” the narrative.
It is without a doubt that the physicality of ethnic bodies has become an undeniable aspect of discourses on Latina identity. Curvaceous bodies become the lowest common denominator through which we can talk about Latina identity in the US in medias that cater to the male gaze. In targeting the increasing complex and contradictory panethnic Latino audiences, marketing industries, construct a “Latina” identity around perceived physicalities of these bodies, over historic constructions such as “Chicana.”

As Aparicio and Chavez-Silverman argue, such constructions of Latina bodies and beauty result from hierarchies of race, ethnicity, and gender that Latinas themselves, in this case Lopez, participate.

Leading renditions of “Latin beauty” are performed in harmony with prevailing commercial, political, and cultural repertoires; these are aligned with an epistemology of the body consistently used to justify hierarchies of race, ethnicity, and gender. Latinas' identification with any exclusive set of physical attributes deemed “natural” or “authentic” (in this case, the Latina body as callipygian ideal) performs an unambiguous self-tropicalization, binding Latina femininity to bodily excess, sexuality, or indulgence and imbuing Latinidad with a fixed set of traits, values, and images. (Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman, 1997)

In the film, Ana reclaims her “excessive Latina body” from the fashion industry that does hold her body outside of its imaginings of beauty but Ana also reclaims her body from her mother. Throughout the film,
Carmen, Ana’s mother exerts authority over Ana by shaming her body. In one scene in particular, Ana and Carmen are sitting around eating dessert. Carmen worries that her daughter will never be desirable and thus will never marry and have children. Carmen demands that Ana stop eating her flan dessert but after a long pause Ana defies her mother eats the last of the dessert. Such mother-daughter challenges provide the momentum of the film. Carmen also demands that Ana relinquish the opportunity to attend college, stay home, and keep the family unit intact while the celluloid Ana yearns to be a cosmopolitan woman. The family tensions between mother and daughter as well as the construction of Latina beauty are well-worn gendered tension in depictions of the Mexican American experience.

Ana as a Chicana scribe also is conspicuously absent in the rewriting of the film. While in the play, writing enabled Ana to sharpen her Chicana feminist analytic tools, providing subtle critiques of immigrant labor, gender, and sexuality. In the play, writing is a tool for liberation, yet, in the film, writing is an avenue for leaving her household. Her teacher, Mr. Guzman, implores Ana to apply to college, but while she fills out the application she refuses to write her personal statement. In her defense, Ana exclaims to Mr. Guzman “I don’t know what to write about” to which he responds, “write about what you know.” The scene ends with an up-close
shot of Ana’s face, puzzled at the thought that she must write about herself. Writing, in the film, represents Ana’s alienation from herself.

In the film adaptation, Lopez jettisons her prior emphasis on communal struggle and her call for communal strategies of activism in favor of individual desire. Contrary to the play, Ana is not a Chicana in Los Angeles’s downtown garment district but a Latina exploring the streets of New York. Tempered in terms of its political content, the film’s new narrative highlights a shift in Mexican American identity, a move away from the explicitly political “Chicana” to the more universal “Latina.” Thus, Lopez’s text, places Latina cultural production within the context of ongoing shifts in national and global forces (immigration). Using this framework, Real women have curves and its transformation to film marries discussions about representation and social movements, while simultaneously reflecting on the uses of Latina as a valuable ethnic category in marketing strategies. The positioning of Lopez as playwright and screenwriter reveals a contradictory of understanding of what it means to belong.

Real Women Have Curves (2002) produces “convenient fictions” through a construction of Latina bodies and family dramas as new ways of discussing anxieties about citizenship and belonging. No longer is the conversation about legalities, INS, and exploited labor, but about
Americanized daughters, family pressure and ethnic bodies. As the actress America Ferrera said to Oprah during her interview “[This movie] is something that people can relate to. You walk out of the movie and feel it's about life, about love, about family, about women. It's your mom, your aunt. It happens to be told by a Hispanic cast but it's not a "Latino" story. You can replace that family with [whoever] you want, because it's the same story. It's a story about life, and life is universal.” This essay argues that the reformulation of Real Women from a play about the struggle for belonging and citizenship into a play about the “universal story” about mothers and daughters and US standards of beauty, is in actuality a new articulation of cultural citizenship employing the often problematic strategies of Latino marketing. While immigrant struggles for full-membership continue, globalization processes fragment and then reconstitute such struggles. Real Women Have Curves, illustrates such a reordering of these claims for citizenship.

**Indigenous (Re)territorialization in L.A.**

In 1999, Fernando López founded El Oaxaqueño Newspaper in Los Angeles with the financial backing of his hugely successful Oaxacan restaurant “La Guelaguetza,” a restaurant that would, in the following years,
expand to three locations and become a fixture of "multi-ethnic L.A." Like the restaurant, *El Oaxaqueño* was the first of its kind in Los Angeles—a transnationally circulated newspaper catering and produced by the ever-expanding transnational Oaxacan population in California and Oaxaca. The newspaper, which was part business venture part cultural revindication campaign, operates within various economies—financial, cultural, social, tourist—and is tied to larger transnational circuits of people, information, and histories.

Published on a monthly basis, *El Oaxaqueño* covers the political, social and cultural facets of Oaxacan life reporting news about Oaxaca and Los Angeles politics and entertainment but also Mexico/U.S. relations and immigration policy. Indigenous immigrants are hailed as both first world marginalized subjects and third world subalterns, thus, *El Oaxaqueño*’s news coverage reflects the multiple positionings of transnational subjects a brief overview of the coverage in *El Oaxaqueño* reflects this transnational indigenous positioning. Since the Immigrant Marches of spring 2006, a plethora of articles which include "In support of immigration reform" (June 7 2007); "To Awaken the Giant," (April 5, 2006); "Oaxacans are Absent from Work,"; "We announce another Mega March" (March 5 2007) and most recently, support for deportee Eliva Arellano, an undocumented immigrant
who took refuge in a Catholic Church in Chicago, firmly situate indigenous efforts for representation as efforts of citizenship. Likewise, editorials on Mexican voting rights for immigrants residing outside of Mexico extend the readership’s belonging to a Mexican national imagined community. As invisible subjects in Mexico, El Oaxaqueño discursively inserts the indigenous into the nation from a transnational position. On the cultural front, El Oaxaqueño constructs a distinctively pan-indigenous (*indígena*) identity by creating regional affiliations, regional nostalgia, and regional culture. While still focusing on townships’ celebrations, meetings, fundraisers, and leaders, the newspaper frames these events as *indígena*, meaning they are *racialized* as Indian as well as markers of ethnic indigeneity. Indigeneity in Mexican, Chicano/a and Oaxacan indigenous history have come into being in disparate ways yet they are all framed by the process of colonization and are grounded in struggles for autonomy and survival.

The Oaxacan indigenous community in Los Angeles is a newly established ethnic community that is both racialized within Mexican groups, given the stigma of being “Indian” which is often coded as ignorant, backwards, simple, pre-modern, short, dark, and dumb and marginalized within the larger category of Mexican in the US, coded as illegal and alien.
Yet, given these multiple marginalizations, the various Oaxacan towns or “pueblos” come together organizing politically and around cultural events, having a combined effect of cohering as a larger community but also, dramatically re-shaping the racial politics of Los Angeles. The racial dynamics in LA are unique in this respect—not only is it a desirable destination for Latino immigrants given its proximity to the border, it is also home to vast ethnic populations who provide cheap labor for the various service industries connected to Hollywood. Ethnic populations like Oaxacans, Koreans and African Americans operate as and within layered diasporas, contesting and sharing space, language, religion, and resources. The various communities re-create themselves and being recreated all under the shadow of the Hollywood sign. An instance of this is the Oaxacan and Korean communities who quite literally share the same neighborhood and buildings and you can stand on the corner of Olympic and Vermont and be in the heart of “Koreatown” and “Oaxacatown.” Given the success and wide circulation of media outlets like El Oaxaqueño newspaper, the Oaxaqueño community increasingly uses similar strategies employed by Latino consumerist frameworks—the pageant, a once local event, reaches a nation and even transnational audience through the newspaper—given this publicity, the circulation of female images and bodies are deployed to define
concepts like “indigenous beauty” and “indigenous authenticity.” All together, these cultural strategies signal a shift in the indigenous community of the US. They are creating a broad-based indigenous identity that is more regional and pan-ethnic and not national or town specific, staging a vibrant, growing, consumer, and producer in Southern California.

When we look to the Oaxacan community, an actual indigenous community in the US, we see a dramatically different articulation of indigeneity. Rather than employ or borrow strategies from the Chicano/a movement, they borrow frameworks employed by a Latina consumer culture, given the popularity and cultural capitol of indigeneity in the US.

The newspaper hailed, Oaxaquens into an Andersonian “imagined community.” In the coverage of cultural events, El Oaxaqueño constructs a distinctively pan-indigenous (indigena) identity by creating regional affiliations around food, music, and language. While still focusing on specific townships’ celebrations, meetings, fundraisers, and leaders, the newspaper frames these events as indígena, meaning they are racialized as more generally Indian. Whereas in Oaxaca, which is split up into seven regions then townships the newspaper hails anyone from Oaxaca as indígena. Such a pan-ethnic move, I believe is necessary for the political efforts of the community, since they are also located in the US. Operating
within the US racial system, indígena bonds and community emphasize perceived shared experiences and values, not only as Inidans but also immigrants. The continual support and coverage on the annual election of the corn goddess, Centeotl, is most clearly relevant. Every year in May, a pageant is held in which the “Corn Goddess” is chosen. She will go on to open the Guelaguetza dance festivals in August, a staple and very first cultural event organized by the Oaxacan community. (The Guelaguetza itself has a contradictory history and status within the Oaxacan community, and your relationship to the Guelaguetza is determined by which side of the border you are on) In April, the call for participants was printed on the front page of El Oaxaqueno in an article entitled “In Search of the Immigrants’ Goddess/En Busca de la Diosa de los Inmigrantes,” April 13 2007 and said the following:

“All those young, Oaxaquin women or daughters of Oaxacan descendants can participate.” La Diosa Centeotl is a contest in which physical beauty is not evaluated. Here the values of the female participants extend beyond the physical. The pageant is about choosing she who can best bear the traditional vestments that represents her or her parent’s community of origin, the one who shall know how to best communicate the richness that her ancestors have been able to rescue, and she who continues, in one way or another, to remain connected to her community. The young women
should be between the ages of 17 and 21 and should also be single and childless. The day of the contest they should be rigorously knowledgeable about the history of their costumes, and those costumes should be presented without artificial alterations. Nor should they wear one drop of makeup or modern accessories.

The call for participants in is more transparent than troubling. It is setting up a fiction about what is an “authentic,” pre-modern indigenous, “virgin” woman should be or is. As I said earlier, it is because women continue to function as a sign for the nation, a stand in for values and concepts like beauty, virtue, home around which the nation can cohere that the fiction produced by the pageant organizers is so effective.

As the participants entered the competition and began to answer questions, it became clear that they were mostly U.S. born and raised indigenous women who did not speak their Indian language. At the competition, some women struggled through the Spanish questions, knew very little Oaxacan history, other than the rehearsed, and admited having never been to their family’s pueblo of origin; yet, they staunchly identified as indigenous and feel they can represent Oaxacan indigeneity the best. Yet, the fact that most of the participants are U.S. born or raised, and the lack the language or lived customs exposing yet another layer of the re-constructed nature of the pageant does not disrupt or thwart their indigenous affiliations.
When *El Oaxaqueño* announced the newly chosen goddess, the young woman was unabashedly heralded as “authentic indigeneity.” “*Authentic Indigeneity/ Autenticidad Indígena,*” May 11, 2007 we see the larger strategy for this ‘imagined community’. Given the transparent constructedness of the pageant’s claim to authenticity—the question critical question then becomes what does the notion of “authenticity” accomplish for the community? By claiming an authentic indigeneity the paper establishes itself as the center of transnational indigenous life. The pageant also genders the performance of indigeneity: in part because in indigenous communities the women wear the distinctive clothes, but also the pageant promotes “traditional” roles and values for women advocating the importance of chastity and proper behavior among single women. The proclamation of indigenous authenticity also significantly represents a rejection of mestizaje. Regardless of the actual racial status of acculturation of its participants, the overarching identification of the transnational indigenous communities in Los Angeles is as indigena.

On the one hand, *El Oaxaqueño* reinforcement of indigeneity, that is translating the rules and regulations of the pageant into “Authentic Indigeneity,” might signify a suture over generational divisions between Americanized daughters and Mexican parents, the rapidly changing racial dimensions of indigeneity, and the signification of home which is no longer
Oaxaca. The strict rules about the dresses, serves as a litmus test for the families—are the connected to their pueblos? Can they get it right? Are they part of our emerging transnational community? What the women and organizers present here is really new kind of cultural citizenship. While in some ways, the pageant adheres to classic notions of cultural citizenship, in that is the vernacular notion of belonging or creating community in a place that does not yet recognize them as citizens, the pageant and newspaper are also keenly aware, much like the producers of Real Women, that the broader more elusive the of concept of “Indígena,” the more effective a strategy for collectivity—this performance an ethnicity in the U.S. overlaps but is nonetheless a sharp contrast to Chicana/o cultural identity in Los Angeles.

In *El Oaxaqueño*’s recasting of transnational indigeneity, Indian-ness represents a generalized, regional Oaxacan indigeneity that “broadens and transforms previously localized identities into ethnic, pan-ethnic, and racial identities”(Fox, 59). The shared Oaxacan migrant experience of ethno-racial discrimination in California drives this process of what Kearney and Nagengast called “‘scaling up,’”—that is notions of race and ethnicity—once away from the center, in this case Oaxaca, prompts and intensification and rearticulation of what it means indígena (Kearney and Nagensast, 1990). As the Diosa Centeotl competition illustrates, this scaling up is also
gendered. The woman’s body is the site upon which notions of community and collectivity are worked out. Both, the rise of a consumer Latina culture and indigenous culture suggest new direction in Chicano/a studies, an epistemic shift in the ways we understand race and consumer culture. These shifts inevitably are the new sites in which inter-racial relations, relationship to the nation-state, and a. like consumer culture that promotes Latina beauty, this festival does not overtly seem to be in opposition to the nation-state
Epilogue

Reordering Racial Politics in the U.S.

When I began this began graduate school in the fall of 2001, the
events of September 11 were just beginning to reshape US cultural politics
and reorder world economies and alliances. As the events unfolded, leading
ultimately to the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, it became clear that
9-11 would be a definitive moment in also reordering immigration policy
and sentiment. September 11 revived readily available xenophobic sentiment
about “aliens,” undocumented immigrants, and “brown” people in general.
At the same time, Latinos in the US were reaching unparalleled levels of
visibility and consumer power, creating paradoxical impulses within various
sectors of the immigration debate.

The larger aim of this project has been to provide an incisive
examination and critique of indigeneity in Chicano/a literature and culture
since the Chicano Movement. Emerging through the concepts of the ‘Indian’
in the Americas, Aztec myth and history, female archetypes and finally in
the mestiza transnational subject, indigenism has been integral to the subject
formation of Chicanos and Chicanas, in large part due to the various waves of nativism Mexican Americans have been subjected to. Equally important to the discussion of Chicano/a indigenism has been the global movements of indigenous peoples politically, socially, cultural, and above all across borders. Indigenous communities have embodied a new kind of indigeneity and cultural citizenship through their own transnational migrations and circuits. Transnational indigenous communities like the Oaxaquen community in Los Angeles, for instance, is reshaping not only Chicano/a indigenist poetics by rejecting notions like Aztlan as homeland, mestiza consciousness and subjectivity but challenging US notions of American Indian identity. As indigenous communities are forging dynamic identities through their negotiation of both Mexican and US racial structures, they have also fallen back onto familiar strategies to make their transnational communities cohere, namely the deployment of ‘woman’ and ‘authenticity’ to create nation. While the events of 9-11 seem far removed from the tensions surrounding indigeneity drawn out in this project, I would like to consider them in conjunction with a previous moment in which the racial politics of the US was reordered.

In 1992, Los Angeles experienced the worst civil unrest ever recorded in U.S. history as a result of the acquittal of four Los Angeles Police
Department police officers for the beating of Rodney King. I suggest, here, that California’s response to the civil unrest was to police, discipline, and further marginalize immigrants by passing propositions 187 (1994) and 209 (1996) and usher in a new era of anti-immigrant sentiment. Latinos have served as the release valve for racial and ethnic pressures in 1992 much like they do now in a post-9/11 world. Thus, this epilogue is not only meant as concluding notes on the role of indigeneity in Mexican American subject formation, but as critically informed by two major historical coordinates. I believe race and ethnicity have undergone continual reordering, and the move to reconsider indigeneity within Chicano/a studies is part of a longer project to consider how race has been continually reordered at the end of the millennium. Inevitably, a study of indigenism in Chicano/a studies and indigeneity in transnational communities will bring about a fundamental reordering of Chicano/a subjectivity.

The end of the century continually re-emerges as the period of time that brings together key discussions of citizenship, Latino visibility, consumer culture and gender. Stuart Hall argued that the 1990s inaugurated an era of the “new politics of citizenship” in which citizenship entailed a discussion, a struggle over, the meaning and scope of membership of the community in which they live (Hall and Held, 1990). In Latino/a studies
circles, the 1990s also mark an increase in the production of texts on Mexican American and Latino cultural productions. In highlighting the cultural processes specific to this era I do not mean to say that significant processes did not occur before, but I believe there were significant breaks and ruptures during the 1990s that render visible the interplay and conditions of Latina cultural citizenship. For instance, in the last decade of the century, Latino populations became the largest ethnic group in the US, a population that is increasingly more diverse. Latinos/as also gained more visibility as voting and consumer publics, have become an indispensable demographic as workers, voters, and consumers—a perceived power of numbers, power of brown dollars, and power of labor force—Latinos were also the target of governmental agencies and national anti-immigration sentiment. I turn now to the 1992 Los Angeles civil unrest as the event, which revealed the socio-political climate of the decade.

How do we warp our minds around the Los Angeles Uprisings of April 1992? After the acquittal of four Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officers for the video recorded, savage beating of Rodney King, violence erupted at the intersection of Florence and Normandie in south central LA. In the five days of looting, burning and violence that ensued,
50,000 participated, 52 were killed, 2,383 required hospitalization, 850 families were rendered homeless, over 600 fires were set, 1,100 buildings were damaged or destroyed, and 20,000 jobs that “went up in smoke” (Abelmann, 1997; Cannon 1997; Bergesen and Herman, 1998). Among these statistics, the legacy of the civil unrest is both one of liberation and destruction becoming known, on one end, as a postmodern bread riot and revolutionary democratic protest, and on the other, as the deadliest insurrection since the civil war, the worst riot of the century, a major interethnic riot in the US, and the death of the Dream city. The LA riots signaled such a seismic shift in our understanding of race, class, and justice, precisely because conflict erupted along multiple lines and not only in opposition to the LAPD as many expected. Tensions exploded along class, interracial, and geographical lines, between African Americans and Koreans, Latinos and law enforcement, between neighbors, and within working class neighborhoods. Given the multiple intersections of race, class, violence, geography, urbanity, and brutality, I will focus on the representation of Latinos during the civil unrest to identify how it is that Latinos and immigrants became the public face of the riots. It is my contention that during the LA riots and their aftermath, the policing of Latinos mitigated the
economic, political, and social crisis that ensued, culminating in the passing of proposition 187 and 209.

When, then, police chief Darryl Gates exclaimed to the media “illegal aliens played a major role in looting and violence during the riot” it was clear that the riots were no longer being analyzed in relation to the inequalities/failures of the judicial system or the internal racial and class dynamics of the city, rather, the focus had shifted to the familiar accusations of immigrant criminality. The media in turn, latched onto studies that revealed 51% of those arrested were Latinos, 1,044 of which were identified as undocumented, sensationalizing views of Latinos as new immigrant communities with the consequence of reifying suspicions about citizenship and hardening racialized differences in the post-riot efforts (Lieberman, 1992). Gates’s inflammatory accusations of “illegal alien” participation in the riots further racialized the geographical areas of south central, Koreatown, Pico-Union as a lawless zone where society’s outsiders (Koreans, Latinos, and African Americans) entered an ethnic competition for survival. But even among the marginalized, the “illegal alien” (which referred to Latinos/as and not Korean immigrants) was a greater threat. The figure of the Latin American immigrant was so threatening because it
triangulated the black-white racial tension paradigm that the white dominant populations in LA believed they had a handle on.

Latinos had become a target for Gates and the LAPD in the initial stages of the protest. As the civil unrest spread throughout south central LA, into Koreatown and Hollywood, no one questioned LAPD tactics. Rather, the deployment of the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) went unnoticed until local community leaders complained to newspaper writers and civil rights organizations of the unlawful use of Border Patrol agents. The LAPD defense was pure racist logic; they argued that since “the looting was occurring in Latino neighborhoods, therefore Latinos were going to be the ones police were going to pick up” and the LAPD did just that (Lieberman, 1992). In defending their decision to bring in INS, in addition to the National Guard and active troops, the LAPD claimed to need INS personnel as translators to aid in the recovery of stolen property. LAPD Capt. Dennis Conte revealed that immigration agents were called in to his Southeast Los Angeles patrol area to help the police, in such instances, he said, immigration authorities worked out of police stations and directly with city police officers (Frezen, 1992). The early and sustained collaboration between both agencies illustrates how governmental agencies collude to target immigrants whenever the opportunity arises. Most Border Patrol units
were deployed in the Pico Union area and other Latino immigrant neighborhoods, the goal of which was to take advantage of the chaotic situation to inspire fear and to deport as many Latinos as possible, raising alarm among residents who have long feared "la migra," as U.S. immigration officials are commonly known (Russell, McDonnell, Berger). By official accounts the use of INS officials was a success, since among the "riot-related arrests" were 1,044 illegal immigrants\textsuperscript{38} despite the fact that, according to the LAPD, INS was not given the mission of "rounding up" illegal immigrants.

In the subsequent months following the INS raids, the ACLU and Hispanic Advisory Council in Los Angeles, found evidence of systematic collaboration between the INS and LAPD and revealed the "agencies falsely claimed that 30% of those involved in the looting that followed the rioting were illegal aliens" (Frezen and Acosta). The agencies’ use of psychological (fear tactics) and racial mechanisms (profiling) reified notions of Latinos as criminals and Latinos as "illegal aliens" and consequently, in the increasingly conservative state of Republican governor Pete Wilson (1991-1999), managing the divides in Los Angeles and throughout

\textsuperscript{38} The RAND analyst noted, however, that such findings are open to numerous interpretations. The high number of Latino arrests, for instance, could "reflect the group's participation in the riot (or) a general failure to flee or resist arrest," a RAND statement said.
California became an issue of immigration. Anti-immigrant discourse was deployed to provide some kind of social cohesion after the ultimate breakdown of law enforcement, order and civil society. Latinos/as were positioned as non-citizens, a homogenous Other, against which LAPD could suture over the violence of the riots and reinstate itself as authority. In other words, it was easier to blame LA’s considerable Latino populations instead of unearthing the systematic discrimination in the courts, rampant illegal use of deadly force in the LAPD, and the unequal distribution of resources in the city. As Carl Gutierrez-Jones suggests, “accusations of criminality—often accompanied by calls to “close” the border or to “repatriate” [Latinos]—demonstrate not objectivity but rather a political and economic investment on the part of Anglo institutions” to cast out immigrants and reframe them as expendable. The cooperation between the Los Angeles Police Department and the INS during the King verdict riots are but instances of long standing tension in this regard (Gutierrez-Jones, 1995).

On the heels of the LA riots came the most damaging and sustained attack on the basic human rights and services of immigrants in California. In the 1990s voters passed a series of legislative acts, Proposition 187, 209, and 227 which systematically worked to deny the children of immigrants born in the US (a future electorate) education, health care, and social
services. The propositions primarily targeted every level of public education, Prop 187 (the “Save our State” initiative) denied the children of undocumented immigrants the right to a free public education, Prop 209 (called the California Civil Rights Initiative) devastated California’s affirmative action programs at the university level, and Prop 227 eliminated bilingual education in primary and secondary schools (Moya, 2002; Perea, 1997; Zavella 1997). The California legislature relied on familiar discourses of an “illegal alien invasion” draining the resources of citizens to successfully pass the anti-immigrant legislation and voters responded accordingly voting with their fears and prejudices. While anti-nativist discourses have a longer historical and cyclical trajectory in US history, especially during times of economic instability and sustained growth of immigrant populations, the recent attacks on immigrants were particular because they aimed to eliminate the rights of US-born children, U.S. citizens who otherwise would have full access to civil rights, and educational and social services (Muller, 1997).

As I draw this project to a conclusion, the LA Riots and September 11 serve as bookends for my broader thinking about race and ethnicity, but also help me postulate the emergence of indigenous identities in the late twentieth-century. How has the increased vilification of immigrants after
1992 and 9-11 also produced the kinds of indigeneity we now see in the US? How has the fight over the meaning of “native” produced complex and contradictory notions of belonging to country, people and place? How have these two historical moments allowed or inhibited nuanced meaning of race and ethnicity? When a critical indigenous lens is enacted, it is possible to link up local and global moments, histories, and cultures.
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