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INTIMATE INDIGENEITIES: ASPIRATIONAL AFFECTIVE SOLIDARITY IN 21ST CENTURY INDIGENOUS MEXICAN REPRESENTATION

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INTIMATE INDIGENEITIES:
ASPIRATIONAL AFFECTIVE SOLIDARITY IN
21ST CENTURY INDIGENOUS MEXICAN REPRESENTATION

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By
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2019

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

INTIMATE INDIGENEITIES: ASPIRATIONAL AFFECTIVE SOLIDARITY IN 21ST CENTURY INDIGENOUS MEXICAN REPRESENTATION

This dissertation analyzes six contemporary texts (2008–18) that represent indigenous Mexicans to transnational audiences. Despite being disparate in authorship, genre, and mode of presentation, all address the failings of the Mexican state discourse of mestizaje that exalts indigenous antiquities while obfuscating the racialized socioeconomic hierarchies that marginalize contemporary indigenous peoples. Casting this conflict synecdochally as the national imposing itself on quotidian life, the texts help the reader/viewer come to understand it in personal, affective terms. The audience is encouraged to identify with how it feels to exist in a space where, paradoxically, the interruption of everyday life has become the status quo.

Questioning the status quo by appealing to international audiences, these texts form a contestatory current against state mestizaje within the same transnational networks of legitimation employed in the 19th and 20th centuries to promote it. In this way, the texts work to build political solidarity via affective means in order to promote and propagate in the popular discourse a questioning how the Mexican state apprehends its indigenous citizens. Ultimately, they seek more inclusive, representative governmental policies for indigenous peoples in Mexico without rejecting capitalist hegemony: they are articulating it against itself.

KEYWORDS: Indigeneity, Indigenous Studies, Indigenous Representation, Mexican Film and Literature, Transnational Representation, Postcolonial Studies

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DEDICATION

To Mónica Díaz: my mentor, my colleague, my friend.

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CHAPTER 1. (INTRODUCTION): A SHIFT IN INDIGENOUS REPRESENTATION

1.1 Context and Thesis

In the spring of 2018, two Mexican presidential candidates exchanged pointed jabs regarding the place of indigenous peoples in Mexico's political coalitions. In April, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (aka "AMLO," the eventual President and figurehead of the politically dominant "Juntos Haremos Historia" coalition), invited María de Jesús Patricia Martínez (aka "Marichuy," the candidate selected by the Congreso Internacional Indígena, or CNI), to join his left-leaning, populist political movement ("AMLO pide"). He extended this offer after Marichuy failed to collect the requisite number of signatures to appear on the national ballot, a situation that was controversial in its own right¹. Despite the invitation, by May the indigenous activist had refused AMLO's offer, citing her conviction that her supporters' best interests lay in the re-negotiation of the national socioeconomic status quo, i.e. the halting or restructuring of extractive, neocolonial practices that impoverish indigenous and non-indigenous Mexicans alike, thereby precluding their access to self-determination as Mexican citizens (Méndez).

By the time of AMLO's ultimate election, the two most high profile indigenous political organizations in the country—the Zapatistas and the CNI—were responding with consistent messaging despite their historically disparate approaches to national politics. It is important that indigenous groups operating both inside and outside the parameters of Mexico's governmental infrastructure find themselves in agreement because it reflects both a sense of shared racialized socioeconomic marginalization and a mutual

¹ For more on the controversy surrounding the final signature counts and their official certification, see Villoro.

consciousness of the Mexican populace's hesitancy to endorse revolutionary rhetoric as of late. The Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN or "Zapatistas"), a group in open rebellion against the Mexican state since the 1994 implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), expressed that a change of head-of-state was of little consequence because the country's elites would continue to exploit the lower classes (García)². By the same token, Marichuy and her advisors at the CNI denounced AMLO's party platform as espousing a corrupt socioeconomic worldview that will continue to marginalize, dispossess, or exterminate bio-ethnically indigenous people, going so far as to frame the electoral process that facilitates it as:

...un gran cochinerero, en el cual contiene quien pudo falsificar miles de firmas y quien tiene los miles de millones de pesos que le permiten coaccionar y comprar el voto, mientras la mayor parte del pueblo de México se debate entre la pobreza y la miseria. (Méndez)

Thus, Marichuy, the elected representative of the pacifist, ethnically coalitional CNI found herself aligned politically with the traditionally more subversive, militant voice of the EZLN in Chiapas. However, this is as much indicative of a radicalization the CNI as it is of a de-radicalization of the EZLN. The year 2017, for example, saw the Zapatistas endorse Marichuy, an oddity given that they have never before endorsed a candidate to the office of the presidency, which, as we have seen, they regard as a ceremonial post meant to dissimulate the administration's lack of capacity for change. At the same time, they have expressed a desire to avoid armed resistance going forward because they

² In a joint letter, the leadership of the movement stated: "“Podrán cambiar de capataz, los mayordomos y caporales, pero el finquero sigue siendo el mismo” (García).

recognize, as Jesús Silva-Herzog has summarized, “Political radicalism today has to be pacifist because the public, social and economic life in Mexico has been stained with blood for far too long” (Villegas).

In March of 2019, AMLO confirmed the suspicions of both Marichuy and the EZLN when he announced a series of national construction projects meant to stimulate the economy and develop rural areas, including a travel corridor through the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, an area under partial EZLN control (Alberto Morales). Marichuy summarized that this was yet another scheme to keep the upper class rich by taking away the land, food, and animals from indigenous peoples, who the government will no doubt coerce into signing contracts that they are incapable of understanding (“Marichuy a AMLO”). In a reluctant return to a more aggressive form, the EZLN responded defensively. Subcomandante Moisés declared, “Enfrentaremos a AMLO,” going on to state that they would prevent the fulfillment of the project in any way they could, including by force if necessary (Martín Pérez). Once again, both leaders used a similar vocabulary to paint AMLO as a “mañoso” (clever, manipulative) villain who hoodwinked the poor of Mexico into electing him only to have him take their lands and livelihoods for state projects that will disproportionately benefit the wealthy (Martín Pérez, “Marichuy a AMLO”).

Despite clear, vocal, and consistent rejection of AMLO’s leadership from the diverse indigenous sector, he has thus far remained remarkably tone-deaf regarding his role as their national representative. As a case-in-point, in a nationally televised press conference in front of the Mayan ruins at Comalcalco (also in March 2019), he requested that the King of Spain, Felipe VI, apologize to the indigenous peoples of Mexico for the

brutalities committed throughout the Colonial Period (Mancinas). In response to the news, Marichuy reiterated that AMLO does not represent her or the peoples of the CNI, and that the brutalities of the past are irrelevant while she and her allies grapple with the “despojos” of the present³. In a surprising turn, she cast aside entirely the question of the Spanish’s legacy of colonial brutality and foregrounded the state’s complicity in the continuation of similar abuses into the present. In this way, Marichuy brought to the fore the primary tension of indigenous representation in the 21st century: the state’s mendacious practice of superficially speaking and acting for indigenous peoples while continuing to promote policies that negatively affect their capacity for self-determination.

Given this constant back-and-forth between indigenous and governmental leadership in the news media, it is clear that the topic of indigenous representation is experiencing a cultural “moment” in which these peoples’ place in society has become a quotidian topic of conversation in popular discourse. More specifically, the last ten years have seen a boom in aspirational coalition building from within the hegemonic networks of production and distribution by indigenous peoples and their sympathetic allies⁴. As a testament to this fact, a film that features a Mixtec indigenous protagonist became a 2019 Oscar darling: Alfonso Cuarón’s historical drama *Roma* (2018). With a total of ten, it tied *The Favourite* (2018) for most total nominations, and took home three awards: Best Foreign Language Film, Best Cinematography, and Best Director. What’s more, it was

³ “Ha pasado tanto tiempo de eso que la mejor autoridad debe dejar de despojar las tierras y dejar de darle en la torre a los pueblos” (Mancinas).

⁴ While such discourses certainly existed before this period, they emerged from the polarizing resistance figures EZLN leaders, whose armed militancy made them unsympathetic figures to domestic audiences. However, as noted above, the EZLN has recognized this and has chosen to articulate hegemonic power structures –like the electoral process– rather than privileging revolutionary rhetoric (Villegas).

the first film featuring on-screen use of a Mesoamerican indigenous language to be nominated for Best Picture and its lead, Yalitza Aparicio, became the first indigenous Mexican ever considered for an Oscar. Although *Roma* is currently the most salient example in popular culture, the representation of indigenous peoples abounds in contemporary film, narrative, poetry, theater, and visual media. For instance, Jayro Bustamante's 2015 French-Guatemalan produced, Kaqchikel-Maya-language drama *Ixcanul* as well as Spanish director Icíar Bollaín's Spanish, Mexican, and French produced *También la lluvia* (2010) amassed their own impressive collections of accolades on the international festival and awards circuits. In February 2019, the trend continued with the release of the film *José*, which follows the life of a gay, indigenous young man in Guatemala City. At this point in time, the trend seems to be growing.

In order to better understand the growing prevalence of relatable, non-threatening indigenous protagonists in contemporary cultural production, this dissertation analyzes six contemporary texts⁵ (2008–18) that represent the condition of indigenous Mexicans to transnational, hegemonic audiences. As a group, they use affective storytelling techniques to build political solidarity across racial and economic lines in order to challenge the domestic status quo. Namely, they represent and encourage audiences to recognize the conflict between racialized socioeconomic hierarchies that marginalize indigenous peoples, and *mestizaje*: the state discourse that exalts Aztec and Maya antiquities as part of its national identity paradigm. Casting this conflict synecdochally as the national imposing itself on quotidian life, the texts help the consumer come to

⁵ I mean “text” in its broadest sense, here: “something (such as a story or movie) considered as an object to be examined, explicated, or deconstructed” (“Text”)

understand it in personal, affective terms: we *feel* what it means to exist in a space where, paradoxically, the interruption of everyday life has become the status quo and self-determination is difficult, if not impossible. In doing so, this dissertation argues that these texts seek legitimation from transnational audiences because domestic paradigms of indigenous political incorporation have proved ineffective, leading to continued, and even intensified, marginalization. Therefore, in a significant reversal, they articulate the same transnational networks of legitimation once used to promote Mexico as a mestizo nation-state to now encourage potential political allies to denounce state mestizaje as a homogenizing discourse of power that disenfranchises, dispossesses, and exterminates indigenous peoples.

1.2 Being Indigenous in the Nation-State: from *Indigenismo* to *Indigeneit(ies)*

The terminology employed to discuss indigenous peoples and their representation in hegemonic media is varied and inconsistent because the field of Indigenous Studies is fragmentary and interdisciplinary in nature, existing across the fields of Anthropology, History, Linguistics, Literature, Pedagogy, and Political Science, just to name a few. Furthermore, Indigenous Studies scholars work on various regions, where indigenous peoples' experiences, representations, and political machinations vary wildly. Because of the piecemeal nature of our work, it is necessary that we define terms outright to prevent confusion. In fact, the Latinx activist-scholar Tlakatekatl pointed out in a 2014 blog post entitled, "The Problem with Indigeneity," that the term *indigeneity* itself lacks a rigorous, standard academic definition that is widely accepted across the disciplines. He summarizes that the term most often appears in legal documentation, where it also lacks an explicit definition, most often having to do with societies that pre-date colonization

processes in various regions of the world. Therefore, he proposes as a starting point the following tentative:

...the state or quality inherent to an indigenous group—or individual, that exemplifies their position as an original people who inhabit and were born, or produced naturally, in a given land or region, including their descendants and relations thereof. (Original emphasis)

However, this definition simply provides a base, superficial understanding of the word in its adjectival form, giving little hint as to its symbolic weight in various discourses and much less its significance as a noun in academic jargon.

Edward S. Casey's notion of the "geographical self" provides a useful taxonomy of spatial being, which can help us to shed light on the ontology of the indigenous subject on the way to defining indigeneity. For Casey, the Body is the conduit by which the agentive subject receives input; it is a processing apparatus for stimuli. Within the Body exists the Self, the agentive, identitary construct that responds to stimuli apprehended via the sensory apparatus of the Body. The Self inhabits a Place, which is simply a space with meaning assigned to it by virtue of lived practice. Further, Casey refers to a cluster of interconnected places as a Landscape. He theorizes that the Body and its Landscape are in a constant feedback loop, making them distinguishable but intimately related⁶, meaning that a subject's identification with a space is as much a matter of lived practice as

⁶ This distinction is key because it sets Casey apart from Aristotelian spatial essentialism, which posits that bodies are the result of their geographical circumstances, and therefore made either superior or inferior by virtue of the habitability of their climate. This theory has at times been used to justify racist ideologies, suggesting that darker skin people are less intelligent because their climate involves more survival work, and therefore less intellectual work (Aristotle, Livingstone 160). I revisit this term in Chapter 2.

of material inhabitation. Adapting Tlakatekatl's definition of indigeneity to Casey's spatio-cultural understanding of identity, we can say that being indigenous exists at the nexus of habitation and praxis: being indigenous means inhabiting a Landscape where Body and Landscape participate in mutually transformative feedback loops to ontologically generate a geographical Self that would self-identify as ethnically indigenous. However, being indigenous, just as "Amerindian," or "of First Peoples/Nations," etc., is a matter of comparison. These terms qualify these peoples' identities as representative of a deviant lived experience and, by extension, of a deviant ontology within a national or supra-national territory. This means that "indigenous" or "indigeneity," as adjectival modifiers, sometimes appear as a threat to hegemonic society, and may work in service to hegemonic actors, providing a pretense for the exclusion or forced assimilation of these peoples, as was the case in Mexico throughout much of the twentieth century (See Chapter 2, Section 3).

Apprehending indigenous peoples as deviant and backwards, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw the rise of the Indigenista movement, which sought to assimilate them into various modern nation-states via the process of acculturation. Analisa Taylor has summarized that in Mexico "Indigenismo" connotes a politico-aesthetic discourse emergent from the ruling class; "[it is] a social scientific paradigm wedded to a set of government institutions and policies as well as an aesthetic sensibility that has shaped a great deal of twentieth century Mexican art and culture" (2, emphasis mine). Put another way, Indigenismo is a state discourse that seeks to incorporate indigenous peoples into the nation's imaginary and politics to serve the interests of the state itself. In particular, the state sought both to solidify its sovereignty on the international stage (against the

claims of the United States, in particular) and to strengthen its mandate over the disparate political and ethnic factions within its territory (Tarica). It did this under the banner of mestizaje, or race mixing, a rhetoric that anointed the mestizo (mixed-race individual) as the ideal Mexican: half-European and half-indigenous. However, because it is a top-down approach to indigenous incorporation into hegemonic structures, Indigenismo is an assimilationist or “acculturating” movement rather than a mutually transformative, “transcultural” one. In fact, the Cuban scholar Fernando Ortiz roundly criticized Latin American Indigenista movements as failed transculturations (94).

In his 1999 essay, “I am where i think: Epistemology and the colonial difference”, Walter Mignolo posits that discourses emerge from localizable places and that the epistemology of the enunciator determines their contents (239). Therefore, we can understand that the Mexican state defined the significance of the word “indigenous” in contrast to the mestizo norm, marking it as an adjectival modifier of spatio-cultural deviance. However, in implementing mestizaje-oriented policies, it concretely modified the landscapes of indigenous communities in order to reduce deviance from the new mestizo norm. Claudio Lomnitz summarizes the mission of Indigenista practitioners as, “forging Mexican citizenship both by ‘indigenizing’ modernity and by modernizing the Indians, thus uniting all Mexicans in one mestizo community” (231). However, modernity received only superficial aesthetic changes in the form of a hybrid national iconographic tradition, while indigenous communities saw their landscapes, and therefore their identities, fundamentally altered. As Guillermo Bonfil Batalla pointed out in his foundational work *Mexico profundo: una civilización negada* (1987), Indigenista policies constituted a concerted, wholesale “de-Indianization” of the territory by means of

assimilationist educational programs, land reforms, and other political incorporation techniques (*Mexico*, 17)). Just in terms of the linguistic consequences, it led to a precipitous drop-off in indigenous language use beginning in the 1930s that endures to this day (“Instituto”). Therefore, it is important to consider the positionality and directionality of these discourses, as they often serve to problematize the continuity of these cultures.

In the last few years, a countercurrent to Indigenismo has emerged in indigenous representation in which authors and activists strategically encourage the public to question state discourses regarding indigenous peoples in an effort to build political solidarity and affect change. Dominic O’Sullivan refers to this as “Indigeneity,” defining it as a noun that signifies, “a developing theory of justice and political strategy used by indigenous peoples to craft their own terms of belonging to the nation state” (35). In Mexico’s case, Indigeneity emerges as an inversion of Indigenismo: a contestatory discourse that utilizes the same hegemonic networks of legitimation as Indigenista discourses, such as schools, transnational production and distribution companies, governmental institutions, etc. As opposed to Indigenismo, which emerges from the subject position of the state, Indigeneity emerges from the heterogeneous subject positions of indigenous peoples, sometimes by means of their political allies. For this reason, Indigeneity has two important caveats. First, as a contestatory current a homogenizing discourse, it is more of a loose trend than a movement. It emerges organically from various subject positions and has variegated conjugations. Second, but related, those various conjugations are highly reflective of individual- and community-level lived experiences. That is, there is a tendency to oppose the macro discourse of

mestizaje with a series of polyvalent micro Indigenities. Therefore, the movement is only unitary in the sense that the enunciations seek to oppose state mestizaje and its related policies as they currently stand.

The loose political and representative trend of Indigeneity stands in contrast to the post-Indigenista movement where state actors internally questioned the ethics of Indigenismo as the effects of de-Indianization began to materialize (Taylor 39, 55). For example, during the period of post-Indigenismo, State-sponsored (or otherwise ingrained, hegemonic) mainstream editorials published authors like Castellanos and Poniatowska, while current indigenous-related texts emerge from a variety of sources and do so with less overt state backing (or none at all). Under Indigeneity, indigenous peoples are agents who recognize their status as nominally deviant subjects but also articulate state technologies of power to assert their rights. However, the success of these machinations rests squarely upon the recognition that state mestizaje fails not only to adequately represent them, but also the totality of the national population. As Lund and Acosta have reasoned, confining the concept of hybridity to a territory in order to use it as a national identitary paradigm:

...can only prove more ideological than real, for ... hybridity as a concept in Latin America is inextricably bound to notions of race and, as such, relies on many unfounded assumptions about cultural and biological reproductions that are simply impossible to confirm⁷ (Lund 48 in Acosta 36)

⁷ The inferred “simply impossible to confirm” factors include the exact levels of biological miscegenation within a given population, individual and collective inter-ethnic self-identification, etc.

In understanding mestizaje as biologically and ethnically false in a general sense, Indigeneity in Mexico operates based not only upon a revelatory mechanism that reveals the persistent, racialized hierarchies of power (insofar that they stunt indigenous self-determination), but also on the presupposition that this is true of most national identities. It is therefore a sympathetic, appealing discourse to represent to a hegemonic audience. That is, “the state doesn’t represent me” is effective, and affecting, political messaging for building solidarity in a nation-state that predicates its identity on false transculturation, especially in a historical moment of widespread violence and economic strife.

1.3 Affective Solidarity under Neocolonialism

Contemporary Latin American indigenous representation foregrounds the experience of subjects living under neocolonial regimes of power in order to build solidarity between indigenous subjects and their audiences, who also similarly struggle in this context. Neocoloniality is the spatiotemporal relationship a historically decolonized nation has with imperial powers. For our purposes here, imperialism is defined as, “an economic system of penetration and control of markets,” articulated by the “metropole” (the imperial power) that uses, “relations of dependency and control [to] ensure captive labour as well as markets for ... industry as well as goods (Loomba 11–12). From time to time, as is the case for much of the field of Latin American Studies, the term “coloniality” appears in lieu of neocoloniality in order to emphasize the continuity of extractive colonial infrastructure in the present day. Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui summarize in *Coloniality at Large: Latin American and the Postcolonial Debate* (2008) that terms like “postcolonial” and “neocolonial” run the risk

of signifying a clean historical severing of colonial praxis and a complete transition to national sovereignty for former colonial nations following decolonization. This is not the case. Rather, they explain, many of these nations' governments went on to make a "neocolonial pact" with imperial powers like Europe and the United States in which, "international capital and national elites ... perpetuated relations of international dependency and social inequality in the region" (11, 14). Thus, neocoloniality signifies the economic exploitation of a nation's citizenry via the articulation and maintenance of extant colonial infrastructure by nominally sovereign governments whose political elites gain power and wealth by serving the interests of imperial nations⁸.

Although the concept of coloniality is a useful shorthand that reveals the continuity of economically incentivized abuses in nominally decolonized nations, it fields the critique of still relying on a historicized and binary understanding of the colonizer/colonized relationship. Notably, Abraham Acosta specifically characterizes Moraña, et al.'s volume as buying-in to a historiographical understanding of postcolonialism that reduces a system of rhetorical deconstruction to a "historical moment." He goes on to summarize that, "postcolonial thought reads and traces the critical contradictions of the colonized-colonizer binary [discourse]," rather than an abrupt shift between historical colonialism and neocolonialism (38–39). Although I cannot endorse Acosta's wholesale dismissal of coloniality as a productive, academic

⁸ Fernando Coronil has recognized the tension between imperial and nation hegemonies. Because the latter is politically subaltern to the former, he calls for an understanding of the neocolonial hegemonic/subaltern relationship that determines their positionality relatively. That is, elites that are locally hegemonic are transnationally subaltern, and those at the bottom are doubly marginalized (644). I discuss the implications of this argument further in Chapter 3, Section 3.1

concept, his point that a historical-economic approach to the colonial condition nominally encourages practitioners to replace the actors rather than reconfigure the relationship entirely. Despite this astute and relevant point, Acosta mischaracterizes Moraña, et al.'s discussion of historical postcolonialism in making it. In that section of the edition, the authors are discussing the tendency in many Latin American scholars to find loose, often semantically based reasons to resist nonlocal theories of difference in order to assert epistemic autonomy. Moraña, et al. are not entirely reducing, as he argues, postcolonialism to a question of a historical moment. In the introduction, they make clear that:

...history[ies] should not be written as only a mere enumeration of grievances [...] that renders testimony of the enduring effects of colonial domination and its importance as a determining factor in Latin American historical development. This heterogeneous history must be written, also, as an account that includes multiple voices, actions, and dreams that have contributed to shaping the collective expression of political rebellion against external aggressions, discrimination, marginality, and social inequality (10)

Thus, it would seem that although Acosta understandably resists the historization of postcolonial critique and its consequent potential to reshuffle binary understandings of dominance, all seem to seek to represent the heterogeneity of resistance in Latin America. Acosta's critique is instructive, however, insofar that it encourages scholars to deconstruct the colonizer/colonized binary in order to understand how the binary re-authorizes itself. Put another way, apprehending a political actor as subaltern (in a dichotomous fashion) relegates them to a zone of unassailable incomprehensibility and

forecloses analysis of how these agentive actors may resist domination from within the hegemonic systems of power, to which they do undoubtedly have access (56).

When it comes to indigenous studies, destabilizing the colonizer/colonized and hegemonic/subaltern binaries helps us to see how their contemporary representations aim at the “retrenchment” rather than displacement of colonial and neocolonial thought (Acosta 38). In fact, as I will argue of the texts in this dissertation, indigenous authors and their allies in Mexico are taking advantage of the public’s understanding of the colonizer/colonized binary specifically to subvert it in a quasi-“colonizer vs. colonizer” fashion. That is, they play on hegemonic audience’s expectations and emotions in order to encourage them to act in solidarity with indigenous peoples to promote a more polyvalent discourse that would code cultural heterogeneity as a positive value (which post-Indigenista state mestizaje currently does) and back up this stance with state capital (which it currently does not). They do this by framing their narratives in such a way that they transmit political information via their emotional conceits. Via a strategic process of affective transference, they invite the reader/viewer identify with the protagonist’s struggles in order to make alternatively sympathetic or empathetic arguments for social justice.

The concept of affective transference emerges from the field of affect studies, which concerns itself with codifying and analyzing the embodied experience of the feeling subject. The term “affect” itself is often used interchangeably with “emotion.” However, as Brian Massumi argues in the introduction to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*, it is, rather, “...prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an

augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act" (xvii). That is, an affect is a visceral feeling that precedes emotion, whereas emotion is the processing and subsequent qualification of affect by a thinking subject. As Massumi notes in the above definition, affect can augment or diminish a body's capacity to act. This works well with Casey's understanding of the Body as a processing apparatus caught in reciprocal feedback loops with its lived space, or Landscape (discussed in the previous section). Here, affects would be stimuli originating from a Landscape, apprehended by the Body, and processed by the Self. Because the Body and Landscape inform one another's production, affect can be said to be a constitutive element of a geographic subject's ontological development, i.e. the strategic manipulation of affective stimuli can change the experience and, by extension, the identity of an individual. Therefore, as many have noted, a useful tool for increasing intersubjective political solidarity is the transmission or transference of affective experience via media wherein affect cultivates pathos between individuals. (Hemmings 22, Juris 65, Lynch and Kalaitzake 7–8)

In Latin American film studies, Laura Podalsky has written extensively on the merging of politics and affect in the region's contemporary cinema, which I would argue is applicable to other modes of representation, as well. In her book *The Politics of Affect and Emotion in Contemporary Latin America* (2011), she argues that 21st century Latin American cinema (LAC) has seen a sensorial turn in which they organize, "their formal properties, their modes of address, and their engagement with contemporary political discourses," around affecting the audience (7). At the same time, she summarizes—though stops short of outright agreeing—that the privileging of the sensorial over the political is a mark of contemporary cinema's inherent bend toward political Conservatism. As

opposed to the New Latin American Cinema of the 1960s and 70s that presented overtly subversive, political content that alternatively shocked or delighted different factions, contemporary LAC seemingly seeks to appeal to hegemonic audiences and deliver political messages in an under-the-radar fashion (5, 7). However, the critique that this mode of filmmaking is politically conservative seems to play into the expectation that political discourse be aggressively confrontational in order to be transformative.

Although these contemporary texts are “small-c” conservative in terms of their technical construction and generally inoffensive narratives (films or otherwise), they are still aimed at political transformation, and are arguably having an impact – at least insofar that indigenous representation in the 21st century is concerned. For example, the prevalence of *Roma*’s lead actor Yalitza Aparicio in Mexican popular culture has provoked a productive debate regarding the place of indigenous peoples in the nation that cannot be understated, one that runs parallel to the ongoing ALMO-Marichuy/EZLN dialogues in the media.

Synthesizing the present discussions of neocolonialism and affective transference, the rest of this dissertation argues textual exemplars of Mexican Indigeneity (the loose cultural tendency to use hegemonic transnational networks of legitimation to de-legitimize state mestizaje) privilege affective communication to win over transnational audiences to their cause. It is possible to consider them indicative of what has been referred to as the “affective turn”: a larger epistemic shift in Western thought and politics from vertical, hierarchical reason to horizontal, democratic affect. As Dierdra Reber has summarized, the use of affect to communicate ideas and to assail hierarchies (both political and logical) is polyvalent, emerging from a diversity of political camps who feel

disenfranchised—or imminently disenfranchised—under the current system (63). She argues that affect has become culturally hegemonic during the late-capitalism of the post-USSR period, creating a rival epistemic paradigm to capitalist growth: capitalist homeostasis. Under this episteme, the hierarchies that govern neocolonial societies have become “headless” and self-governing, self-regulating towards somatic wellbeing: “the organically equitable networked distribution of resources and wealth” (91–92). This is consonant with Acosta’s call to lay aside the hierarchical colonial discourses of the past in order to deconstruct the relationship the colonizer/colonized relationship. However, although it is possible that the episteme of capitalist homeostasis has superseded hierarchical reasoning, that does not mean it has entirely eclipsed it. Rather, these epistemic modes are rivals at odds with one another and the interplay between them is as important as recognizing their existence.

The progressive questioning and aspirational dissolution of (neo)colonial hierarchies brought on by the larger epistemic shift towards affect accounts for two otherwise striking (even baffling at first glance) factors in the texts of this dissertation. First, the texts espouse similar political viewpoints and structural concerns despite their disparate authorship, production, modes, target audiences, and represented ethnicities. Second, they all address hegemonic audiences in normative hegemonic modes of representation, despite representing traditionally “subaltern” subjects. However, they are framed in such a way as to challenge hegemonic apprehensions of indigenous identity from within its own networks of legitimation. Put simply: these authors do not know each other and write different media for different demographics: why are they so similar in how they approach the unsettling of state mestizaje? I would argue that this is the

unsettling of capitalist epistemes in action, using new modes of affective reasoning to challenge the racialized, socioeconomic hierarchies of (neo)colonialism.

1.4 Project Roadmap

In order to understand the biopolitical colonial discourse of indigeneity that contemporary texts of Mexican Indigeneity actively work to subvert, a large part of this study entails a detailed summary of its history. This is because any discussion of the place of indigenous peoples in a nation-state is best grounded in the historical and material specificity of the histories, nation, and ethnicities involved. Chapter Two, entitled “Abstract Indigeneity: Dissecting Mexico’s Historical Apprehensions of Indigeneity,” traces the history of indigenous representation in Mexico from the Colonial Period to the Present, emphasizing the continuity and interconnectedness of indigenous economic exploitation and representation. Although not an exhaustive study, it provides a detailed overview of the tropological history of indigenous representation in the territory that would become Mexico in the early 19th century. It identifies two key temporal inflection points wherein major shifts in identitary triangulation occurred in the territory, directly affecting the apprehension of indigenous peoples in political discourse, as evinced by coetaneous writings or representations. The first shift took place during the early settlement of Mexico, when the newly arrived Spanish authorities sought to re-organize the complex patchwork of indigenous ethnic states and internal class structures. Referring to the disparate peoples of New Spain (and later in the Americas in general) as a catch-all, legal category of *Indios*, they initiated a process of cultural homogenization that aimed to evangelize the indigenous peoples they encountered. For our purposes here,

it is important to understand “evangelization” as not just an epistemic re-orientation, but simultaneously an economic one, as the feudal nature of the Spanish Crown bound these two elements closely together.

I then argue that the second inflection point began with the post-Independence economic liberalization of the territory (~1865) and stretched well into the post-Revolutionary period (~1965). During this time, The United Mexican States (Mexico) became a modern, capitalist nation-state that sought to articulate its own unique national identity. In doing so, it drew on the pre-existing, elitist Creole phenomenon of Colonial Antiquarianism⁹ that presented Aztec and Maya antiquities as cultural analogues to those of Greece and Rome. In this way, being Mexican became a matter of *mestizaje*, or participation in a grand tradition of race mixing, that elevated the nation through the intercultural exchange of both blood and ideas. This simultaneously cast bio-ethnic homogeneity as being antithetical to progress, once again relegating ethnically homogenous indigenous peoples to the margins of society. However, as opposed to the Colonial Period, wherein cultural syncretism was the norm in the evangelization process, this period saw the State enact a robust, educational movement whose long-term effect was the hispanization and de-Indianization¹⁰ of many communities, as evinced by a precipitous drop-off in Mexico’s linguistic diversity (“Instituto”). Chapter Two concludes with a discussion that considers the possibility that we are likely living through a third

⁹ Anna More uses this term in her book *Baroque Sovereignty: Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora and the Creole Archive of Colonial Mexico* (2013) to describe the appropriation and secularization of Central Mexican indigenous iconography by criollo colonial elites to argue for their political and administrative sovereignty vis-à-vis transatlantic discourses that subjugated them (i.e. they were relatively subaltern to Spain).

¹⁰ See: Bonfil Batalla, *México profundo* 17, 105.

inflection point wherein indigenous peoples are using hegemonic modes of representation to re-articulate their languages and cultures in spite of the State.

Chapter Three, entitled “Incidental Indigeneity: Empathetic Pathos and the Ethics of Invisibility,” analyzes three texts in which the indigenous identity of a main character is incidental to the cause-and-effect of the narrative, but ultimately an important factor that will inform the reading of the piece. I argue that these texts present indigenous readings as ancillary in order to facilitate an empathetic (intersubjective) connection between the protagonists and the audience. Eschewing alienating aesthetic choices like the use of indigenous languages or documentary modes of representation, they privilege more relatable concerns (like economic exploitation, water rights, or land seizures) in order to privilege the empathetic connection between the protagonist and viewer. The texts considered are: *Sleep Dealer* (2008), a dystopian cyberpunk film by Alex Rivera; *Made in Mexico* (2018), an anti-Trump reality show about upper-class Mexicans living in Mexico City; and *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo* (2009), a coming-of-age migration novel by Yuri Herrera. In all three texts, a main character is coded as indigenous, but it is not a fact critical to the plot, i.e. one could consume the text without taking notice of it. However, I contend that the recognition of a character’s implicit or declared indigeneity has a profound effect on the text’s interpretation, providing either a complementary reading that supports the content of the plot, or a supplementary reading that subverts it. For instance, in *Sleep Dealer*, the film reads superficially as a migration film, but recognizing the presence of an implicit challenge to state mestizaje (via audiovisual racial coding) marks the exploitation of the protagonist, Memo, and his pueblo as an economic problem symptomatic of State-backed racialized hierarchies of

power, rather than simply an economic one.

Chapter Four, entitled “Documentary Indigeneity: Sympathetic Pathos and Authorial Framing,” analyzes three texts that foreground the indigeneity of their characters. Unlike in the texts of incidental indigeneity, these protagonists present as unambiguously indigenous, usually via the use of Amerindian languages and race-oriented casting choices. I argue that these texts all operate in a performative documentary mode, meaning that they work to privilege the affective connection between audience and subject via strategic paratextual, structural, and thematic choices. In these texts, they use these techniques to bridge the communicative gap produced by presenting a more “authentic”—but ultimately alienating—protagonist that is linguistically and culturally subaltern. Like the texts of incidental indigeneity, they all privilege a reader/viewer-subject dialectic in order to transmit affectively their conceits, but these texts must do so by cultivating sympathy (objective identification) rather than empathy (intersubjective identification) as a result of unavoidably Othering its protagonist/s. Here, the protagonists do not narrate nor overtly reflect on their circumstances in any way. Instead, the texts themselves work to evoke more visceral responses from the audience via structural and technical choices, leading one’s “gut” to respond to and promote rumination on the conceit of the text in question. The texts considered are *Café: cantos de humo* (2014), a Nahuatl-language documentary film by Hatuey Viveros Lavielle; *Nemiliztli tlen ce momachtihquetl* (2011), a Nahuatl-language didactic play used for language revitalization; and *Roma* (2018), the Oscars darling mentioned earlier in the opening to this introduction.

In my conclusions, I synthesize the analyses of Chapters Two, Three, and Four

and argue that Incidental- and Documentary Indigeneity represent poles on a spectrum of contemporary indigenous representation. What appears to be the determining factor regarding the type of representation employed in a hegemonic-audience-facing narrative seems to be the indigenous protagonists' perceived levels of anti-hegemonic aggression. That is, there is an inverse relationship between how much a character resists the advent of state economic and identitary hegemony and how explicitly indigenous a portrayal codes them. In *Sleep Dealer* (2008), the racial coding is so subtle as to be overlook-able, and ends with Memo helping with (though not initiating) the destruction a dam in Oaxaca. Conversely, *Roma* (2018) prominently foregrounds Cleo's Mixtec identity, but ends with her submitting stoically and (mostly) passively to the status quo. Therefore, despite the fact that all of the texts are consistent insofar that they elect to represent the socioeconomic inequities obfuscated by the rhetoric of mestizaje, they do this carefully: in direct proportion to the hegemonic audience's racially informed capacity to accept deviance from the norm. By casting it as a positive trait associated primarily with positive, passive model minorities who contribute to the State, these texts work to re-assert the role of indigenous peoples in the history and success of Mexico. However, they are not presenting alternate epistemologies. Instead, the texts challenge racialized hierarchies from *within* to encourage the public at large to consider the State's treatment of its indigenous citizens and thereby, hopefully, demand substantive policy changes over time.

If we use this understanding of contemporary indigenous representation to shed light on AMLO's fraught relationship with indigenous political factions, we can see that AMLO and his generation of politicians, generally speaking, still apprehend the

indigenous peoples as part of a homogenous, mestizo body politic. However, transnational popular discourse is now explicitly working to challenge that ontology of mestizaje by highlighting the racialized socioeconomic hierarchies that support it. In essence, AMLO is tone-deaf when it comes to indigenous representation because he fails to recognize this distinction. As Marichuy put it, there is solidarity to be found between Mexico's indigenous and Mexico's poor because of their mutual, overlapping, and ongoing exploitation by the ruling, political class that has endured since the Colonial Period. Let us revisit her quote from our initial discussion, paying particular attention to the end of the enunciation:

El proceso electoral es un gran cochinerero, en el cual contiene quien pudo falsificar miles de firmas y quien tiene los miles de millones de pesos que le permiten coaccionar y comprar el voto, *mientras la mayor parte del pueblo de México se debate entre la pobreza y la miseria.* (Méndez, my emphasis)

As we can see, she identifies adjectival indigeneity as weaponized by the state as an expired colonial of discourse of power that means to insulate neocolonial elites from the consequences of their economic practices. She is aware of a mutual, affective connection between indigenous Mexicans and other disenfranchised citizens on the basis of their shared suffering under these regimes of power, and presents an anticipatory, aspirational rhetoric of solidarity.

If the present study means to inform our understanding of any one thing in particular, it is that the popular discourse regarding indigeneity is shifting, and that the ultimate goal is certainly not to solicit vacuous apologies from Spain for its colonial abuses. Rather, the trending, utopic aspiration seems to be agentive, conscious self-

determination for indigenous individuals within the nation state contingent upon the active dissolution of the racialized hierarchies that inhibit such a reality by indigenous and non-indigenous political actors alike.

CHAPTER 2. ABSTRACT INDIGENEITY: DISSECTING MEXICO'S HISTORICAL APPREHENSIONS OF INDIGENEITY

“Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity.”

-Chimamanda Adichie, “The Danger of the Single Story”

2.1 Absolute vs. Abstract Space and Abstract Indigeneity

This chapter provides a history of the ever-evolving polemics of indigenous representation from Columbus to the present day by identifying key inflection points in the ongoing debate regarding indigenous peoples' place in the alternatively colonial and national territory –in the cultural imagi(nation), if you will– in order to highlight the perennial power imbalance in these identitary debates. In doing so, it will establish a basis on which to understand the shift that has occurred in the 21st century that Chapters 3 and 4 analyze in detail. By means of an interdisciplinary analysis that includes questions of politics, economics, demography, history, ethnography, and literature, I hope to demonstrate here that cultural elites in the region have almost uniformly abstracted, or “disembodied,” the debate into one of *Abstract Indigeneity* (the abstract idea of having indigenous heritage) rather than one of *Embodied Indigeneity* (those who would self-identify as ethnically indigenous based on their lived practice). In this way, the debate and its many iterations have been one geared towards statuses, rather than material well-being: a debate over cultural capital and the access thereto, rather than a debate between (and about) the roles of two equally agentic members of the body politic. The debate

overwhelmingly regards “the indigenous question”, i.e. what to *do about the perceived obstacle to progress* (during the both Colonial Period’s evangelization processes and the Modern/Neocolonial Period’s nationalization processes¹¹) that are Mexico’s indigenous peoples, rather than how to incorporate them as equal members of a society.

I contend that disembodied indigeneity –always discussing it in the abstract, global sense– has had two serious consequences. First, it has led to a historical narrative wherein the lettered class has obfuscated indigenous peoples, both past and present, from the public consciousness by virtue of treating them as objects, rather than as interlocutors. Taking a page from feminist theory, Michelle Caswell calls this process “symbolic annihilation” and contends that it contributes directly to a general lack of concern for the well-being of the peoples it affects (27). Second, treating indigeneity as a status rather than an embodied identity has allowed the hegemonic power structure to strategically appropriate aspects of indigeneity they find aesthetically pleasing and metaphysically convenient while obfuscating the tangible, material concerns of indigenous peoples. This process is widely known in sociological and ethnological circles as cultural appropriation. Focusing on these two consequences, my review of the historical apprehension of indigeneity highlights how it both did and did not evolve over time: different political contexts provoked debates about the status of indigenous peoples and cultures, but (until recently) they were intra-party polemics that treated these peoples as *material* to

¹¹ As a healthy reminder, this dissertation is tracing indigenous representation in political and popular culture. In point of fact, the evangelization and modernization projects were wide-reaching and affected various ethnicities in various regions in manifold ways (despite some trends being more or less generalizable, like language loss). I provide this broad-strokes chapter *only* to guide the reader to a general understanding of the status of indigenous representation up until the 21st century in order to more coherently discuss the shift that is occurring and why it is important.

progress, but not *party* to progress.

Often, cultural actors frame their representations of indigeneity or indigenous peoples around questions of time and progress (meaning change over time), both of which are abstract concepts that operate unidirectionally, benefiting the framers more than the subjects. For example, our current economy perceives progress to be the result of social and technological change, innovation, and advancement. That relationship can be represented as a function of change in a lived place over time [$f(\text{time}) = \int (\text{space}) dx$]. Henri Lefebvre calls this theoretical concept Architectonics, describing time as the consecutive overlaying of one space onto another (space as being integrated –in the mathematical sense– over time) (229). While the concept of Architectonics lines up nicely with Casey’s idea that the geographical self participates in feedback loops with the environment (See Chapter 1: 7–8, 15), it is dangerous to link the idea of positive cultural change to a function of capital-driven progress. This is because such a rhetorical move stigmatizes and devalues the lifestyles and tangible contributions of societal actors that are content to subsist in mono-cultural contexts or simply conceptualize cultural progress differently than does the State. Often, this can lead to the perception that they are “backwards” or “primitive” and serve as an epistemic driver of symbolic annihilation. Or, as Adorno, Horkheimer, and Caswell argue, very real annihilation (Horkheimer 137-38, Caswell “Past Imperfect”). Nonetheless, Lefebvre’s Architectonics is useful insofar that it elucidates –and therefore allows for the critique of– the underlying notions of linear, progressive time that permeate many of the debates regarding indigeneity and lead directly spatial domination.

Despite Lefebvre’s “architectonics” favoring a particular notion of accumulative

time, it does prove to be helpful in describing the socioeconomic structures at play whenever the question of the status of indigenous peoples arose. In this chapter, I highlight two critical moments in which the status of indigenous peoples and their cultures came into question. Each time it was part of a larger cultural re-orientation regarding the apprehension of space and lived spatial practices. Thus, we can understand the history of Mexico and its indigenous politics as layered, with each status shift being both preceded-and followed by relevant changes in lived practice. They are the temporal inflection points demarcating the moments when the material society reacted formally via its governing institutions, re-articulating the hegemonic discourse in response to underlying, tectonic shifts spatial practices.

I identify the major inflection points as coming to a head in (1) ca. 1540-1552 with the promulgation of the New Laws by the Catholic Kings Ferdinand and Isabella and the Valladolid Debate, and (2) ca. 1865-1930 with the conclusion of the Mexican Revolution and the advent of secular education. In each case, decades of shifts in spatial practice led to the need (or perceived need) to revisit the status of indigenous peoples within the newly established networks of power. In both cases, the cultural renegotiation of indigeneity as a status only served to further abstract indigenous peoples from their cultural patrimony¹².

In spatial terms, we can understand these shifts as points of high tension between absolute and abstract spatial practices. Henri Lefebvre defines “absolute space” as the

¹² Though I present these two inflection points as major shifts in the apprehension of indigeneity in Mexico, this does not mean that they are the only ones. The question of the status of indigenous peoples has always been a pressing concern in Mexican history. However, I believe that these two inflection points best represent evolution of the discourse.

result of assigning symbolic meaning to an arbitrary, naturally occurring geographical location. This action converts the site into a political entity that functionally reproduces its own societal discourses and hierarchies via ritual feedback loops (48). Lefebvre further theorizes that absolute spaces are “at once civil and religious” with the tendency to recodify natural relationships as political ones, concretizing (sometimes literally) a wide range of ideas about interpersonal relations such as patrilineal inheritance, the notion of sexual orthodoxy and/or deviance, etc. (48). It is the space of tradition, stability, and the status quo. On the other hand, “abstract space” organizes itself around the interests of capital. Whereas absolute space involves a reciprocal exchange of labor for protection and subsistence goods between social elites and the lower class (often leaving subsistence structures and local practices intact) the latter is much more pervasive. Abstract space upends and fragments local economies of power and alienates workers from their labor, e.g. it replaces purposeful subsistence practices with repetitive jobs devoid of symbolic meaning that are acutely sensitive to the hiccups of the global economy (49-50). At both of the inflection points, abstract spatial practices reached a point where they were no longer (or no longer perceived to be) tenable, and access to absolute structures was adjusted in response as a compensatory move.

The first shift denotes the abstraction of specific indigenous people into the homogenizing legal category of *Indio* (Indian). This was an ambivalent act –like all of the shifts discussed– that the Catholic Kings carried out in response to abuses by local colonial authorities. However, it also served to privilege the dilution of pre-existing, Amerindian social hierarchies by lumping all indigenous people into one legal category, despite the benefits it ostensibly afforded them as a protected “class.” This led to *Indio*

becoming a legal status of which to take advantage, thus leading to the abuse of the category and the earliest signs of cultural appropriation, here affected by the *criollo* (European-descended, American-born) class. These colonial elites developed a rhetoric of spatial hybridity that appropriated birth in the America's a type of upper-class indigeneity that they leveraged to question the continued role of the weakening Monarchy in the New World. As a result, indigenous peoples in the late colonial period (those in contact with the Spaniards) saw their material indigeneity increasingly become a marker of membership in the impoverished peasant class.

The second shift was the result of nearly a century of political strife in which the young Mexican nation suffered interminable internal struggles as it tried to establish itself as a liberal nation-state, a struggle that came to a head with the Mexican Revolution. After the Revolution, the state sought to promote internal unity by promoting the national, racial identity of mestizo, thus de-privileging the non-mestizo indigenous peoples. I contend that mestizaje is a notion of race that predicates itself on lived spatial practice. In this case, Pan-Latin-American Modernist authors like José Enrique Rodó and José Vasconcelos fleshed-out pre-existing notions of mestizo superiority by developing a mythology of space on which to base national educational movements. In essence, they wholeheartedly embraced transnational ideals of intercultural contact as being a sign of cultural progress. Though this was largely a contestatory current to the burgeoning rhetoric of racial purity in Europe at the time, it cast peoples who lived in spaces of minimal intercultural contact as stuck in the past. The presumption that peoples living in a homogenous context could not provide for the success of the nation led to a quiet ethnocide of indigenous communities as seemingly beneficent State agricultural and

educational programs annihilated their cultures via spatial pedagogical techniques. Meanwhile, the criollo elites cast themselves as the rightful heirs to both the Mesoamerican and European classical traditions on the premise that their spatial –and not *necessarily* biological– cultural mixing was the common factor between those empires and their contemporary nation.

The second shift gave way to decades of anger in the face of prejudicial state policies that enriched the upper classes at the expense of the livelihoods of indigenous peoples. Briefly, the Mexican State had slowly liberalized over the course of the twentieth century. However, the conversion to capitalistic structures made indigenous-grown crops particularly sensitive to the capricious nature of the international economy. This process of economic abstraction jeopardized their material subsistence and therefore their ability to continue local, cultural practices. In response, on January 1st, 1994 the EZLN took up arms against the Mexican state to demand a reconsideration of their place in Mexican society. In the ensuing years, the abstraction and marginalization of these peoples came to a head under the national leadership of President Vicente Fox, who worked to reconfigure State networks of power that addressed the concerns of indigenous Mexicans at the highest levels of government, with mixed results. Today, it is possible we are living through yet another re-negotiation of the Abstract v. Embodied Indigeneity polemic in popular discourse provoked by the abstraction of indigenous bodies from indigenous representation. However, this is a provisional proposal, and it is too early to declare a third inflection point at this point.

2.2 Inflection Point #1: The New Laws, the Valladolid Debates, and the Onset of Abstract Indigeneity (ca. 1540–1552)

The first inflection point in the discourse on indigenous representation emerged just a few decades after the “conquest” of New Spain (central Mexico). It concerned the growing societal abstraction brought on by the mismanagement of New World *encomiendas*. Despite the aim of the New Laws and the Valladolid Debates being to bring indigenous peoples under the direct power of the Crown and therefore providing them administrative avenues through which to pursue some modicum of justice, it was ultimately an ambivalent move that would flatten the social topography of indigenous social hierarchies. This legal abstraction, coupled with the steady, continuous cultural and demographic hispanization of central Mexico, led to the co-opting of the discourse of indigeneity by the European, but American-born *criollo* (creole) class. Despite famous *criollo* authors like Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora passionately defending American indigeneity (as an adjectival modifier signifying birth in the Americas), their arguments served as a foundation from which to launch pointed critiques of Spanish rule in the late colony and assert their own political autonomy, rather than champion embodied indigenous experience and cultural self-determination. Thus, the New Laws and the Valladolid Debates both made explicit and laid the groundwork for the apprehension of indigenous peoples as a subaltern group whose culture would later be appropriated as a politically convenient rhetoric of Abstract Indigeneity for the upper classes.

In 1519, when Hernán Cortés arrived in what would eventually become San Juan de Ulúa, Tabasco on a mission originally charged only with continuing Juan de Grijalva’s

survey of the coast of Mexico (begun in 1517), one “absolute” society came into contact with another (Townsend 39, 239). What I mean by this is that both societies functioned by producing absolute spaces that re-produced cultural imperatives. Both the Spanish¹³ and Aztec¹⁴ Empires were modular societies whose spatial practices worked to imbue Places (Casey’s term) with transcendental meaning in order to reproduce the logic of their respective societies via spatial practices that in turn structured lived practices. In both cases, questions of economics, politics, justice, and religion were interrelated, administered by a hierarchical system of noble elites (who were both economic and ideological aristocrats), and reproduced through predictable spatial organization and practice. However, the political modules of these monarchical states enjoyed relative local autonomy as long as they were productive constituents of the empire. This means that the lower-class vassalages could get away with divergent social practices as long as

¹³ Perry Andrews defines feudalism as: “[un] modo de producción [que] se definía originariamente por una unidad orgánica de economía y política, *paradójicamente* distribuida en una cadena de soberanías fragmentadas a lo largo de toda la formación social. La institución de la servidumbre como mecanismo de extracción del excedente fundía, en el nivel molecular de la aldea, la explotación económica y la coerción político-legal. En señor, a su vez, tenía que prestar homenaje principal y servicios de caballería a un señor supremo que reclamaba el dominio último de la tierra” (13-14, my emphasis).

¹⁴ James Lockhart defines Nahua social hierarchy as functioning as, “a series of relatively equal, relatively separate and self-contained constituent parts of the whole, the unity of which consisted in the symmetrical, numerical arrangement of the parts, their identical relationship with a common reference point, and their orderly, cyclical rotation.” This cellular breakdown of larger units (an *altepetl*) is different from the European feudal hierarchy in that the absolute hierarchical power rotated between sub-units over time, albeit within the same elite, ruling “class” of families (15). However, the inheritance of power was still standard, though of variable character within the families themselves. Although there were differences in the formal administration of spatial hegemony, the Spaniards could not immediately distinguish indigenous absolute practices from their own (18). Further, absolute spatial “nucleation” was also standard, placing the market, palace, and temple directly next to one another, thus demonstrating the unity of state-constructed discourses and their reproduction via spatial modes (18).

they met tribute demands and ostensibly paid homage to the ruling nobility (Lockhart 15, Andrews 13). Thus, the crisis of indigenous representation did not emerge as a requisite result of intercultural contact, as one might assume, because the societies had analogous modes of political-legal authority. Rather, the crisis emerged in the decades following the “conquest” as the result of intra-cultural deviance among the regional administrators whereby the Spanish *encomenderos*¹⁵ (new, more reckless members of the aristocracy) shirked their “absolute” responsibilities in order to enrich themselves. In this way, they failed to cultivate spaces that would ideologically (rhetorically and materially) justify and pacifically reproduce the subjugation and exploitation of their vassals via lived practice. In a similar fashion, they also failed to pay proper tribute to the monarchy, a fact that contributed just as much to the dissolution of their newfound status by the Crown, as this made them few friends at court. For our purposes here, we will focus on the former conflict.

Though the specific technologies of absolute spatial power employed by the Spanish and Aztec empires were different, their global functions were analogous enough to allow for a productive, overlapping coexistence as long as the locals maintained some semblance of their pre-“conquest” spatial practices. To support this claim, one need only look to the numerous, well-articulated examples that highlight exactly how the Spaniards relied on pre-existing, indigenous networks of power. Most importantly, they recognized

¹⁵ Encomenderos were Spaniards granted *encomiendas*, a pre-existing system of land and tribute grants by which conquering soldiers were “granted native villages for their profit.” Meyer describes the relationship between the encomenderos and their subjects as, “the deserving Spaniard receiv[ing] the tribute of the Indians, as well as their free labor, in return for which the natives were commended to the ecomendero’s care. He[/she] was to see to their conversion to Christianity, to ensure good order in the village, and in all ways to be responsible for their welfare” (124).

existing nobility¹⁶, articulated tribute infrastructure¹⁷, and incorporated local leadership into the new colonial superstructure (Mundy 82-84). In fact, when it came to the matter of micro, local governance, most local indigenous power structures remained intact and self-governed well into the Colonial Period (Lockhart, *The Nahuas*, 3-4). They were colonial subjects in the sense that they lived in colonial territory and paid tribute to the ruling sector, but in practice, they were a *República de Indios*, or an “Indian Republic,” that existed alongside a *República de españoles* (a Spanish Republic) (Levaggi 420, Díaz 2). Therefore, the early colony existed and functioned as two ethnically and religiously distinct quasi-autonomous governing bodies. They were de jure Spanish but de facto separately administered. However, the borders (both physical and metaphorical) of these Republics were permeable and malleable, with indigenous noblewomen marrying Spaniards, inheriting encomiendas, receiving education in Catholic seminaries (Lockhart, *We People Here*, 1, 8-9), etc., and the Spanish alternatively deposing unsympathetic indigenous leaders to appoint friendlier ones from time to time (Mundy 83). In fact, the modes of governance between the two societies –at least at the beginning– were so superficially reconcilable that James Lockhart coined the term “Double Mistaken Identity” to describe it (*We People Here*, 4). As a theorist of indigenous representation, I find this term to be fruitful because it frames the misapprehension of identity and practice as a two-way relationship. Such a rhetorical move embodies agency within each

¹⁶ For an example of indigenous nobility being taken into consideration in Spanish legal proceedings, see: Townsend, Chapters 7-9.

For a discussion on early indigenous encomenderos, see: Himmerich y Valencia 178.

¹⁷ For detailed discussions of tribute collection in both the pre- and post-“conquest” eras, see: Lockhart, *The Nahuas*, 177-198, Mundy 53-55, and de Rojas’ work on the *Codex Mendoza* (ca. 1540).

respective member of the body politic, encouraging the reader to explore how each perceives the other. Lockhart deploys this strategy of reciprocal agency in his explanation of post-“conquest” intercultural adaptation:

The Nahuas continued to be self-centered ... concerned above-all with life inside the local ethnic states that had always been their primary arena. *Yet they did not shy away from contact with things Spanish, readily adopting any new artifacts, practices, or principles that struck them as comprehensible and useful for their own purposes.* (*The Nahuas*, 4)

If we pair these observations with Aguirre-Beltrán’s estimate that even the 1570 indigenous and Spanish populations of New Spain were approximately 3 million and 41,000, respectively, (98.62% indigenous) it becomes abundantly clear that indigenous agency and local self-governance were the rule rather than the exception, a fact that runs counter to popular apprehensions of the conquest (Aguirre-Beltrán 200-1, 212; Restall 64).

Despite the real-world situation of the territory, the process of indigenous abstraction in Mexico appears as early as the letters of Cortés himself. Like previous conquistadors, Cortés wrote about the indigenous peoples he encountered not as agentive actors, but rather as beings material to the achievement or impediment of his personal goals. In order to understand how and why he does this –and how this anticipates a larger discourse endemic of spatial abstraction in New Spain–, we must first understand the Spanish writing and pedagogical conventions of the time.

Matthew Restall has argued that there emerged a type of “conquistador standard operating procedure” when missions of exploration began several decades prior to

Cortés' arrival in Mexico (22). The implication here is that Cortés' four *Cartas de relación* are representative of a self-interested genre of legal writing more akin to a petition for a land grant or a curriculum vitae of services-rendered than an unbiased chronicle of events. Because of this, Restall encourages readers of the genre to recognize that Cortés and his contemporaries were not the first to form alliances with local elites, hang mutinous crewmembers, use native interpreters, sequester native leaders to leverage power, etc. These were predictable, codified courses of action that would have been present in the expectations of an educated, coetaneous audience (22-26). In a similar fashion, Laura Ann Stoler encourages readers of archival texts like the *Cartas de relación* to "read along the archival grain," which means to temper our expectations of a text by first developing a more intimate understanding of its role in the larger context of its imperial network (1-8). So, Cortés chose to include, but understate, the contributions of his indigenous counterparts in the "conquest" of the Aztec Empire because he needed to give himself a flattering, starring role in the narrative of the *Cartas* in order to convince the Catholic Kings that he was worthy of governing the lands he brought under their sway.

Though Cortés' understatement of the role of local peoples in the *Cartas* relegates indigenous peoples to supporting roles in the narrative in the hope of gaining access to the power structures that govern them, it was not yet politically expedient for him or his contemporaries to homogenize them as being a single ethnic people nor to recur to totalizing stereotypes. Instead, he gave detailed descriptions of most micro ethnic groups he met, often going to great pains to describe their various sociopolitical organizations, local customs, and political alliances. More specifically, Cortés confirms that various

indigenous nations, such as the Tlaxcaltecas, assisted him willingly in the “conquest” by providing thousands of troops, supplies, etc. This is because the Aztec Empire was a loose, multi-ethnic network of culturally diverse states, many of whom had a fraught relationship with the ruling Culhua-Mexica *altepetl*¹⁸ of Tenochtitlán, a fact that worked in his favor (Cortés 183–90). At this point in time, relaying such information was standard operating procedure because it drew on a tradition of systematic cultural and economic evangelization that emerged during the Spanish Reconquista.

During the Reconquista, the Spanish Crown sought to consolidate its power throughout the Iberian Peninsula by evangelizing its disparate peoples, thereby bringing their lands and laborers under their sway (Floristán 135–36). Their methods of evangelization ranged from processes as voluntary and beneficent as un-coerced conversion, to the periodical expulsion and/or massacre of minorities such as the Sephardic Jews and Andalusian Muslims. The Catholic Kings would deem more violent tactics politically justifiable after a polity or community had rejected their socio-political stewardship. This stewardship was considered part-and-parcel with being catholic in that context. Therefore, refusing to enter into the feudal economic network of the Catholic Kings was tantamount to refusing the salvation of Catholicism, thereby authorizing violent conquest (I will return to this point shortly). Interestingly, many localities continued to practice their local religions in secret after pacifically submitting to Christian rule, a cultural survival practice later seen in the same communities Cortés described, as well. Therefore, when Cortés lays bare his limited understanding of the

¹⁸ An “altepetl” is the Nahuatl term the standard geopolitical entity that comprised micro ethnic communities (Lockhart, *The Nahuas*, 14-15)

political nuances of the micro ethnic states he comes into contact with in the *Cartas*, his recognition and enunciation of the absolute practices of each is (a) a defining function of his role as a faithful servant of the Crown (and therefore of God), and (b) justification for his chosen modes of conquest in various micro polities. Despite Cortés' aims, like those of the Crown, being less than kosher, it was in the best interests of both parties to take advantage of the superficially homologous absolute practices of each local group. In the end, the internal struggles of this similarly modular society provided a legible, articulable analogue for a conquistador educated in the acquisition and administration of modular territories.

In spite of the fact that in the early post “conquest” years the Spanish Crown had a vested interest in maintaining and articulating local economies of power in New Spain, internal bureaucratic and administrative struggles anticipated a crisis of spatial absolutism for its inhabitants. This crisis arose as the result of the frequent mismanagement of the Crown's *encomiendas* in the New World. *Encomiendas* were the system under which the Crown awarded conquistadors (and other explorers, noblemen, and *hidalgos*) indigenous laborers, their parishes, and the tribute associated with these geopolitical cells. In essence, these were New World feudal lordships. Just as in Europe, these lordships presupposed a complementary relationship between the Spanish lords and the indigenous peasants, i.e. that the peasants would provide labor and resources as tribute in exchange for access to (Catholic) religious infrastructure, protection, and education in the Spanish language. However, it was not uncommon that the *Encomenderos* would neglect or outright rebuff their religious and educational responsibilities (often finding themselves at odds with local missionaries), leading to a unidirectional and often violently administered flow of

goods and services (Meyer 178). Meyer provides a summary of the how Encomenderos abused the loose colonial administration and ultimately failed in providing for the care and protection of their vassals:

the system, subjected to every imaginable abuse, kept the Indians in a state of serfdom and led to all sorts of horrors. Indians were overworked, *separated from their families*, cheated, and physically maltreated. The encomienda ... was responsible for demeaning the native race and creating *economic and social tragedies* that persisted in one guise or another into modern times. (124, emphasis mine)

Put another way, the indigenous vassals of the approximately eight hundred Encomenderos of the early colony often failed to provide an infrastructure of absolute, functional lived practice that would promote both the peaceful transition and maintenance of power, an issue that became more serious as time wore on and the Spanish bureaucracy further entrenched itself (Meyer 158). It may very well be that the early Encomenderos, in a general sense, took for granted that the two societies' analogous modes of sociopolitical power were reconcilable without adequately considering questions of local, quotidian practice (Lockhart's "Double Mistaken Identity"). In this way, they abstracted their new subjects from their landscapes by dint of ignorance or apathy rather than cruelty (though such cruelty is undeniable in some cases).

Although colonial scholars have long recognized and discussed the mistreatment of indigenous peoples in central Mexico, it has too often been narrated as political crisis between factions of the Spanish bureaucracy with its metaphysical resolution being the Valladolid Debates of 1550-51. By framing the metaphysical crisis of waging Just War

on “the indigenous” as a crisis anticipated by the abrupt abstraction of indigenous peoples from their cultural landscapes, I hope to reframe this discussion by allowing for two major caveats. First, although it is undeniable that some indigenous peoples were mistreated, this was still an uneven, modular society whose very structure did not lend itself to easy generalizations. Lockhart recognizes that a hybrid methodology of acculturation lent itself best to a pacific transition power in Central Mexico when he states that the success of Catholic missionaries, “depended precisely upon the acceptance and retention of indigenous elements and patterns that in many respects were strikingly similar to those of Europe” (4). Such an observation makes room for a spectrum of outcomes ranging from abrupt cultural uprooting (“root shock,” to borrow an evocative botanical term) to the careful observation of local customs and the subsequent gradual introduction of European analogues. This distinction is important because it resists generalization regarding the status of indigenous peoples in the Colonial Period. In fact, as previously mentioned, some members of the indigenous noble class were Encomenderos themselves, and therefore alternatively complicit in both the positive and negative aspects of the cultural shifts of the period. Second, articulating this as a matter of spatial abstraction reframes the Valladolid Debates as part of the *climax* of the crisis, rather than its *resolution*. What I mean by this is that both the promulgation of the New Laws and the content of the Valladolid Debates contributed to the *further* abstraction of indigenous peoples by lumping all indigenous peoples regardless of ethnicity into a single legal status, despite seemingly resolving the internal debate in the *República de españoles* for a time.

In the Valladolid Debates, Bartolomé de Las Casas, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, and the Crown Court at large treated the indigenous peoples of the early colonies as a monolithic group with a shared legal status, despite the situation on the ground being much more complicated. This was because in 1542, the Crown issued a *Cédula Real* (a Royal Decree) in response to (a) various complaints regarding the abuses of the encomienda system and (b) the 1537 Papal Bull, *Sublimis Deus*, which declared that the Church would thereafter consider Amerindians to be “rational beings” (Hanke 73-74). Though it would be tempting to assume that such declarations were made to protect indigenous peoples, this is only true in the sense that the Church and the Crown sought to evangelize (see: conquer) non-confrontational peoples pacifically rather than violently, as that would be an affront to God. Therefore, the subject of the debate was not the treatment of the indigenous per se, but instead the justifications for waging “Just War”, i.e. the proper circumstances under which to conquer a local people by force (Adorno 120-21). This conflict emerged because the *Cédula Real* promulgated *Las Leyes Nuevas* (The New Laws) which required the colonists to treat their indigenous subjects as free individuals, legally prohibiting the creation of new encomiendas and the inheritance of most existing ones (though this was difficult to enforce, in practice) (Meyer 140-41). What’s more, The New Laws declared that indigenous peoples in the colonies now fell under the direct protection of the Crown, and could petition to the Crown Court to resolve the disputes that arose between them and Spanish nobility and clergy. At this point, being *Indio* became a legal status with certain sets of privileges and rights (Díaz 2-3). This is why the Valladolid Debates did not concern themselves with the question of indigenous social statutes; the Crown had already set a precedent that misapprehended all

Amerindians as a homogenous, protected legal class of vassals nearly a decade before this debate. This status did not reflect the reality of indigenous social stratification, despite questions of indigenous nobility and class privilege being a crucial factor in Ibero-indigenous politics and policy for the first post-“conquest” generation.

Whether or not the Crown was entirely cognizant of (a) the real-life social stratification inherent in the indigenous empire or (b) the multifaceted, hybrid discourse of its subjects on the ground, by issuing the *Cédula Real* it committed an act of legal democratization that transgressed previous social boundaries. In fact, the Latin American historian Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra has argued that this was an act of “radical democracy”: an act that smoothed out the contours of colonial social topography by extending a modicum of power to a broader base of the indigenous class (“Radical Modernities”). More concretely, it allowed indigenous persons to file complaints and petitions on behalf of themselves or their communities. In addition, because they were now subjects of the Crown instead of the *encomenderos*¹⁹, they were able to bypass and/or overrule (on occasion) many local power structures. During this period, there was a veritable explosion of petitions, last wills and testaments, legal transcripts, etc., in diverse sectors of the colony. A huge number of these documents are in the local languages and dialects of the peoples that authored them. Many of them denounce their local authorities, both administrative and ecclesiastic, as being physically abusive, financially compromised, or morally bankrupt. It is based largely on this corpus of

¹⁹ Some *encomenderos* would keep their *encomiendas* for several more generations following the promulgation of the New Laws. However, they became increasingly scarce as time wore on and were constantly at odds with the Crown in matters of finance and jurisprudence after 1542 (Meyer 124).

documents that ethnohistorians like Charles Gibson, James Lockhart, and others wrote their seminal works on post-“conquest” Nahua culture. Despite almost a century of academic rigor, the sheer number of these petitions is so massive (and the number of scholars literate in indigenous Mexican languages so small) that there remain thousands of these documents inadequately catalogued or unanalyzed to this day. However, the scholars that have made progress in the analysis of these archival texts generally agree that widespread, community participation in governance was the norm rather than the exception in communities with access to literate leadership (transcultured officials such as scribes, notaries, and local council members), just as were indigenous agency and self-determination.

Although the Valladolid Debates are often presented as the defining moment in Spain’s approach to indigeneity in the colonies, it is important to recognize three factors that are often left out of the discussion. The consideration of these factors will allow us to see the debate as the climax of the narrative of the crisis of indigenous spatial abstraction rather than its resolution. First, a major part of the reason the debate took place was the proliferation of almost a decade of petitions to the Crown for protection and assistance (ca. 1542-1550) by indigenous peoples literate in Western alphabetic scripts or their literate representatives. Second, the debate sought to determine how to enter their communities in a manner befitting Catholic morality in order to evangelize them, not how to administer them. Third, the debate was ultimately paternalistic because it was a one-sided, internal argument about the merits of waging Just War on non-Catholic peoples; the conversion to Catholicism as the implicit end goal for all parties involved remained unchallenged in any meaningful way. Because of the promulgation of the New Laws,

indigenous agency became an impetus for the Debates, even if indigenous voices were not ultimately included as interlocutors at court. By understanding the debates as indicative of Abstract Indigeneity, we can rearticulate this historical narrative to account for the spatial agency exercised and affected by indigenous actors that were granted no voice in the determination of their own status via the recognition of their material contributions (petitions, revolts, etc.).

Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda took up the epistemic mantles of peaceful and forceful evangelization, respectively, in order to assist the Crown in determining the best way forward when it came to ruling and administering the native peoples of the new territories. For Las Casas, the harsh treatment of indigenous peasants by the Encomenderos ran contrary to –and may have even delegitimized– the evangelizing mission of the Crown because it amounted to an unjust conquest and enslavement of a peaceably convertible non-Christian peoples. He argued that dominion over a foreign land was only legitimate if it served the missions of propagating the Christian faith and treating those simply ignorant of God’s Word justly. Because the indigenous subjects were capable of reason but could not speak Spanish (and therefore could not receive instruction in the Catholic faith), Las Casas argued that the Encomenderos were acting unjustly by knowingly manipulating peoples that were simply ignorant of God’s glory due to surmountable problems related to cultural infrastructure. From his point of view, they were not fulfilling their responsibilities as feudal lords and thus they themselves had become the most obstructive obstacle to ethical evangelization because they continued to prioritize greed over proselytization and protection (Adorno 124). He interpreted what others saw as “barbaric” practices such as human sacrifice,

idolatry, and unsubstantiated claims of cannibalism as the actions of misguided peoples, not malicious attacks on innocents (*Ibid* 106-07). Ultimately, for our purposes here, his argument can be described as paternalistic insofar that it relied on convincing the Crown that the indigenous peoples were capable of reasonable self-governance, but were purposely being kept at arms-length from the tenets of Western morality in order to justify their subjugation. Therefore, as they could not be held culpable for any act of barbarity without first receiving proper instruction in the Catholic faith, they had not yet been shepherded by Europeans to act in their own best interests. Put another way, Las Casas did not believe that the Amerindians were inferior beings, but instead potential Christians that New World leadership was exploiting despite their capacity to convert willingly and self-govern responsibly.

Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda based his arguments in favor of further conquests and forceful subjugation on Aristotle's principle of "natural slavery," and provided as evidence for this claim the ever-mounting accusations of barbarity and idolatry. He argued in his *Demócrates segundo* (1550) that the violent conquest of Latin America was justifiable because it meant to subdue obstacles to the propagation of the Catholic faith, namely inferior, barbarous peoples whose sinful customs qualified them as "natural" slaves/subjects of "more perfect" peoples (20). He conceptualized the relationship between the Amerindians and the Crown as one of "paternal domination" akin to that of an adult and a child or "the rule of the less perfect by the more perfect," an idea that draws directly upon Aristotle's argument for "natural slavery" (Adorno 113–118). However, even Sepúlveda shied away from characterizing Amerindians as being less "human" per se, which is in fact a more modern discourse that emerged post-

Enlightenment (this is discussed in the following section of this chapter). Adorno explains that Sepúlveda saw the differences between European and American peoples as being more accidental than essential, i.e. he saw their inferiority as a function of their environment and customs, not as a lack of a shared humanity (6). Mónica Morales further clarifies this perspective in her article “La distancia y la modestia: las ‘dos’ caras del Atlántico en los versos de Sor Juana a la duquesa de Aveyro,” wherein she details the Aristotelian spatial epistemology of climate based-inferiority as it relates to Sepúlveda’s argument. This is relevant because Sepúlveda based his argument on Amerindian inferiority on Aristotle’s *Politics Book VII*, which contextualizes Sepúlveda’s moral and ethical positions. Morales explains:

La funcionalidad del clima en esta agenda representa el imaginario jerárquico proveniente del otro espacio dominante. Las tensiones [entre ...] zona templada y tórrida así como también virtud, razón y vicio clasifican y definen lo que yace más allá de Europa en calidad inferior, autorizándole como tal por el signo menos prestigioso del par. (23)

Understanding Sepúlveda’s half of the Valladolid Debates in this way helps us to understand that his brand of religious paternalism was geared towards the Crown’s right to manipulate the physical world –even violently– in order to provide the ideal conditions for the conversion of souls. In essence, this indirect paternalism takes place-based inferiority for granted, a stance that in turn authorized the violent domination and reorganization of space in order to provide for its inhabitants’ own best interests. A more cosmopolitan, capitalist conjugation of this argument underlies much of what the *modernista* discourse would bring to the table centuries later.

What is perhaps most surprising for contemporary readers of the Valladolid Debates is how much Las Casas and Sepúlveda's arguments have in common. In fact, they agreed on the rational justifications for waging a Just War²⁰, and that acts of barbarity and idolatry were occurring. Where they differ is in their approach to rational personhood regarding the first-contact generation of Amerindians. Whereas Sepúlveda saw them as a *de facto* threat and obstacle to the spread of Christianity, Las Casas saw them as generally docile peoples whose crimes were the result of poor education, not anti-Catholic hostility. Therefore, Sepúlveda believed a pre-emptive strategy of armed defense was necessary to facilitate an unobstructed evangelization process, while Las Casas advocated for the peaceful conversion of Amerindians, choosing not to see previous ignorance of faith as a threat to the faith itself. In either case, the question of indigenous agency arises rarely and tangentially, only appearing insofar that the indigenous peoples are a party that *may* react positively or negatively to evangelization. For both men, the question was not whether the Amerindians espoused inferior and/or repugnant practices, but under what circumstances the Crown would have the authority to conquer and convert them by force. Put bluntly, the debate regarding the status of Amerindians was an internal feud that is too often understood as being a momentous, pseudo-progressive decision in favor of indigenous peoples. It was a group of upper-class European men debating the merits of different methodologies by which to subjugate a silent third party. This paradigm of one-sided and sometimes well-meaning paternalism is

²⁰ Namely, they did not disagree that Just War could be waged and civil slavery instituted under the following circumstances: (a) the Christian nation is attacked from without, (b) an outside religion seeks to displace Christianity, or (c) to punish those who have wronged the nation and "refuse to make restitution" (Adorno 66).

a rhetorical trend that remained largely uncontested until the twentieth century, and is still extant today.

For many colonialists, the Valladolid Debates mark the closing of a loophole and the resolution of a legal problem in the colonies²¹, despite its ultimate effects contributing to the further abstraction of indigenous peoples from pre-contact lived practices, rather than restoring their access to self-determinative spatial absolutism. Though the New Laws afforded legal protections to classes of peoples who previously had none, this status was ultimately ambivalent in nature because it simultaneously undermined the principles of micro ethnic semi-autonomy that had existed before, and continued to exist for some time after, colonization. The tradeoff, while seemingly beneficent in nature insofar that it seemed to lament or even pity the abuses carried out against the indigenous population of New Spain, ultimately promoted the political utility of a homogenous legal status over the real-world, heterogeneous geopolitical circumstances. In the long term, it laid the groundwork for a state-oriented identitary ideology in exchange for certain legal protections. It served to place a diverse group of people on the same horizontal legal plane by gradually (over centuries) bulldozing many of the contours of the social terrain. In sum, despite the sociopolitical narrative of indigeneity becoming increasingly uniform over time, the geography, demography, and pre-existing social hierarchies betrayed the true complexity of what it meant to be Indio. Because the content of the colonial discourse after this inflection point does not reflect the diversity of the situation, we can conclude that representing and reproducing authentic iterations of local indigeneity were

²¹ Insofar that the legal matter was decided. It was difficult to enforce for a long time and a select few Encomenderos legally held their lands until the late vice regal period.

not primary concerns of the colonial government. In order to understand the consequences of apprehending indigenous peoples as one homogenous, “Othered” group, let us take a brief tour of indigenous representation in the century following the News Laws and the Valladolid Debates.

The later stages of the early Colonial Period through the viceroyalty evince the continued epistemic distancing of indigenous people from indigeneity as a status which they would use as cultural capital. In the physical realm, more and more communities came into contact with Spanish modes of production and governance, modifying or replacing their previous modes of production and exchange (Lockhart, *The Nahuas*, 427). Also, European diseases continued to travel to the New World and ravage local populations, contributing to the decentering and displacement of entire communities well into the 17th century. Likewise, in the cultural realm, agentive indigenous iterations of power became increasingly scarce as a result of hispanization. Lockhart explains that this occurred in three stages:

In brief, the three stages of the general postconquest evolution of the Nahuas run as follows: (1) a generation (1519 to ca. 1545-50) during which, despite great revolutions, reorientations, and catastrophes, little changed in Nahua concepts, techniques, or modes of organization; (2) about a hundred years (ca. 1545-50 to ca. 1640-1650) during which Spanish elements came to pervade every aspect of Nahua life, but with limitations, often as discrete additions within a relatively unchanged indigenous framework; and (3) the time thereafter, extending forward to Mexican independence and in many respects until our time, in which the Nahuas adopted a new wave of Spanish elements, now often more strongly

affecting the framework of organization and technique, leading in some cases to the true amalgamation of the two traditions. (427-28)

As you can see, Lockhart likewise characterizes the period of the New Laws and the Valladolid Debates to denote a period of cultural transition wherein more pervasive hispanization became the norm in the colony (between stages one and two). However, Lockhart and I seem to have come to similar and correlated conclusions via different methodologies. Whereas his analysis emerges from the loose canon of the archival indigenous petition genre (which, as previously mentioned, exploded after the promulgation of the New Laws), I came to this conclusion by observing the widening gap in the representation of indigenous people and the concept of indigeneity in the Mexican literary canon of the Colonial Period.

As indigeneity was abstracted from indigenous bodies following the inflection point of 1540-52, it increasingly found itself used as a trope to (a) benefit colonial elites of dubious indigenous heritage and nobility by virtue of the newfound legal prestige of being *Indio* and, later on, to (b) articulate *criollo* agency in the face of the abuses of the Crown. A prime example of the former phenomenon are the writings of Don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl. The primary historian of Texcoco, a prestigious *altepetl* that had been part of the triumvirate (or “Triple Alliance”) that founded and administered the Aztec Empire. However, those who study his writings –which are primarily in Spanish– have expressed serious doubts about the authenticity of his discursive claims. What I mean by this is that most colonial scholars consider his writings, like those of Cortés, to be a self-interested articulation of indigeneity (as a legal-identitary construct) that existed to take advantage of the privileged *Indio status* rather than authentic articulations of indigenous

agency (Brokaw 13, Whittaker 31-33). Even Lockhart only gives Ixtlilxóchitl a passing mention in his work, stating, “[he] paid little attention to and even perhaps had little grasp of the polity-specific nature of Mexican rulership or of the importance of a fixed complex of constituent parts” (25). This quote, albeit short, communicates that Ixtlilxóchitl is regarded by authorities in the field as exhibiting a general ignorance regarding the absolute spatial practices of the Texcocan people themselves. The strategic elision of polity-specific details and silence regarding quotidian (non-having-to-do-with-nobles) practices²² epistemically locates him in the Spanish tradition of abstract domination rather than indigenous absolutism. In more concrete terms, he is advocating for his own inclusion in the *abstract legal construct of indigeneity*, rather than for his inclusion in the *material circumstances of embodied indigeneity*. This is a key distinction because, as Lockhart’s “Stage 2” wore on, the status of Indio had less and less to do with leading a Mesoamerican lifestyle. Little by little, the shock of the colonial abstraction waned and indigenous communities, through their own agentive practices, participated in an uneven transcultural hispanization, constructing and articulating new, hybrid landscapes from which to derive cultural absolutism.

By the decline of the Hapsburg era (the late 1600’s), indigeneity as a concept had devolved into a trope of spatial citizenship. As a rhetorical tool, it was appropriated by the criollo upper class in order to articulate its own brand of “indigenous” power in the face of what colonial elites perceived to be a corrupt and incompetent monarchy. For context, the late Hapsburg era was characterized by multiple wars of succession fought in Europe, the imposition of colonial controls that the local mercantile and elite classes saw

²² See Whittaker 2016.

abusive, and the rulership of sickly, child King, Carlos II, who was widely referred to as *El Rey hechizado* or “the cursed King” (Meyer 171, 237-38). Suffice it to say that the burgeoning economy and relative cultural boom among the criollo elites occurring in New Spain fostered resentment towards Spanish authorities. In response, writers like Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora appealed to their readership’s sense of abstract, American Indigeneity to draw moral contrasts between themselves and the monarchy. Anna More calls the tendency to which he was appealing—the baroque Creole tendency to secularize indigenous antiquities and then incorporate them into local state discourses of power—Creole Antiquarianism (11, 14–15). She argues that thinkers like Sigüenza y Góngora and Sor Juana specifically recurred to Central Mexican iconography in an attempt to produce a, “recognition of [Mexico’s] civilized past” (114–15). These thinkers worked to re-articulate New Spain’s indigenous spaces—previously considered a place barbarous idolatry and violence—as a space of civilized practice (*Ibid*). In this way, the continuity of Central Mexican space and the habitation therein became the means by which indigenous historical patrimony was transferred, eschewing the question of biopolitics and allowing the largely non-indigenous Creole population to base claims to its fitness to hold political power on its claim to a civilized, imperial indigenous patrimony.

To provide just one evocative example of Sor Juana’s expression of criollo American Indigeneity, let us for a moment engage with her poem “Romance 37.” This 200-line ballad, ostensibly a piece commissioned to praise the Portuguese Duchess of Aveiro, lends itself to second reading as a defense of New World intellectualism in the face of late colonial corruption. Sor Juana does this by making a subtle distinction

between the thematic subject of the poem, the Duchess, and the grammatical subjects of the poem, the precious metals and minerals mined in the Americas. Throughout the ballad, the poetic voice (a Muse, here) uses her sharp tongue to deliver double-edged compliments that simultaneously praise the Duchess and critique the degenerated state of Iberian nobility under Carlos II. The poetic voice begins by praising the “Grande Duquesa de Aveyro” as the image depicted by busts and sculptures. However, this high praise takes place in a sentence where the grammatical subjects are the bronze and the jasper, rather than the eponymous Duchess. Here, the materials have been “cavado” and “esculpido,” converting them into forms that reflect the grandness of the noblewoman. Being the subjects of the sentence allows these mined materials to “informa[r]” and “publica[r]” the image of the Duchess; they are in a grammatical position of agency. In this way, the Muse recognizes the materials as critical to conveying messages while also indicating they are modified to reflect a desired form –a bust of the Duchess–, rather than their own essence. In the second strophe, the Muse extends this metaphor to the realm of royal imagery. Here, the Duchess is praised as being the “alto honor” of Portugal because of her “prendas generosas”, and not because of her “Quinas Reales”, i.e. royal stock (the Five Escutcheons of Portugal metonymically standing-in for her royal lineage). The inference to be made here in rhetorically separating royal bearing from royal blood is that, logically, these traits will *not* converge in all members of the nobility. Therefore, Sor Juana is laying the groundwork for a veiled critique of the low caliber of royal blood and character during her time.

Late in Romance 37, the poetic voice explicitly designates America as being the site of enlightenment and noble stock. Continuing the metaphor of precious metals, she

declares: "... ¿Para qué, señora, / en distancia tan notablemente / habrán vuestras
altiveces / menester mis humildades? / Yo no he menester de Vos... / que vuestro favor
me alcance / favores en el Consejo / [...] / ni que mi alimento sean / vuestras
liberalidades / Que yo, Señora, *nací / en la América abundante / compatriota del oro /
paisana de los metales*" (v.69–75, 79–84, emphasis mine). By geographically locating
herself in the land of the same precious metals used to build the empire and sculpt the
likenesses of the Duchess, the Muse of the ballad wryly articulates a New World rhetoric
of indigeneity in order to rival the (in some cases literally) decaying nobility of the
Peninsula.

Just as interesting for our purposes here, the Muse also engages with Aristotle's
concept of "Torrid Zones." As the reader will recall, during the Valladolid Debates, Juan
Ginés de Sepúlveda attempted to justify the forceful evangelization of first-contact
indigenous peoples because of spatial inferiority. Though Sepúlveda, again, did not share
Aristotle's essentialist view that "torrid zones" necessarily created lesser, more barbarous
peoples by dint of the extraordinary effort required to survive there, he employed the
logic to justify the forceful manipulation of space in order to produce good Christian
vassals. In Romance 37, the Muse/poetic voice works to reverse Aristotle's argument in
declaring the Duchess to be the "*Primogénita de Apolo*" who is the recipient of his
"*rayos solares*," thereby establishing the Sun's rays as a source of enlightenment rather
than of brutal climatic conditions (v. 33–36). This imagery reappears in verses fifty to
fifty-two, when she describes New Spain as receiving "*rayos perpendiculares*," a move
that mathematically²³ and epistemologically locates America as being closer to the Sun

²³ The shortest hypotenuse is that of a right triangle.

and therefore closer to its grace²⁴. This rhetorical move rearranges the epistemological geographies of morality and knowledge, allowing for the Muse to argue for “indigenous” (in the loose sense) enlightenment.

Despite Sor Juana’s poetic defense of indigenous enlightenment, it is clear that her concept of American indigeneity is more related to birth than to lived practice, thus representing a significant abstraction of indigenous discourse from indigenous bodies. On lines 81–82, she declares that she, “ma’am, was *born* / in abundant America,” thus introducing birth as the primary factor for claiming American-ness (translation and emphasis mine). Though Sor Juana spoke Nahuatl, she was a well-off criolla nun that spent most of her life in the convent, a great deal of time at court with the high court, and even maintained relationships the Viceroy himself. Therefore, when she epistemically locates herself in the territory closest to the Sun and its symbolic blessing of knowledge, she is placing herself in a tradition to which she has little material connection in terms of the territory’s traditional lifestyle. In order to demonstrate the size of the gap between the rhetoric of indigeneity and embodied indigeneity during this time period, let us look at a telling piece by one of her contemporaries, Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora.

Barely a year following Sor Juana’s death, Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora describes the involvement of Indios in the 1692 rebellion in Mexico City against colonial

²⁴ “La luz de la razón” is an important trope throughout Sor Juana’s corpus. In her famous letter *La Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz*, she recounts her biography in order to justify her studious and contestatory nature by stating, “desde que me rayó la primera luz de la razón [...] ni ajenas reprensiones [...] han bastado a que deje de seguir este *natural impulse que Dios puso en mí*” (v.167-171, pp. 46 in the Arenal edition). Here, Sor Juana very publically equated the light of reason with the grace of God to defend her female (and American) erudition.

authorities in a manner that clarifies the lowly status of indigenous people at that time. He explains that at first, he was not aware of the riot, even –quite tellingly– stating that, “siendo ordinario los [ruidos] que por *las continuas borracheras de los Indios nos enfadan siempre*, ni aún se me ofreció abrir las vidrieras de la ventana de mi estudio para ver lo que era” (64, my emphasis). In this first mention of Indios, he makes it clear that he associates indigenous people with quotidian drunkenness and poor behavior, a message that locates them firmly in the lower class of the city. He goes on to describe the composition of the crowd as, “no sólo de Indios sino de todas castas” and “y todo lo que es plebe,” thereby confirming the reader’s suspicion that being racially indigenous in the mid-late vice regal period in Mexico City was colloquially associated with poverty, ignorance, and violence (65). These observations stand in stark contrast to the early colony when indigenous class structures remained largely intact even in Mexico City.

Though the final implication of this essay, *Alboroto y motín de los Indios de México* (1692), is that Sigüenza y Góngora likely sympathizes with the lower classes because they are rioting due to a lack of food²⁵, the pejorative and homogenizing tone he uses to describe these peoples betrays the divide between lived indigeneity and rhetorical indigeneity that had manifested by the 1690’s. Just as in Sor Juana’s “Romance 37,” there is an implicit critique of Spanish authority in the colonies, but only insofar that it supports the author’s implicit argument that criollos would be better stewards of the New Spain than the *gachupines* (the Peninsular-born Spanish leadership). Their rhetoric does not serve to lift up indigenous people, nor does it include indigenous voices that speak for themselves. Even when Sigüenza y Góngora quotes the crowd, it only serves the

²⁵ For a thorough discussion on this matter, see Rivera-Ayala and Ross.

rhetorical purpose of highlighting the grievances of the population against the Crown, which is a self-serving deployment of that information in this context because it is nothing more than a framing device for the narrative of the essay. Ultimately, such rhetoric demonstrates that the long-term effect of spatial abstraction that began with the abuses of the Encomenderos and the social flattening of indigenous social hierarchies with the New Laws and the Valladolid Debates was the abstraction of indigeneity from indigenous bodies, apprehending the diverse tapestry of micro ethnic inter- and intra-cultural hierarchies as a homogenous “casta” and relegating them to subalterity.

This would be the general status quo of indigeneity as a concept up until the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries, when the nascent liberal nation-State and the subsequent post-Revolutionary government, respectively, would work to redefine Mexican citizenship around the racial category of *mestizaje*, or Spanish-indigenous racial hybridity. This would ultimately prove to be an expansion upon Colonial Antiquarianism insofar that it secularized indigenous identity, converting it into an adjective demarcating a spatial difference that the nation-state would use to articulate its unique national identity on the international stage in order to legitimate its claims to sovereignty over the territory and its inhabitants.

2.3 Inflection Point #2: National Identity, Spatial Mythologies of Race, and Indigenous Ethnocide (ca. 1865–1930)

The bureaucratic nation-state that crystallized in the late 19th and early 20th centuries sought to re-negotiate Mexico’s social contract in order to pursue a set of ambitious social policies like the major educational and land reforms of the early post-Revolutionary period. Some of the major Latin American philosophers of the period, the

*modernistas*²⁶, drew on a nascent tradition of positivism in the Americas to both theorize and enact these reforms, a fact that gives critics a rare glimpse into the relevant thought processes of these policy makers. Transnational public intellectuals like the José Enrique Rodó and José Vasconcelos, among others, brought into the mainstream a distinctly Latin American concept of race (or *raza*) that is rooted in spatial philosophy: *mestizaje*. In short, they expanded the previous notions of criollo Abstract Indigeneity to include biological and iconographic hybridity. They purported that the cohabitation of different races produced prosperous nations because intercultural cooperation facilitated the progress of civilization as a whole. Based on this central conceit, they reverse-engineered a cosmopolitan mythology of space to justify *mestizo* (mixed-race) superiority and, by extension, *mestizo* governance²⁷. This was done in opposition to the positivistic discourses of racial supremacy emanating from Europe at the time, which, were Mexico to have indulged in such logic, would have de-privileged the nation in the international sphere due to the extreme ethnic diversity of its citizens.

Despite its apparent bend towards interracial equality, the philosophy of *mestizaje* in its post-Revolutionary conjugation is egalitarian only on its face. In fact, a study of the policies enacted in its name betray it as re-articulation of the prejudices and paternalistic attitudes regarding indigenous peoples during the Colonial Period. It presents being a

²⁶ Whereas most disciplines in the Humanities use the term “Modernism” to refer to the various 20th century *avant-garde* movements, the Spanish-speaking Latin American literary tradition uses the term *modernista* to refer to a specific group of pan-Latin-American artists, politicians, and philosophers who (a) above all elaborated on the themes of progress and modernity, (b) employed a baroque aesthetic, and (c) drew heavily from the Greek and Roman traditions.

²⁷ The modernistas were not the first Latin American thinkers to argue the merits of *mestizaje*. However, they were the first to reformulate global history and mythology in order to deploy the concept as a litmus test for national citizenship.

member of the mestizo race as a matter of cultural “cultivation” achieved by being exposed to different cultural traditions. It operates on the assumption that legitimate citizenship is a matter of (re)education, i.e. tied to (re)orienting various communities toward a common national goal. By privileging culturally heterogeneous²⁸ communities over homogenous²⁹ indigenous ones, it encoded a new iteration of racial supremacy that emerged from a transnational cosmopolitan ideology of interracial interaction in a determined space. Thus, it excluded from the national project those indigenous communities wishing to maintain their traditional cosmologies and quotidian practices by coding them as nationally and racially “Other.” Thus, it served as a justification to ignore, dispossess, or otherwise abuse these peoples in much the same way that resistance to evangelization served as justification for waging Just War against “barbarous” native peoples in the past. Once again, we can observe that an identity discourse in Mexico participated in the larger trend of abstracting indigeneity from indigenous bodies by appropriating positive cultural capital from these communities while simultaneously “Othering” their “homogenous” communities.

²⁸ Regarding “heterogeneity” in this context: A major critique of *mestizaje* is that the criollo upper class that pushed this message did not overtly promote biological race mixing/racial miscegenation. Just as with the criollo indigeneity of the past, it promoted a cosmopolitan aesthetic of transculturation as a rhetorical device for targeted nation-building campaigns. Optimistically, this was because they located the defining traits of the *raza* outside of the body. Realistically, it was because this new ideology was not a full departure from the racially essentialist philosophies of the past. Therefore, I contend that implicit to the concept of *mestizaje* is a heterogeneity of lived spaces, and not of bodies, thus maintaining the institutionalized racisms of the past.

²⁹ Once again, the state continued to apprehend indigenous peoples as one undifferentiated mass rather than a patchwork of hundreds of micro ethnicities with distinct cultures, practices, and languages.

Upon achieving Independence in 1821, the new, Mexican Imperial government incorporated the (by then) politically undifferentiated indigenous *casta*³⁰ as citizens of the nation rather than vassals of the Crown. It did this by declaring that all individuals within the territory of the state were now “Mexican”. However, the new Nation had trouble enacting any serious policy shifts with lasting consequences between 1820 and the late 1860’s due to severe political instability. The near-constant conflicts between the secular humanist *Liberales* and the latent colonialist *Conservadores* effectively precluded the efficacious implementation of any state infrastructural policies aimed at shifting the status quo (Vázquez 3-4, Meyer 358). For this reason, it is reasonable to say the criollos largely succeeded in preserving and maintaining colonial systems of power decades after independence. In fact, the lack of effective oversight and the wealthy classes’ ability to mobilize a seemingly indefatigable religious conservative coalition to oppose any attempt at reform only assured the further consolidation of their holdings and the perpetuation of their status and influence (Myer 311, 363). However, the Reform government (1857-1861) championed by President Benito Juárez –a Oaxacan politician of Zapotec heritage– was the first to shake up the status quo successfully by initiating lasting reforms and mobilizing the construction of physical and social infrastructure. This included bringing parts of the educational infrastructure under the purview of the State for the first time, a move that enraged the Church and provoked yet another war, the War of Reform, which was followed, in turn, by the French Intervention, wherein Napoleon’s forces invaded and annexed Mexico in order to settle its extraordinary outstanding debts (360-63, 367).

³⁰ Again, despite this homogenous legal classification and general hegemonic attitude, there still existed hundreds of micro ethnic groups throughout the whole of the territory.

However, Juárez and the Liberales regained control of the State in 1867 and picked up where they left off, but with a newfound strength of conviction derived from their victories in those conflicts. During this time of relative peace (the Restoration Period), the State further consolidated its power, liberalized the economy and bureaucracy, and set about modernizing the nation. This period boasted economic development, the construction of major railways by British investors (subsidized heavily by the State), and the development of a national curriculum (387–89).

What we can glean from this summary of the back-and-forth nature of the first two-thirds of 19th century is that Mexico's transition from colonial viceroyalty to liberal, bureaucratic nation-state was neither politically smooth nor ideologically complete. Liberal thinkers throughout the first half of the century experimented with many ideas geared towards effective reform, but they endured constant armed, political resistance. Thus, their ambitious programs did not get off the ground until the Restoration Period. Because of this sluggish social inertia, we can infer with some confidence that attitudes regarding the role of indigenous peoples in the national project were also slow to evolve³¹. This means that the colonial perception of native peoples went unchallenged in a serious way until late in the 19th century because many of the elite stakeholders in the colonial bureaucracy had succeeded in maintaining the colonial status up to this point. Specifically, the Catholic Church and wealthy, autocratic landowners (*caciques* or *hacendados*) regimented the discourses and practices surrounding these peoples.

³¹ Although indigenous people would not crystallize into a modern political class based on their (debatable) shared subaltern identity until the late 20th century, it is worth noting that they absolutely developed political power as a sizeable sector of the peasant class during the 19th century (Mallon 3).

Respectively, these colonialist actors were interested in evangelization and labor, and at times came into conflict when it came to the rights and duties of their indigenous subjects, just as they had been doing since the Colonial Period. In theoretical terms, we can say that the apprehension of indigenous peoples did not change because the policies aimed at manipulating their lived spaces in the interest of the young nation never really got off the ground.

Once the Restoration Period policies had laid the groundwork for a more durable political infrastructure, Mexico entered into a dictatorial period characterized by modernization and positivism. This period, often referred to as the *Porfiriato*, named for the President/Dictator of at the time, Porfirio Díaz, saw a change in the governing paradigm that would anticipate the second major shift. During this period of relative stability, Mexico imported much from Europe in terms of both identitary philosophy and physical infrastructure. Regarding the latter, Díaz's regime oversaw the completion of the *desagüe* project in Mexico City by English engineers, a major drainage system that had been the bane of the polity's popular and intellectual classes³² alike since the immediate post-"conquest" generation destroyed the indigenous waterworks by virtue of sheer ignorance of the machinations of the Culhua-Mexica infrastructure (Meyer 121, 421; Mundy 193-95). In analogous fashion, the criollo intelligentsia of the time imported its own set of infrastructural tools. More specifically, they adopted the Spencerian mode of positivism that promoted paternalistic ideals of biological essentialism, effectively framing economic competition as a contest between different "races" of people (in the

³² This was no small feat, considering it took the better part of four hundred years to complete. For context, even Sigüenza y Góngora was at one time in charge of the long-running political gag that was the *desagüe* project.

cultural sense)³³. This group came to be known as the *Científicos* precisely because they embraced Spencerian logic, which predicated itself on the scientific method. What's more, the idea that science supported the superiority of the criollos allowed the Científicos to, "[do] the ideological work of aligning revolutionary liberalism with the consolidation of state power" (Lund 8, Hale 23). That is, by embracing a liberal ideology predicated on the pre-existing notion that the European-descended, mercantile class was superior, they were able to merge produce a discourse of consensus under which the consolidation of state power by elites and liberal notions of popular governance could be reconcilable – at least for a time. However, the question of popular governance was often kicked down the road, as the regime was –quite understandably– more interested in long-term stability after decades of civil wars (Lund 9). Unfortunately, this meant the Científicos (and therefore the government writ large) carried forward the colonial discourse that the criollo sector was the superior "indigenous" group (in the "born-in-Mexico" sense) and therefore the best shepherd of the nation into the future. When it came to matters of dealing with indigenous peoples, Meyer summarizes that, "many of the Científicos were paternalistic towards the Indian masses at best and elitist at worst," which translated into policies that regarded native peoples apathetically at best (422).

³³ Briefly, Herbert Spencer applied the logic of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* to human social contexts. In his 1864 work entitled *Principles of Biology*, he made the argument that some peoples and organizations were more fit to succeed and contribute to the well-being of society by dint of their inherent characteristics (Godfrey 29). Though it is debatable whether or not he meant this in an essentialist way (rather than in a purely economic way), the fundamentals of this ideas lie in biology, and led his adherents to apply his "survival of the fittest" logic to cultures and races they perceived as "other."

Though the Spencerian logic as deployed by Porfirio Díaz and the Científicos privileged European inheritance to a fault, the late Porfiriato saw these scientific discourses turn their eyes inward and onto Mexico's past. In this spirit, the modernistas used the scientific method to further develop the conceit of criollo indigeneity that we analyzed in the work of Sor Juana and Sigüenza y Góngora in the previous section. By seeking out, restoring, and codifying archeological sites, anthropologists like Manuel Gamio sought to develop a distinctly Mexican notion of national heritage by anointing the Olmec, Maya, and Aztec civilizations as a classical period to rival the Greek and Roman traditions in Europe (Lorenzo 199-200). This attitude translated into policy when the normally European-oriented Porfiriato funded Gamio's endeavor to restore the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacán for the nation's centennial in 1910 (Hedrick 39). In his book *Mestizo Modernism: Race, Nation, and Identity in Latin American Culture, 1900-1940*, Tace Hedrick summarizes how the Científicos' process of codifying the indigenous past would culminate in a full-fledged science of national pedagogy by the end of the Porfiriato:

With the discovery that anthropology and archeology could function as legitimating new vocabularies for public policy and nation building, the Mexican anthropologist Manuel Gamio ... became increasingly influential in [his] government's policies on native cultures. [He] popularized the idea that the indigenous past formed a continuity with the indigenous present, *making this past into a national rather than merely native history*. (Hedrick 39, emphasis mine)

The clear benefactors of this rhetorical move were the criollo leadership (first the Científicos and then the modernistas), as their control over scientific discourse and state

funding allowed them to serve as gatekeepers to the discourses of national identity. Therefore, the crucial takeaway here is the recognition that the positivist logic that led most Científicos to treat living indigenous peoples as an inferior race was the *same* progress-oriented logical system used to develop the national discourse and infrastructure of a shared, indigenous past by the modernistas. Ultimately, just as with the criollo Abstract Indigeneity of the late Colonial Period, this was rhetorical device meant to authorize a criollo regime of power via the cultural appropriation of indigenous iconography and archeology. It did not exist to benefit those who lived Mesoamerican lifestyles and who perhaps still believed in the deities their national government was coming to fetishize.

Despite its success in modernizing the infrastructure of the nation, the Díaz regime was socially top-heavy and ultimately collapsed under the weight of its own elitism and philosophical contradictions. Over time, a steady current of labor abuses and related strikes, skirmishes, and massacres as well as opposition parties questioning the democratic legitimacy of the dictatorship reached a critical mass. Regarding the former, it logically follows that a regime operating on explicit notions of racial superiority would neglect politically and socially subaltern peoples, and this was most definitely the case. Most of the Porfiriato's modernizing infrastructure served primarily to benefit only the urban populace, the mercantile class, and regional caciques (Meyer 451). Meanwhile, a great many rural and far-flung areas of the state still found themselves under the control of despotic, state-backed hacendados who mistreated their laborers. This led a growing sense of discontentment and unrest among the lower classes in the nation, into which indigenous peoples figured prominently (Meyer 468-71, Mallon 3). Regarding the issues

of democratic norms and the transition of power, the new Liberales took up the mantle of being Anti-Re-Electionists (*Antirreeleccionistas*) and began to mount increasingly successful campaigns against Díaz, culminating in his resignation and the beginning of the Mexican Revolution (473)³⁴.

During the post-Revolutionary period, the newly formed government prioritized the representation of indigenous peoples as a state concern. Though still overwhelming comprised of criollos, the new government understood that its new mandate was to respond to the masses (at least ostensibly), rather than to a small group of criollo oligarchs and their families. In this spirit, it is readily observable that the post-Revolutionary regimes concerned themselves with social issues like secular education, land reform, and workers' rights. Though the amount of success these programs had –and at what point in time– is a historical mixed bag up for debate, it is inescapable that the new regime sought to capitalize on the masses' generalized distaste for oligarchical practices like European-style elitism and labor abuses. However, as no regime can hope to maintain its power in the long term based on a negative discourse (by declaring what it is not), those in power worked quickly to cultivate an idealized, national identity aesthetic –a positive discourse of Mexico– that would yield and sustain an enthusiastic

³⁴ Because this dissertation concerns itself with hegemonic technologies of power as exercised in space, I will be skipping the chaotic period of the Mexican Revolution. This is because, like the period from 1820-1860, this was a period of governmental hiatus (for the most part), and what is of concern in this project is the how the modernistas modified the discourses of the Científicos and translated them into *functional* state policy. Though some wartime governments anticipated the policies of the post-Revolutionary period, their widespread and efficacious implementation was only possible once the conflict came to an end.

base of popular support from which to derive a democratic mandate and, in turn, implement policy.

Though the transnational collective of Hispanic modernistas shared many philosophical antecedents with the Científicos (both groups were, generally speaking, positivists), they differed in their attitudes regarding cultural-biological essentialism. Due to the uneven and exploitative nature of industrialization of Latin American, the modernistas' writings decry the advent of scientific discourses like the Social Darwinism of Spencerian logic as utilitarian tools used to extract material resources from Latin America via the manipulation of Latin American bodies by European and North American actors (with local elites being complicit in these processes). By dint of their more inclusive approach to Latin American governance that sought to draw power from popular mandate rather than hegemony, they opposed pseudo-scientific, biologist apprehensions of race that sought to justify discourses of racial supremacy and inferiority. In other words, the modernistas firmly opposed locating race in the biology of a people because they believed it authorized oppressive regimes of power. From their vantage point, rejecting exploitative racial hierarches was as much a philosophical concern as it was a practical, political one because Latin America was –and continues to be– a territory characterized by sustained intercultural and interracial contact. Thus, any regime of power that privileges a Spencerian approach to racial purity is a non-starter for pro-Latin American philosophers and politicians as it relegates them to the lowest rung of the international social ladder from the outset.

Therefore, to replace the biologist hierarchy of bodies championed by 19th-century Spencerians, they proposed a hierarchy of space. By locating racial identity in the

realm of cultural/national experience rather than in the body, they sought to produce a more inclusive taxonomy of race, one that would allow Latin American nations to present their identities on the world stage in opposition to the derogatory, biologically essentialist narratives of the neocolonialist Científicos. In particular, the modernistas emphasized the relationship between material and aesthetic goals, creating a vertical spatial hierarchy that placed subsistence and biology at the bottom and knowledge, beauty, and culture at the top. In this way, Pan-Latin-American philosophers like José Enrique Rodó and José Vasconcelos called for the development of a society whose ultimate goals would be aesthetic rather than corporeal in nature (Van Vacano 115), establishing a dialectic between earthly materiality and heavenly aesthetics. Echoing Las Casas' stance in the Valladolid Debates, they considered a regime of pacific coalition building via education to be the way forward. In their writings, they often employ metaphors of cultivation wherein the seeds (uneducated citizens) are cultivated (educated) and thus emerge from the ground (from cultural monotony), reaching towards the sky (towards the modernist aesthetic).

Despite their apparent egalitarian leanings, the Latin American modernistas' spatial apprehension of race and culture cultivated its own gamut of institutional hierarchies as an inevitable consequence of the positivist logic on which they predicated their arguments. That is, as mentioned above, positivism as a logical system codes the idea of progress as an inherent good. Though the modernistas disagreed that biology in and of itself limited the potential of human progress, both they and the Spencerians defined societal progress as being a unidirectional progression from simpler to more complex societies (with their own definitions of "simple" and "complex" being dominant, of

course) (Godfrey 29-30). As we have seen, for the Spencerians this was a material progress towards more complex and prosperous economies. Meanwhile the modernistas saw material progress as subordinate to aesthetic progress. In both cases, progress is a function of change over time, and the more steep the curve towards their chosen definition of progress, the better. This produced a dialectic of progression vs. stagnation that coded non-participatory segments of society as backwards in the sense that they were, theoretically speaking, frozen in time³⁵. In this way, many of the previous discriminatory practices were re-authorized and re-enacted, albeit with a new place-based justification. In order to illustrate this point, let us consider some concrete examples of these themes in the writing of Rodó and Vasconcelos.

Throughout his foundational essay *Ariel: Motivos de Proteo* (1900), Rodó ties North American (the USA), “utilitarian” material culture to the character Caliban from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1610), who is a crude, base creature enslaved by the island’s patriarch, Prospero. In *Ariel*, Rodó treats Caliban as an allegory for modern progress-for-its-own-sake. By equating the United States to Caliban, Rodó suggests that North Americans live in subordination to progress rather than as the beneficiaries thereof, and then suggests that Latin America should reject such overt and aimless materialism in order to avoid a cycle of alienated servitude. His solution is to follow the example of the character Ariel, Prospero’s other servant who, in contrast with Caliban, is a beautiful, ethereal fairy-like creature capable of reason, even convincing his own master to be kinder and more charitable by the end of the play. In sum, Rodó conceptualized the ideal

³⁵ In fact, this logic is such a major theme in Mexican literature throughout the 20th and 21st centuries that it may deserve its own separate study.

goal of modernity as the pursuit of love, beauty, and reason and rejected material culture as being an end in and of itself, but rather a step on the way to aesthetic progress. What's more, he places such ideals in the "space-above" of his spatial hierarchy, an observation that is metaphorically evinced by the fact that Shakespeare's Ariel literally floats around in the play, never touching the ground.

Similarly establishing beauty and reason as the ideal goal for humanity, Vasconcelos defined what he believes to be the three stages of human development in terms of man's conceptual relationship with materiality. Like Rodó, Vasconcelos organizes the stages in terms of a vertical hierarchy. The first stage—the "base" stage—is one of subsistence and violence wherein humanity's goal is survival at all costs. The second stage is one of reciprocal logic wherein the material space is organized to promote a single culture's own worldview, thereby anointing economic structures entwined with discourses of local, racial superiority. Vasconcelos explains that remaining in stage two for too long leads to decadence, excess, and a generalized societal degenerescence, which is a critique of racially homogenous nations similar to Rodó's critique of North American subordination to progress in *Ariel*. Finally, the third stage is defined by the pursuit of an "aesthetic pathos" wherein "solo importará que el acto, por ser bello, produzca dicha" (*La raza cósmica* 39). Stage three is the zenith of this hierarchy, and Vasconcelos defines the cultures that reach this stage to be a Cosmic Race (una raza cósmica) Thus, Vasconcelos concurred with Rodó's anti-materialist conclusions and expanded on them by developing what he deemed to be a natural progression of goals for society that described how humans would manipulate space to achieve said goals. For both authors, positivistic materialism is base and immoral because it engenders abusive and exclusive economies

of power, while the pursuit of aesthetic goals (reason, beauty, love) is the ultimate goal of societal development. The ultimate consequence of this dialectic is that, as Vasconcelos saw it, stage two societies perceive race as being a biological category (grounded), while stage three societies use it to denote a community oriented towards a common aesthetic goal (cosmic).

Having rejected the essentialist racial paradigms of the Spencerians, the modernists could no longer treat any racial group as materially inferior and instead classified races in terms of their perceived cultural progress towards aesthetic goals, often recurring to spatial metaphors to make their point. Vasconcelos, being far less subtle than Rodó, developed a mythology of space wherein he traced modern (stage two) civilization back to the mythological lost continent of Atlantis. In *La raza cósmica* (13-17), Vasconcelos argues that Atlantis was a cultural behemoth that decayed due to negligence and degenerescence, but whose past grandeur was derived from its central Atlantic location, i.e. from having easy spatial access to all other coetaneous cultures (ibid). In this way, he posits that a high diversity of cultures in a determined space positively contributes to the progress of society, i.e. positively contributes to reaching the ideal of “aesthetic pathos.” Despite their romantic prose, Rodó and Vasconcelos’ universalist notion of cultural progress reproduced traditional notions of racial inferiority by casting sites of relatively low intercultural interaction as antithetical –and even obstacles to– national progress. In the final chapter of *Ariel*, Rodó describes the end of (the professor) Prospero’s lecture. The students disperse in silence as both the lecture and the day come to a close. By making it explicit that the sun is setting as the lecture ends, Rodó symbolically communicates that education and enlightenment are indelibly linked. By

presenting these as parallels, education becomes a celestial or cosmic phenomenon that emanates from sources of light, figuratively localizing the space of wisdom in the firmament. As the scene concludes, the youngest student, Enjolrás, confirms this suspicion when he approaches professor Prospero and declares the following:

Mientras la muchedumbre pasa, yo observo que, aunque ella no mira al cielo, el cielo la mira. Sobre su masa indiferente y oscura, como tierra del surco, algo descende de lo alto. La vibración de las estrellas se parece al movimiento de unas manos del sembrador. (Rodó 56)

In these concluding sentences of the essay, Rodó establishes that enlightenment descends from the space-above (because that is where the sun and stars are). In this way, enlightenment becomes a matter of cultivating (re-orienting) the masses whose *cabizbajo* indifference is equated with darkness and with furrowed land, as if humans are seeds that may grow towards enlightenment if guided by capable hands (“unas manos del sembrador”). While this seems a romantic and egalitarian gesture, what it ultimately entails is the creation of a spatial hierarchy wherein the purveyors of a single kind of wisdom –the Western kind– become cultivators and take on the responsibility of educating the masses that are, in turn, equated with the earth. In effect, it is an argument in favor of state paternalism enacted via spatial discourse.

Understanding the *modernistas* spatial approach to identity is important because many of these philosophers were also public intellectuals. In fact, José Vasconcelos served as the Minister of Education (as a “cultivator”) in Mexico in the immediate aftermath of the Mexican Revolution. He launched a series of ambitious, wide reaching, and relatively successful national education initiatives that were based on the principles I

have just discussed at some length. In a piece written for the *Bulletin of the Pan American Union* in 1923, he justifies to the outside world why he does not support teaching indigenous languages in state schools located in indigenous communities by declaring the following:

I have always opposed ... [establishing Indian schools] because that would in the end create a sort of reservation system that divides the population in castes and colors of skin, and we wish to educate and assimilate the Indian fully to our community and not to set him apart. In reality, for the education of the Indian, I believe we should follow the methods of those great Spanish educators, Las Casas, and Vasco de Quiroga, who trained the Indians to become a part of European civilization and assimilated him, thus giving ground to the creation of new countries and new races, instead of wiping out the native or reducing him to isolation. We can see no difference between the ignorant Indian and the ignorant French peasant or English peasant; as soon as they become educated they become a part of the civilized life of their nations and contribute to the betterment of the world. (236–237)

This excerpt is absolutely in keeping with Vasconcelos' spatial approach to race and national progress, espousing the view that the racial mixing is promoted by the Spanish-speaking State is the best path forward for all involved. This idea is certainly a tantalizing one to accept, and very progressive for his time. However, upon further reflection, he is implicitly ascribing an arbitrary notion of ignorance (by virtue of his positivistic notions of progress) to these indigenous peoples, devaluing their cultures, languages, and productive knowledges. In a way, Minister of Education José Vasconcelos is declaring to

the world that Mexican citizenship is contingent upon assimilation to positivistic modes of logic specific to Western cultural and philosophical traditions, thus perpetrating a wholesale disenfranchisement of millions of non-assimilated peoples in the national territory. They are *in* Mexico, but not *racially* Mexican, by this logic. They are ancestors to the nation, but not the nation.

Up to this point, I hope to have lain bare the philosophical underpinnings of the post-Revolutionary governing logic in order to better understand the real-world practices that it unleashed and their consequences. Returning to this chapter's central conceit that there have occurred two major shifts in the apprehension of indigeneity in Mexico that can be theoretically cast as moments of precipitous abstraction of indigenous bodies from the concept of indigeneity, let us now discuss how the post-Revolutionary State's new national-racial identitary paradigm of *mestizaje* developed a vast network of spatial practices that affected the lived spaces and therefore lived practices of indigenous peoples.

Up until the Científicos theoretically linked liberal policies of democratic governance to the hegemonic consolidation of state and Church power, indigenous peoples in both homogenous and transculturated spaces had reached an species of cultural homeostasis. What I mean by this is that in the centuries following the mass abstraction and destabilization of the colonial years that provoked the first crisis, many communities had returned to previous –or developed new, hybrid– modes of spatial absolutism. Lockhart explains that Stage 2 (ca. 1545-50 to 1640-50) of the, “general postconquest evolution of the Nahuas,” was characterized by rapid hispanization due to the colony exploring and expanding its reach into more and more communities. In Stage 3 (ca.

1650–1800), he explains that the Nahuas began to take a progressively more agentive role in their own hispanization, adopting elements that would, “more strongly affect ... the framework of organization and technique, leading in some cases to a true amalgamation of the two traditions” (*The Nahuas* 429). For our purposes here, such an observation communicates that the indigenous populations in transcultural contexts were articulating hybrid networks of power via absolute structures that drew on both traditions. They had emerged from the previous crisis of lived practice and begun to participate in hybrid modes of spatial absolutism. Though they were not privileged by the state, they were now largely an overlooked population of Christians that could spend a lifetime subsisting in a similar environment to the one in which they were born. Many Catholic churches throughout Mexico would even give Mass in indigenous languages, despite this not technically being permitted by the Catholic superstructure until December of 2013 (Grant). As far as homogenous indigenous communities go, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla correctly explains that geographies non-conducive to colonial networks of resource extraction (mountains, jungles, etc.) have shielded many populations from being “conquered” (42–43). Thus, both of these indigenous segments of society could say they had reached a sort of stasis of absolute lived experience until the post-Revolutionary period.

Vasconcelos’ mission to cultivate the nation via an ambitious network of educational reforms had much in common with the colonial process of evangelization and problematized indigenous absolute practices in a similar fashion. Just like the colonial missions, his agents were dispatched to rural and/or indigenous communities. Once there, they were charged not only with the education of the populace, but also with the

reorganization of the local infrastructure and economy. They were the “sembradores”, to borrow Rodó’s term, who would raze and prepare the ground for the effective cultivation of culturally mestizo citizens. Concretely, Viesca argues convincingly that, though a humanist, Vasconcelos did not abandon the Christian ideology that the state was vehicle with which to bring salvation to the indigenous peoples of Latin America (Viesca 53-54; Vasconcelos, *Indología* 88, 216). He openly admired the colonial evangelization efforts as a positive development towards a more civilized populace, and therefore it should not come as a shock that he styled his program on these early missions, only now with a secular humanist ideology (Viesca 53; Vasconcelos, *Discursos*, 224). Thus, the ultimate goal was to, “reduce the distance between that separated [indigenous] sectors from the groups leading modern Mexico,” by a process of civilizing missions (Batalla, *Mexico*, 114). However, just as in the Colonial Period, the “evangelizing” mission of the state was simultaneously ideological and economic. When teachers arrived in remote pueblos, they were charged with the economic reorganization of the space, as well, so as to incorporate the community into the larger mission of the nation. In the long term, this led to these communities, who had once been insulated from state economic crises by virtue of their subsistence-guided lifestyle, to become vulnerable to the capriciousness of the growing capitalist economy with “disastrous” results during economic downturns (Viesca 37; Batalla, *Identidad* 67). In this way, the value of indigenous labor and subsistence labor was abstracted by virtue of being subordinated to the needs of the nation. This would problematize traditional economies of power, knowledges, and even language use throughout the 20th century.

Based on the previous descriptions of the post-Revolutionary State's modernista educational philosophy and its overt colonialist, evangelizing methods, it should come as little surprise that the 20th century saw the steepest decline in estimated indigenous language usage since the colonial crisis of indigenous representation. Just as in the period following the Valladolid debates, indigenous peoples found themselves facing economic and cultural precarity as the result of yet another ambivalent policy shift. Like the New Laws of 1542, the indigenous education initiatives spearheaded promised resources and access to political bureaucracies at the cost of symbolic annihilation. Since the INEGI (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía) began publishing census results in 1930, indigenous language use by persons over the age of five has seen a near 60% drop-off, with the estimated 16 million native speakers in 1930 plunging to about 6.6 million by 2015 ("Instituto"). Compared to the general population, Antonio García Cubas estimated at the end of the nineteenth century that approximately thirty-eight percent of the Mexican population spoke an indigenous language (17). By contrast, only about six percent of Mexican citizens self-reported that they spoke an indigenous language in the 2000 census ("Instituto"). Guillermo Bonfil Batalla famously wrote that post-Revolutionary educational programs and the nationalization of the economy together constituted a "de-Indianization" process that amounted to a cultural ethnocide of Mesoamerican lifestyles throughout large swaths of Mexico (*Mexico*, 17). He declared that the adept reader of Mexican history should read the verb "to civilize" as "to de-Indianize," or to recognize that civilizing processes pressure or coerce indigenous peoples to renounce their cultural patrimony, "with all the consequent changes in their social organization and culture" (*Ibid*, 105, 17). I believe the philosophical underpinnings, the

methods, and results of the processes we have analyzed here roundly support that conclusion. They are, respectively, the motive, the means, and the smoking gun for a mass spatial abstraction of indigenous peoples from their cultures over the better part of the 20th century.

Meanwhile, the upper classes were experiencing a baroque-style cultural renaissance that drew heavily on the traditions of the very people they were systematically erasing. The term *indigenista* came to refer to both the governing attitudes of indigenous-oriented political organization and a parallel artistic movement (Taylor 2). For observant readers, the very morphology of the term communicates the positivist, unidirectional nature with which it apprehended the cultures it purported to represent and help. The suffix “-ista” denotes a specialization in the subject of study or observation to which it is affixed. Thus, the *indigenista* political and artistic movements by definition take indigenous peoples as the objects of study or practice, not as interlocutors in a cultural dialogue. Their perceived cultural deviance is the object represented, not their material existence or embodied experiences. The 1920’s saw the rise to prominence of muralists and painters such as Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo; authors such as José Vasconcelos; poets such as Gabriela Mistral (who was teaching in Mexico at the time); and many other modernista artists throughout Latin America. All of these individuals contributed in some degree to the objectification of indigenous peoples by working to co-opt the history and plights of the rural (often indigenous) class into the hegemonic discourses of both the political Left and the Right.

Indigenista literature is rarely of indigenous production by virtue of both its underlying motives and its means of production. Ultimately, *indigenista* literature and art

came to present the pragmatic, educated mestizo (the stand-in for the nation-state) as the pragmatic savior and educator of the forgotten, silent Indio. This paternalistic attitude contributed to the discourse of mestizaje by promoting the assimilation of the various indigenous nations in lieu of promoting individual cultural autonomy and self-determination. This literature –though it often exposes abuses levied against these peoples– depicts the indigenous as lost, downtrodden, and fundamentally incapable of moving forward without help from beneficent Westerners (“Indigenismo”). What’s more, when it represents abuses by governing officials, those officials are almost universally hacendados or caciques that have held on to their power since before the Revolution, thus making the discourse more about the State v. Regional landholders than about the fair treatment of indigenous Mexicans; it seeks to assign blame rather than cultivate solidarity with the victims. If we also take into account that most indigenista texts were published by the state, it is not shocking that in the 20th century indigenous authors were scarce to nonexistent in indigenista writing.

2.4 A Third Inflection Point?: Cultural Democratization and Contestatory Currents (ca. 1965–)

With the rise of anticapitalistic ideologies and new networking technologies, the late mid-late 20th and the early 21st centuries have seen the rise of new iterations of indigeneity that trend towards re-embodying indigeneity. That is, the cultural abstraction brought on by the national reorganization programs was evident even in the early aftermath of major reform packages. For example, in 1953 author Juan Rulfo released his foundational work of Mexican fiction entitled *El llano en llamas* that is critical of how the state treats its peasant class, into which the indigenous sector primarily figures. It

contains a story entitled, “Nos han dado la tierra” (“They have given us the land”). This short story implicitly critiques the land reforms of the President Lázaro Cárdenas regime (1940-46) by narrating a march of impoverished people to the new lands the government has assigned them, seemingly beneficently. However, they have been given deeds to arid, infertile lands, on which they will struggle to even subsist. In similar fashion, the famous post-indigenista writer Rosario Castellanos, a former Vasconcelos-style teacher-missionary herself, made a point of incorporating the insolubility of the national educational programs as a common theme in her poetry, novels, and political discourse. She even makes a point of framing both the state and the hacendados as bad-faith actors when it came to the treatment of her indigenous characters, a narrative twist on the indigenista genre that “anticipate[d] ... the contestatory current that was to emerge vocally in the sixties, when radical social scientists branded indigenismo ethnocide” (O’Connell 77). What is important to grasp here is that policies of spatial abstraction were once again contributing to a generalized discontentment among the lower classes (into which the overwhelming majority of indigenous peoples figured). So much so, in fact, that members of the hegemonic culture like Rulfo and Castellanos³⁶ came to express it as a theme in their often state-published and critically-acclaimed works.

The generalized discontentment among the rural and working classes led to a political crisis in the country in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. In response to the failings of indigenismo reflected in the works of the post-indigenistas like Rulfo and Castellanos, testimonial literature emerged, predictably, as yet another attempt to fix the

³⁶ Castellanos, by the way, had wholeheartedly supported and worked for the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) during her youth before later questioning its methods (O’Connell 16, 21, 106-09).

problems of cultural positivism with a different conjugation of positivism. Analisa Taylor describes this as a literary struggle for cultural autonomy that responds to, “public outrage over the post-revolutionary state’s failure to bring social justice to the urban poor and its brutal repression against those who have dared to voice this outrage” (Taylor 68). Works that exemplify this transition are *Hasta no verte Jesús Mío* (1969) and *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1983), two semi-fictional pieces written by journalists Elena Poniatowska and Elizabeth Burgos-Debray, respectively. These two pieces represent different ends of a representational spectrum. The former is more of a stylized biography wherein an indigenous woman discusses her lifelong struggles to survive in Mexico with some fantastical elements strategically included to best represent the narrative as it was presented to the interviewer and author, acclaimed Journalist Elena Poniatowska. The former text is the life story of Rigoberta Menchú and tells the story of how she grew up under harsh conditions and eventually began to do political work in her native Guatemala in order to raise the station of indigenous peoples. I would contend that both works are important responses to the abstraction of indigenismo because Poniatowska’s work challenges the limits of positivism to represent alternative worldviews, while DeBray’s narrative of Menchú’s life participates in hegemonic, positivistic modes of logic in order to gain sympathy and support for the indigenous political sector in Guatemala.

Although many writers and activists challenged the topography of the modernistas’ enduring spatial approach to identity as elitist, deficient, and exclusive, it was not until the mid-1990s that the popular culture would challenge the tenants of education-based citizenship as fundamentally discriminatory. In 1994, Mexico entered

into the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), an international trade deal that turned the primarily intra-national economy into an inter-national economy. For indigenous (and other largely peasant) populations who had seen their subsistence economies re-structured into capitalist ones under the post-Revolutionary state, NAFTA resulted in the drastic devaluation of their crops and thus the exacerbation of their impoverished circumstances. The abstraction of their local economies over the course of the twentieth century made their practices acutely sensitive to the whims of the global market. Thus, NAFTA became the political straw-that-broke-the-camel's-back³⁷ for many indigenous and peasant communities in Southern Mexico (again the line between the two groups is blurry and always worth parsing out) because it aimed to increase the wealth of the nation (of the cosmopolitan elites) at the expense of making their livelihoods even more precarious. This led to armed insurrections by native populations in Southern Mexico by the EZLN and the rise to prominence of thinkers like subcomandante Marcos and comandante Éster.

Interestingly, the EZLN leadership seemed to be admirably aware that the modernista mode of thinking used spatial metaphors to code indigenous peoples as inferior because they employ alternative spatial metaphors in their communiqués and speeches, respectively, to expose the failings of the modernista spatial-identitary paradigm that still endures in State and popular discourses. In a particularly evocative example from subcomandante Marcos, which Mihalis Mentinis stresses as fundamental

³⁷ It is worth mentioning here that much of the philosophical infrastructure for this break evolved throughout the last four decades of the 20th century. This is simply where I date the philosophical “rupture,” as it were, as it represents a major socio-political event (The Zapatista Uprising) wherein the philosophy translated into action.

to understanding the nuances of the Zapatista uprising, an indigenous boy approaches two other boys playing chess in a schoolyard (29-30). After asking repeatedly how to play the game only for them to first ignore him and then say he is too stupid to understand it. He then walks away. A few minutes later, he returns with a muddy boot, lays it on the chessboard and asks, "Check?" He is then met with hostility and anger by the boys who had been alternatively ignoring and demeaning him (Rodríguez Loscano 5). In this metaphor, the movements of the chess pieces on the board are representative of the political machinations of the state. The purposeful exclusion of the indigenous boy from the game both via the overt rejection and their refusal to teach him to play imply the state is neither concerned with truly including indigenous peoples in the national project, nor teaching them to do so. In such a case, one of the "boys" would need to cede his seat or they would need to develop an entirely new game for three players. The boot represents an act of civil disobedience that is analogous to the uprising. It participates in the hostile nature of chess (it is a war game, after all) while simultaneously revealing the game as abstract and exclusive. On this level, the abstract nature of the chessboard is revealed to be purely representational; it is a false simulacrum that dissimulates reality, mapping how the players imagine things to be. It is a Cartesian plane that represents the abstracting nature of positivism. So, when the indigenous boy reveals the false nature of the game to the boys by interrupting it with the boot, he is turning their attention away from their imagi(nation) and on towards the material world. Here, the mud on the boot, I contend, is a call back to the traditional association of indigenous people with the ground within the modernista hierarchy of space. However, subcomandante Marcos' indigenous boy is

destabilizing that vertical hierarchy by placing it on *top* of the chessboard and associating it with a shrewd act of civil disobedience.

Since the Zapatista uprising, indigenous-related literature has more explicitly concerned itself with unmasking the State's narrative of space-based, mestizo identity as a rhetorical device that both obfuscates the real contours in the plane of racial and economic justice in Mexico and authorizes their continued existence. While previous authors have alluded to these problems, I argue that they have generally presented solutions from *within* the confines of state power. For example, State or ingrained mainstream editorials published post-indigenista authors like Castellanos and Poniatowska, while current indigenous-related texts emerge from a variety of sources and do so with less overt state backing (or none at all). And, indeed, some actors still resist hegemonic narratives within the confines of state power. Although the philosophy of indigenous-related narrative production seems to have shifted, it still formally engages with its intellectual predecessors, predicating its conceits on the unjust representative paradigms of the past.

By way of a conclusion, it is possible that these contestatory currents constitute another inflection point. Both the indigenous and non-indigenous-authored texts I analyze in Chapters 3 and 4 seem to be in direct conversation with the abstracting nature of the earlier paradigm shifts. That is, they seem to provide retrospective on the policies and racialized, socioeconomic hierarchies that have problematized indigenous lifestyles in order to build a future of their own. In this way, they seem to represent a swing of the pendulum back towards absolute spatial practices simultaneously within and against state power. Put another way, the inflection points as I have presented them represent crises

brought on by large-scale spatial abstraction anticipated and facilitated by administrative decisions by the hegemonic culture, and we seem to be living through a contestatory moment that promotes cultural continuity through hybrid absolute practices. On the other hand, this may be an entirely different kind of paradigm shift/inflection point that is being precipitated by the reduced influence of the state in a globalized economy and high levels of international cooperation by subaltern groups (and individuals in general, for that matter). Frankly, it may very well not be a paradigm shift unless it anticipates and precipitates a change in political policy, as well. Only time will tell. All the same, recognizing the power of hegemonic attitudes and policies regarding indigeneity to alternatively promote or problematize cultural absolute via strategic spatial manipulation will allow us to read some 21st century indigenous representations in-context.

CHAPTER 3. INCIDENTAL INDIGENEITY: EMPATHETIC PATHOS AND THE ETHICS OF INVISIBILITY

3.1 Incidental Indigeneity

In contemporary representations of Mesoamerican peoples, it is common for the indigeneity of a character to be incidental to the narrative. That is, the references to a character's indigenous heritage or lifestyle are oblique or fleeting, appearing as ancillary character traits instead of motivating factors (at least upon first reading/viewing). In these cases, being indigenous has no obvious bearing on the chain of cause and effect that orders the narrative structure. Thus, it is possible to overlook, take-for-granted, or outright ignore the impact the protagonists' indigeneity or claims to indigeneity have on their stories (be it outside or alongside) the presented narrative. However, indigenous primacy's absence is not the same as a lack of textual commentary on the place of indigenous peoples in national and international discourses³⁸. Upon analyzing a text's structural and thematic elements alongside its place within popular discourse, it becomes apparent that an incidental indigenous reading is either **complementary** or **supplementary** to the narrative. That is, such a reading is parallel, supporting and expanding upon the text's central premise, or **conflictive**, providing a missing or disappeared piece of the story. I do not call this trope **incidental indigeneity** because such a plot structure is unmotivated, but because it entails including ancillary readings. In

³⁸ I use the term "discourse" in the sociological sense, meaning, "systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak" (Lessa 285–86). This definition is in contrast to the "discourse" of narrative studies, which refers to the "motivated" (see next footnote) structural elements of a story (Chatman 19–20). To avoid confusion, I simply call this "plot," as is done in film studies (Bordwell and Thompson 76–77)

fact, I mean to demonstrate precisely the opposite. I argue that the trope of **incidental indigeneity** is both motivated³⁹ and deployed strategically via key structural choices to support the primary discourse of the text.

In this chapter, I analyze three texts of varying formats that strategically deploy indigenous racial coding alongside seemingly unrelated narrative-critical personal struggles (i.e., they participate in the trope of incidental indigeneity). They are *Sleep Dealer* (2008), a cyberpunk migration film by Alex Rivera; *Made in Mexico* (2018–), an eight-episode⁴⁰ reality show produced by Netflix; and *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo* (2009), a coming-of-age border-crossing novel by Yuri Herrera. After summarizing each text and analyzing how their structural components support a distant-engaging narrative that invites the reader/viewer to empathize with the focalizer-protagonist/s, I discuss how each codes its protagonist as indigenous (either implicitly or explicitly) and how, despite the coding, indigeneity itself has little to no bearing on the plot. Then, I discuss whether their uses of incidental indigeneity are complementary or supplementary by determining if an indigenous reading supports or conflicts with the content of the plot. By way of a conclusion, I briefly remark on the ethics of incidental indigeneity via a comparative analysis of all three texts. However, it is not my intent to assign a positive nor negative value to incidental indigeneity. Rather, I encourage readers to recognize the existence and persistence of this trope via my proposed taxonomy in

³⁹ By “motivated”, I mean it in the film studies sense: the “motive” for a phenomenon’s existence in the text is justified in relation to another element in the text (Bordwell and Thompson 66). However, since the authors of these texts are still living, I sometimes refer to interviews they have given. For the sake of clarity, I call authorial “motivation” “intent.”

⁴⁰ As of spring 2019.

order to provide a launching point from which we may frame ethical arguments regarding indigenous representation going forward because no two representations will be equal in content, nor point-and-purpose.

Incidental indigeneity is, first-and-foremost, a structural concern that emerges when a character's indigeneity has no overt causal relationship to the plot. In *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, Seymour Chatman argues that "character" is an open-ended construct determined by the audience:

A viable theory of character should preserve *openness* and *treat characters as autonomous beings*. It should argue that character is reconstructed by the audience from evidence *announced* or *implicit* in an original construction and communicated by the [plot], through whatever medium. (119, emphasis mine)

Thus, he argues we must recognize that a character is both an agent of cause and effect in the plot and a floating signifier determined and re-determined by an audience's apprehensions of what drives a character to act, which will vary depending on context. By signaling textual evidence that may be "announced" or "implicit," Chatman recognizes that a text's meaning is a matter of apprehending different strata of information. Depending on their level of exposure to the different elements of the societal discourse with which the film engages, the viewers will take note of different elements and ascribe to them different motivations. They do this based on observed character "traits," which Chatman defines as a "relatively stable or abiding personal quality" established by a matrix of actions, perceptions, etc., available in the text (126–27). A text may outright announce that a character is introverted, like Memo from *Sleep Dealer*, or simply infer this based on his actions or interactions with his friends and family. In terms

of spatial theory, analogously, we can read and ascribe personality traits to a character by reading the “lived environment” of their diegetic world: we can read a visual or textual “landscape” to deepen our understanding of their “geographic self” (See Chapter 1: 7–8, 15 and Chapter 2: 79–80). In this way, we can rely on implicit and announced visual and geographic information to infer that Memo is indigenous. However, although the trait of being indigenous may be important to a protagonist’s *story* (the implied content of the narrative world both on- and off-“screen”), it may serve no practical function in the *plot* (the casually linked chain of events that constitutes the narrative) (Bordwell and Thompson 76-77). In all of the texts analyzed in this chapter, indigeneity is non-essential to understanding the content of the plot. However, analyzing this lack can be fruitful because the choice to leave out or downplay its potential significance is often a motivated, strategic choice made in service to the point-and-purpose of the narrative.

Incidental indigeneity is a side effect of the choice to cultivate a subjective pathos between the narrator and reader/viewer by reducing the distance between the audience and the protagonist. The distance shrinks in one of a few ways. One, the text may use first-person narration, where the reader/viewer experiences the plot via the mental or perceptual subjectivity of the narrator. This forms a direct link in the narrative chain of signification between the reader/viewer and the protagonist. Two, it may use third-person restricted narration with an anonymous narrator, whose perceptual unassailability deflects the reader/viewer’s attachment onto the protagonist, encouraging them to identify with this individual by default (Wyile 116–17). Three, it may vacillate between these two modes, using the first-person to highlight critical themes and spatially/temporally heterogeneous parallelisms (key ideas, imagery, etc.). When this narratory oscillation

provides first-person, emotion-driven retroactive reflections on the content of the restricted third-person narrative, this is called “distant-engaging” narration, a style that Andrea Schwenke Wyile argues, “invites [the readers] to consider themselves in, or close to, the position of the protagonist” (116). By reducing the distance via these strategic narration techniques, the protagonist/s become/s the focalizer of the narrative: the perceptive filter of the story’s content with whom the audience must identify. In film, we would say that the *range* (the content of story information) is *restricted* and the *depth* (the perception of diegetic events as represented on-screen) is highly *subjective*, forcing the reader to rely on the focalizer-protagonist’s perceptions and interpretations to understand and contextualize the events of plot (Bordwell and Thompson 88-91). In this way, distant-engaging texts use affect to encourage the audience to relate to the focalizer’s interpretation of the narrative, meaning that these are often didactic pieces⁴¹. In distant-engaging narration, character traits not related to the protagonist’s emotional and perceptual subjectivity are a poor point-of-attack from which to launch an emotional appeal because such information relies on the audiences’ variegated perceptions. The inclusion of such information as a causal element would distance the reader/viewer from the focalizer by “zooming-out” to the macro level because it would cause the audience to fill-in cultural knowledge gaps between its experience and the now “Othered” subjectivity with discursive shortcuts, such as stereotypes. This would draw attention away from the central narrative and weaken its affective power. However, the superficial irrelevance of indigeneity to the narrative is not the same as lacking racial coding. In fact,

⁴¹ Indeed, Schwenke Wyile emphasizes that distant-engaging narration is a widespread convention of children’s literature (116).

the coexistence of the two in a single text is the defining characteristic of incidental indigeneity.

Racial coding is most often binary in nature because it presents race in terms of conformity and deviance. Richard Dyer theorizes that, “whiteness” is, “seeming not to be anything in particular,” because it is, “order, rationality, [and] rigidity,” from the point of view of the audience. It is the act of conforming to expectations within the hegemonic status quo of the narrative, which often mirrors the real-world status quo. Conversely, the audience identifies racial minorities via signs of non-conformity; they are “disorder, irrationality, and looseness” (Dyer 141–45 in Barringer). Nama provides a telling example of this oppositional theory of racial coding in his analysis of the science fiction film *Logan’s Run* (1976). He explains that the white population of the film suffers under an oppressive regime allows them to live to the age of thirty. The SF film premise flips the deviance/conformity relationship on its head when Logan, seemingly having escaped the city and the regime, encounters a food collection robot named Box. Box, coded as “black,” waxes grandiloquent in the style of Civil Rights orators about the rules and comes to represent societal rigidity (and the all-white cast looseness and freedom):

Interestingly, the only sign of blackness in the entire film is responsible for creating a static condition for thousands of whites on a quest for freedom ... trapped by a captivating “black” robot with a gift for grandiose oration. This setup is quite telling, given that a fundamental feature of the counterculture movement to radically change American society was bolstered by charismatic black speechmakers. (Nama 25)

Deviance from the pre-1970’s American understanding of “freedom” is what codes Box

as “black,” and this observation requires a cursory familiarity with the US Civil Rights Movement, or at least with the symbolism of their oratory legacy. In this way, white anxiety about the loss of “freedom” (to refuse services to people of color, etc.) in the face of the Civil Rights Act is allegorically represented in *Logan’s Run*. Box is a fit analogue for our discussion of incidental indigeneity because his racial coding is implicit, much like the protagonists of the texts analyzed in this chapter. Like the coded blackness of Box, we can recognize and analyze implicit (and explicit) indigenous coding in *Sleep Dealer*, *Made in Mexico*, and *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo* by judging elements of the texts in terms of their conformity or deviance to hegemonic discourses of indigeneity.

North American (from Mexico and the USA) texts racially code indigenous Mexicans, implicitly or otherwise, via an indentitary triangulation that begins with the conflict between colonized and colonizer. That is, the conformity/deviance relationship described by Nama revolves around the extant matrices of colonial and neocolonial power in the regions depicted, specifically in terms of colonial and neocolonial abuses with which the viewer/reader will be at least passingly familiar. By “colonial,” I mean the pre-capitalist regimes of state power that exercised control over their colonies via a complex web of social stratification and cultural hegemony, primarily for the purposes of resource extraction (Loomba 11–12. Also, Chapter 1: 12–13). Similarly, by neocolonial, I mean the contemporary nation state’s re-authorization of colonial systems of power, occurring when a state cedes control over extractive economies to stateless corporate interests in exchange for its incorporation into globalized flows of capital. In this way, the state often becomes complicit in abuses reminiscent of those of the colonial period

proper, a phenomenon Coronil calls internal colonialism (Loomba 11, Coronil 643–44). However, being cast as “colonized,” or disadvantaged by neocolonial systems of power, does not mean a character is indigenous on its own. We must take this observation in concert with other factors like language use; visual cues; allusions to real-world political movements; etc., because being subaltern, or on the political periphery of hegemonic discourses of power, is a variegated and relational category that shifts according to space and time.

As mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2, Mexico’s indigenous population is ethnically, linguistically, and politically diverse, and the groups are not all subaltern (or “colonized”) in the same way. Fernando Coronil has argued that subaltern peoples speak from “variously subordinated positions” that are contingent upon their relationship with their immediate, geographically specific economies of power (646). For instance, it is an unfit comparison to lump together the Zapatistas of Chiapas and the Nahuas of Central Mexico given that the former is a political movement in open rebellion against the Mexican State and the latter takes advantage of its proximity to nationalist discourses of Colonial Antiquarianism (See Chapter 2: 58) to nonviolently incorporate itself in extant power structures, especially academia. What’s more, there is much dissent within these groups on how to represent themselves and how to resist the abuses of state power. Therefore, I operate under Coronil’s definition of subalternity that posits:

I propose that we view the subaltern neither as a sovereign-subject that actively occupies a bounded place nor as a vassal-subject that results from the dispersed effects of multiple external determinations, but as an agent of identity construction that participates, under determinate conditions within a field of

power relations, in the organization of its multiple positionality and subjectivity.
(644)

Thus, the spatiotemporal location of the subaltern subject in relation to entrenched power structures is important for identifying the character traits/particularities that will code said subject as indigenous-colonized rather than simply colonized.

Let us apply this logic to the three texts analyzed in this chapter. Both *Sleep Dealer* and *Señales que predederán al fin del mundo* code their respective protagonists (Memo and Makina) as colonized by virtue of the fact that extractive economies negatively affect their day-to-day lives, forcing them to adapt new strategies for survival. However, this does not code them as indigenous on its own. Instead, these are suspicions that we confirm only when Memo's family appears on-screen in traditional Zapotec garb and the film portrays him alongside a Zapatista (EZLN) analogue: the Mayan Army for Water Liberation. Likewise, Makina's colonized status narrows into indigenous-colonized by virtue of her linguistic connection to her Pueblo, i.e. that she speaks the local Amerindian language. On the other hand, Kitzia in *Made in Mexico* represents the converse circumstance of Memo and Makina in that she announces that she is of Mexica descent. In doing so, she takes on the role of colonizer by extracting social capital from an indigenous ethnicity that has gone extinct via assimilation since the time of colonization. She equates being Mexica with being Mexican, i.e. having descended from both the European and Aztec antiquities, thereby performing a neocolonial act of social capital extraction that she uses to justify her position on her reality show as a voice of contemporary Mexico.

Despite its usefulness in parsing out racial coding, the binary colonizer/colonized

relationship presents an obstacle to cultivating affect between a protagonist-focalizer and the reader/viewer because privileging difference would undermine the relatability of the former to the latter. In *Logan's Run*, Nama makes clear that racial coding marks Box as a villain, so a text must be mindful of how it frames an individual's coloniality if it seeks to portray a subaltern figure as a protagonist. In order to achieve an affective link with a general North American audience, coded racial difference in a focalizer-protagonist must be casual, relegated to minor substrata of character traits, or used only insofar that it aligns with the sensibilities of the status quo. In the essay "Of Mimicry and Man," Homi Bhabha posits that colonized subjects come to participate in colonizer society via mimicry, which is a sort of "camouflage" that is "a form of resemblance [to the colonizer] that differs/defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically" (91). In this conception of mimicry, the colonized stands in for the colonizer, imitating their conventions and mannerisms as a "reformed 'Other'" who is "almost the same, but not quite / but not white" (86, 91). In short, the colonized "passes" in hegemonic society, but does not disappear into it.

In texts of incidental indigeneity, the colonial ambivalence inherent in mimicry is played out on the bodies of the protagonists. In *Sleep Dealer*, Memo is a Oaxacan man who wants to leave his home to join the dystopian, hegemonic cyber economy. In *Made in Mexico*, rich, white Kitzia predicates her "Mexican-ness" on her dubious indigeneity via mestizaje. In *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo*, Makina is a translator between an unnamed indigenous language, Spanish, and English, relying on her prowess for mimicry to survive. In each case, the character trait of being indigenous –whether implicit or announced– reveals the coloniality of the subject and "disrupts [colonial]

authority” and, by extension, the authority of the text’s plot to represent the whole story (Bhabha 89). Therefore, a text seeking to cultivate pathos based on inviting the viewer to relate to the subjectivity of the protagonist may downplay the non-hegemonic elements by employing incidental indigeneity.

Though the colonial ambivalence revealed by reading for incidental indigeneity may alternatively support or contradict the content of a narrative, it is not indicative of a representation’s ethical value in- and of-itself. Nama grapples with the temptation to assign values to the ways in which American science fiction (SF) films depict African-Americans, but resists binaries, concluding that the range of different representations (and their implications) is so diverse that it would be “too reductive” to characterize whole tropes as “either ‘negative’ or ‘positive’.” He goes on to stress the importance of context, i.e. a film’s location within the debates one uses to frame their readings, stating, “No matter where the film is set –in a futuristic or otherworldly backdrop– the ‘cultural work’ that the film is performing is not divorced from the real state of American race relations” (4–5). Similarly, my taxonomy of complementary and supplementary incidental indigeneity is neither positive nor negative, but instead a reflection on this character trait’s function in relation to the contemporary discourse of Mexican indigeneity. A text whose motivated organizational principles put indigeneity under erasure could, by dint of analysis and critique, become liberatory in its own right by virtue of fomenting resistance to racist discourses in the long term. In fact, the Twitter debate surrounding *Made in Mexico*’s apparent colorism has proved enlightening to many by discursively supplementing the lack of racial diversity in the series. Alternatively, as is the case in *Sleep Dealer*, downplaying indigeneity and turning it into a complementary

reading works to generate sympathy for the plights of indigenous resistance groups who face real-world politico-aesthetic obstacles, like the EZLN. North American audiences often mistakenly apprehend them as “terroristic” due to their visual aesthetic (they wear ski masks, carrying weapons, and often traffic in low-definition video) despite existing before such imagery had concretized in the west (i.e., pre-9/11).

3.2 *Sleep Dealer* (2008): Incidentally, Not a Zapatista

Alex Rivera’s *Sleep Dealer* (2008) is a cyberpunk activist migration film and coming-of-age tale that invites the viewer to recognize that multinational corporations problematize the subsistence-based livelihoods of rural Mexicans and empathize with their plight. The primary focalizer and protagonist of the film is Memo, a reserved young Oaxacan man who dreams of leaving his small, dusty hometown of Santa Ana del Río (Santa Ana) to work in the tech sector as a “cybracero,” or a digital migrant worker. He is disenchanted with Santa Ana because the local dam has made eking out a meager living difficult and unfulfilling. The inciting incident of the film occurs when Memo, a technological autodidact who has built his own radio, accidentally overhears transmissions from the militant, security wing of the San Diego-based Del Río Water, Inc. (Del Río). Assuming the eavesdropping represents an implicit threat to the local dam because it occurs in a region where the Mayan Army for Water Liberation (MAWL) is active, Del Río sends—without further scrutiny—a remote-piloted drone to destroy Memo’s home, resulting in the brutal murder of his father. Wracked with guilt, Memo travels to Tijuana to become a digital laborer to support his family. There, he cultivates a relationship with Luz, a writer who makes her living trafficking in documentary-style

memory narratives online. Eventually, Memo meets Rudy Ramirez, the novice drone pilot who killed his father. Rudy, who has sought out and located Memo via Luz's memory publishing services, expresses his intense guilt and his will to make things right. In the end, –seemingly on a whim, narratively speaking– the three resolve to take revenge. In the climactic finale, they hijack a drone and use it to destroy the dam; loosening the stranglehold Del Río has on Santa Ana.

Structurally speaking, *Sleep Dealer* is an emotionally didactic, distant-engaging coming-of-age film that depicts Memo's coming-to-consciousness that neocolonial technologies of power reproduce the same dangerous material inequalities as the colonial past. The film alternates between the points of view of Memo, Luz, and Rudy, always restricting the range to their own field of knowledge (it primarily focuses on Memo, though). Although most of the film is third-person restricted (i.e., more or less “objective”) (Bordwell 88–91), it occasionally presents highly stylized, first-person subjective montages that represent the internal thoughts and emotions (with primacy given to emotions) of the characters. The most poignant example of subjective reflection filtered through emotion occurs when Memo remarks that he does not have the heart to tell his mother that his gainful but physically brutal employment in Tijuana is affecting his health. In this scene, Memo makes explicit the visual and thematic parallels between himself and the river: “Me estaba drenando la energía y mandándola lejos. Lo que le pasó al río me estaba pasando a mí.” To underscore visually their parallel exploitation⁴²/suffering, the film intercuts the narration with a short, subjective montage

⁴² For a Marxist reading of this scene's depiction of economic exploitation, see: Suppia and Oliveria 195–96.

that begins with Memo plugging-in at the Cybracero warehouse where he works. Like the electrical current, the viewer enters Memo's arm through one of his nodes and travels down a canal of his nervous system. Then, the canal fades into a shot of the same pipeline seen at the start of the film—the one that pumps the river's water north and away from his home. The last image is of the pipe's terminus atop the dam; vigilantly guarded in SADR. In this moment, Memo is expressing his coming-to-consciousness that node technology is just another extractive tool manipulated to maintain an uneven status quo. As a result, the viewer is also encouraged to confront this reality via the filter of Memo's anxiety and suffering.

Aside from the occasional instances of emotionally motivated moments of mental subjectivity, the film employs perceptually subjective point-of-view shots to represent technological disembodiment. In these scenes, the viewer sees through the eyes of Rudy, Luz, and Memo (in that order) as they engage with node technology. In every case, the characters' experiences are mediated in unsettling ways. Rudy, for example, experiences the world in "hyper-reality" when he becomes the drone he pilots; he sees menus and targets, receives input and directives from his home base, etc. In short, the drone's operating system saturates his field of vision with signifiers that define his perceptual reality.

Jean Baudrillard defines hyper-reality as the creation and deployment of a representation that has no original referent, producing a world of multi-level representations in which objective reality becomes impossible to identify and, more importantly, beside the point (1). When Rudy's screen targets Memo's father, it misrepresents him as a MAWL aqua terrorist that must be annihilated. He accepts this,

but not without significant hesitation. Because he *feels* (emotion is key, here) that this categorization is mistaken, it causes him to question the symbolic economy displayed by his screen and, by extension, the institutions that produced it. Similarly, the audience's knowledge that Rudy is correct to hesitate invites them to question the classification of aqua terrorist altogether. It is precisely at this juncture that a complementary reading of Memo's family's incidental indigeneity can enrich our understanding of the film's discursive role. First, however, let us identify how the film codes Memo and his family as indigenous.

Discursive, semiotic connections code Memo as ethnically indigenous by casting him as colonized in the oppositional, racialized relationship of colonizer/colonized. The first sign is that Memo's last name is "Cruz." A seemingly innocuous detail, the use of the name "Cruz" or its variant "de la Cruz" is often, I would argue, literary shorthand for proximity to indigeneity because it represents the evangelization of indigenous peoples during the colonial period in Mexico. In terms of its use as a contemporary, real-world last name, it is disproportionately widespread among indigenous populations, most likely due to its prevalence as an assigned last name by evangelizers. As of the most recent census, it only ranks among the ten most common surnames in the three most-indigenous states (in terms of L1 indigenous language usage): Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Yucatán (Galán). Thus, the use of the surname "Cruz" associates Memo with both the history and demography of his state of Oaxaca. The second sign is that Memo lives in Santa Ana del Río, Oaxaca, a pueblo that shares its namesake of "Santa Ana" with the real-world Southwestern Oaxacan town of Santa Ana del Valle. In the nineties, this town found itself at the forefront of the indigenous community museum movement that stressed "taking

their history into their own hands” in order to develop a soluble local tourist economy based on self-representation that would prevent their children from expatriating to the cities as economic and cultural migrants (Hoobler 441–42). Though these connections are loose, they nonetheless allude to the political significance of Memo’s indigeneity by referring to colonialism’s enduring legacy in the region.

In terms of visual evidence, the second sequence of the film begins to code the family as indigenous by depicting his mother preparing breakfast and the family. In this sequence, Memo is absent, allowing the viewer to observe the thematic contrast between him and his family spatially. The scene begins with a close-up of his mother’s hand sparingly pouring water into a red, ceramic bowl, ostensibly to make *masa* for the family’s tortillas. In the next shot, the camera shows her remove a tortilla from the *comal* before panning up to a profile of her unblinking face; a sign that she is concentrating on her work. She then lifts and places it (just off-screen) into a small woven basket, wrapping it in a cloth to keep it warm. Here, in the lower-left quadrant of the shot, just below her face, the viewer can see that she is wearing traditional Zapotec/Oaxacan household garb. That is, she is wearing a simple, white, unembroidered *huipil* underneath a modest knee-length, two-strap red apron with an indistinct textile pattern. In the subsequent long shot, we see her finish covering the tortillas, turn away from the camera, and walk towards the dinner table; she wears her hair up in circular braids. In the space of approximately twenty-five seconds, the film saturates the screen with clothing, practices, and customs associated with rural, indigenous life in Mexico. However, this is not sufficient to code them as ethnically indigenous in a SF film because it does not cast them as inherently racially “deviant” in their diegetic world (as Nama argues is key to

producing legible racial coding), just rural and poor by real-world standards. It lacks critical narrative context for the genre.

It is only upon the revelation that Memo is in conflict with his family regarding their lifestyle that the on-screen racial coding becomes relevant. At the end of the breakfast scene, Memo's father asks where he is, and his brother, David, replies "¿Dónde crees?" implying that Memo has a penchant for missing family meals. His father then proceeds to enter the home, where his son is absent-mindedly tinkering with his radio. Here, the contrast between father and son is implicit in the staging and lighting: Memo sits alone inside the dark room alone while his father stands in the well-lit doorway, asking his son to go with him to fetch water for the family. They represent alienation and community, respectively. This contrast narratively manifests itself as a brief argument between the two after they fetch water and tend to the family's *milpa*. Regarding Memo's disengagement with life in Santa Ana, he asks a philosophical question, leading to the following exchange:

Papá: Pues, déjame preguntarte: ¿Crees que nuestro futuro pertenezca al pasado?

Memo: (*se ríe*)

Papá: ¿Se te hace chistoso?

Memo: Pues sí, digo, es imposible.

Papá: No. Tuvimos un futuro. Estás parado en él. Cuando ellos obstruyeron el río, cortaron nuestro futuro. Tú ni siquiera habías nacido todavía.

Memo: (*se pone los ojos en blanco*)

Papá: Tú no sabes ni cómo siente eso. (*pausa, señala a la milpa*) Tal vez no parezca mucho, pero es nuestro. ¿Tú quieres dejar que se seque y desaparezca?

Memo: Uh-huh. Exacto.

Papá: (*molesto*) Tú crees que lo sabes todo. No sabes ni quién eres.

Memo: Por lo menos sé que el mundo es más grande que esta milpa, papá.

This exchange makes clear that Memo, the focalizer, aligns himself with the interests of multinational capital because he believes it may provide an escape from Santa Ana. Put in the vocabulary of colonial racial coding, he is mimicking the colonizer. However, Memo has no cultural frame-of-reference with which to compare the past and the present, as he was born after the dam was constructed, therefore, his sympathy for the colonizer's perspective is not out of malice or shame. Simply put, he associates his ethnic identity and associated subsistence traditions with poverty and subjugation; he only hears stories about his family prospering under this system before his birth. He can only associate their traditional Oaxacan lifestyle with monotony and struggle. Thus, the film's racial coding emerges as part of a system of generationally determined personal-political alliances. Namely, the contrast between Memo's desire to conform to/participate in the technocratic hegemony he was born into⁴³ and his father's "deviant" desire to continue their traditional lifestyle.

Because the arc of the film represents an emotionally driven shift in Memo's

⁴³ Altha Cravey, et al. has noted of *Sleep Dealer* that "Rivera's decision to locate his futuristic sci-fi film in rural, agrarian, indigenous Mexico challenges hegemonic conceptions of a future that is already known," by including people like Memo in an imagined future that often excludes the third-world (867).

views on technology and his place in the world, it is important to identify exactly how the choice to present his indigeneity as incidental contributes to this goal. As I have argued above in the structural analysis of the film, it is important that Memo begin the film sympathetic to the hegemonic discourse because it aligns him with the mainstream viewer. However, although that reasoning identifies the pedagogical advantages of using emotional didactic structures, it does not adequately identify why indigeneity *in particular* should be implicit and covert. In order for incidental indigeneity to serve the purposes of the film, it must –based on the principles of the film’s very plot– remove barriers to affective connection between the audience and Memo. Departing from an understanding of Memo’s colonial ambivalence evinced in the contrast between the narrative and the on-screen coding, we must deduce why Memo’s mimicry would be an effective narrative option for this story. In this regard, the intent of the director, though not strictly necessary to make this argument, frames the case well.

Sleep Dealer is just one of director Alex Rivera’s many explicitly activist projects regarding US-Mexico relations, and the film has developed a cult following due to its popularity in academic and activist circles. In the film’s review in *The Village Voice*, Aaron Hillis remarked, “Science fiction film easily lends itself to allegory, but while the dystopian near-future of writer/director Alex Rivera’s feature debut focuses, admirably, on how globalization affects the third world, his ideas are as subtle as a light saber to the face” (48). In a January 2008 interview with the website Circle of Blue—an activist news site dedicated to spreading awareness of global water issues—Rivera lent credence to Hillis’ critique, stating that his artistic *raison-de-être* is to bring sociopolitical concerns to new audiences:

I try to make films that are substantial, that address living urgent political realities. But through a form and through a visual cinematic language that can hopefully bring those concerns to new audiences. I sometimes call the films Trojan horses: on the outside it looks like one thing; but inside it's got these little ideological or analytical soldiers. (Haughn)

Later in that same interview, Rivera said that another audience he tries to address in his work is “the left”: those who constantly seek new ways to represent sociopolitical challenges and “are trying to think critically.” And, at least in this regard, Rivera has had marked success. Altha Cravey, et al. summarize that *Sleep Dealer* first received critical acclaim despite a lukewarm public reception, only for its popularity to be boosted by unusually high levels of engagement in academia, thus transforming it into a cult film for scholars and activists. The resurgence in popularity eventually led to a second release on DVD and BluRay (872). However, academics are trained to read films for their subtext and, therefore, are not the “new audience” at whom Rivera’s “Trojan horses” are directed.

Rivera’s use of the term “Trojan horse” reveals that the film works to bypass the confrontational relationship between the viewer and the subject matter in order to destabilize the status quo of the conflict, much like the wily Odysseus and the Greeks (who were seemingly conceding the Trojan War). In this case, Rivera faced the task of opposing international water privatization and extraction in Southern Mexico to a post-9/11 public. In real-world politics, the Zapatista Movement (EZLN) has been the face of the cause in the Southern Mexico since the early nineties. The EZLN is a militant, primarily indigenous resistance group whose members wear ski masks to conceal their

identities for both philosophical and security reasons. Despite the EZLN's predominantly peace- and liberation-oriented rhetoric, and despite their visual aesthetic predating 9/11 by nearly a decade, post-9/11 cinematic language appropriated the imagery of masked, armed resistance fighters as visual shorthand for "terrorist" in North American discourse. Thus, it would have undermined the intentionality of *Sleep Dealer* to align the protagonist directly with a visually terroristic organization like the EZLN, even if the visual semiotics of terrorism were arbitrarily ascribed to the movement ex post facto, because it would alienate mainstream viewers out-of-hand.

Rivera's film works to subvert the coding of the MAWL as a terrorist organization by first recognizing the average moviegoer's predisposition to read masked resistance fighters as hostile and by then showing Memo come to adopt their stances organically and in a sympathetic fashion. Luke Howie has argued that the image of the brown terrorist has become an imaginary character divorced from reality, "...in popular, tele-visual and screen cultures [terrorists] have quite a bit in common with other fictional characters ... [their depictions] are more indicative of how Muslim terrorists are stereotyped, not how they might appear in a police line-up" (215). *Sleep Dealer* uses the stereotype of the terrorist as a jumping-off point when, about ten minutes into the film, Memo says that his brother is "adicto al *high-def* gringo," watching violent US reality TV programming compulsively and with gusto. We then see him watching the true-crime reality show "*DRONES!*" a show that "takes you live to front lines where high-tech heroes use cutting-edge technology to blow the hell out of the bad guys." This summary of the show presents the oppositional relationship between the drone pilots' institutions and the "bad guys" who threaten their interests abroad. The day after Memo accidentally

overhears a Del Río transmission; he and his brother see the show again at an acquaintance's home. It begins with the host saying, "This show depicts graphic violence against evil-doers. If you have any children at home, you won't want them to miss it," a line that elicits a laugh from both Memo and David, showing that they buy-in to the binary premise of the show, once again aligning Memo with hegemonic interests, i.e. he mimics the colonizer.

The film begins to subvert the logic of *DRONES!* and, by extension, the extractive Northern economy when it brings the violence of the program to Santa Ana. The host summarizes, "The Southern-sector water supply is in constant crisis, and dams all around the world are a security risk for the companies that build them they often come under attack by legions of aqua-terrorists like the [MAWL]. So, the companies fight back." As present by this television program, it is explicit that indigenous-aligned (Mayan) aqua terrorist groups are sold as the "bad guys" in the diegetic world of the film. To support this claim visually, the program intercuts its narration with a shock montage of dams exploding and MAWL soldiers in ski masks speaking in front of a low-def camera. Thus, via a television program, the film plays into stereotypical popular apprehensions of what a terrorist looks like. However, it quickly flips this notion on its head. After watching for a few minutes, the brothers recognize their own homestead from the perspective of the drone –which is transmitting live–, causing them to panic and run home to warn their father. The narrative creates emotional tension by showing the terror the boys experience as they realize their family is about to be vaporized. At the same time, it is implicit that Del Río is mistaken. In combination, this suggests that the hegemonic perception of who is terrorizing *whom* is completely backwards, at least when it comes to Memo's family,

by putting on display the emotional trauma Del Río can inflict with absolutely no oversight.

By the end of the film's first act, *Sleep Dealer* has already heavy-handedly communicated that hegemonic discourses of terror predicate themselves on the interests of the enunciator, but it stops short of ever aligning Memo directly with the MAWL. In fact, the decision to destroy the dam is never a motivated plot device in the film. Instead, it is as an act of emotional contrition by *Rudy*. Therefore, the film's climactic payoff is strategically framed as not related to Memo's desire for vengeance but instead to Rudy's conviction that he "...podría hacer algo por [Memo], lo que sea (*expone sus nodos*)."

Though the dialogue never makes explicit whose idea it is to destroy the dam, the implication is that it would not occur without Rudy's presence, as Memo seems only to care about the long-term subsistence of this family. In the final moments before Rudy connects, Memo asks with much trepidation and concern, "¿Estás seguro de querer hacer esto?", once again distancing himself from the act by allowing Rudy to be the agent of his own destiny. After crashing the drone in to the dam and unleashing the river, it is Rudy who ultimately becomes the international fugitive and, "head[s] south," not Memo. This is critical to the effectiveness of the plot, which, as this analysis has argued, works to link, affectively, Memo and the audience via structural and thematic manipulation. If Memo were to go south as well and, as is implied for Rudy, join the MAWL, the film would alienate viewers by putting Memo behind a ski mask. Therefore, his interests must be emotional, contained to his micro-circumstances, and morally justifiable to the audience.

In the end, the use of incidental indigeneity in *Sleep Dealer* divorces Memo both

politically and aesthetically from the MAWL/EZLN⁴⁴ in order to help the viewer identify with his struggles and see the destruction of the dam in Santa Ana as a cathartic climax rather than an act of terrorism. Put another way, by the end of the film, the narrative frames the cause of the MAWL/EZLN as sympathetic, bypassing the superficial political shorthand and filtering the experience through the thoughts and emotions of one character. Because reading for Memo's indigeneity provides a parallel reading that does not contradict the message of the film, an indigenous reading of *Sleep Dealer* is an example of complementary incidental indigeneity. It makes Memo's possible indigeneity incidental to his character motivations to avoid discursive connections to a real-world movement that contemporary media conventions visually code as terroristic. In sum, by having Memo reject the binary logics of North/South, good guy/bad guy, white capitalist/indigenous "terrorist," *Sleep Dealer* "complicat[es] facile before/after, either/or investments in the border" by being "kinda subversive, kinda hegemonic" by virtue of downplaying potentially oppositional aspects of indigenous racial coding (Carroll 498).

3.3 *Made in Mexico* (2018): Incidentally, Güey Off-Topic

Made in Mexico is a Netflix docu-reality show from the U.S. affiliate of the U.K.-based production company Love Productions. The Internet Movie Database (IMDb) lists the tagline of the show as: "Get to know the opulent lifestyles and famous families of Mexico City's socialites and the expats vying for a spot in their exclusive social order."

⁴⁴ China Medel's work also underscores the implicit visual relationship between the MAWL and the EZLN, stating, "In the featured episode, *Drones* follows pilot Rudy Ramirez on a mission to protect a corporate water company's property from 'legions of aqua-terrorists,' *masked insurgents who resemble the Zapatistas*" (119, emphasis mine).

The description and the transnational nature of the show's production enter into direct conflict with the popular, discursive connotation of the title, which calls to mind Mexico's lower-class manufacturing sector and the products they export en masse to the USA. This is not accidental, as the first scenes in the first episode make it implicit from the get-go that the overarching theme of the show means to undermine negative stereotypes of Mexico by putting on display its cosmopolitan elite in Mexico City (CDMX). However, an indigenous reading of the introductory arc reveals a profound conflict between the show's documentary and reality TV elements that mirrors the ironic tension espoused in its title (i.e. the recasting of perceptions of Mexico via the intentional erasure of the working class).

The introductory arc of the show (Episodes 1–3) portrays Mexican excellence as analogous to success in other western nations, but with a local flavor that I would describe as Vasconselian insofar that it plays into the post-Revolutionary of *mestizaje*. That is, *Made in Mexico* exuberantly plays into the nationalistic paradigms of race and indigenous cultural appropriation canonized by the State in the late Porfiriato and early post-Revolutionary era (See Chapter 2: 63–66). In spite of this, ironically, the most salient non-romantic plot point in this arc revolves around several group members confronting the central antagonist, Hanna, about her upcoming political fashion show *We are One*. Pointing out that it is culturally insensitive, they tell Hanna that appropriating the sacred symbols of other cultures and religions to use in a fashion show, for charity or otherwise, is insensitive. Despite the concerns of her friends and of a religious panel that she convenes in Episode 2, "Paz Mundial," Hanna forges ahead, leading to a series of

tense conflicts that pit the proud, self-proclaimed “fresas”⁴⁵ against one another for the remainder of the season. In this case, recognizing that the characters’ claimed indigeneity via mestizaje (one character even claims she is descended from an Aztec Emperor) has no bearing on the narrative allows us parse out the dissonance between the show’s admittedly weak documentary-style presentation of Mexican cultural singularity and its reality TV interpersonal conflicts. That is, analyzing the deployment of the incidental indigeneity in the show reveals that the documentary conceit and of the narrative conflict are in direct conflict with one another. The former predicates identity representation on the nation’s institutionalized racialized hierarchies of power (See Chapter 2), whereas the latter presents representative power horizontally, i.e. as a matter affect and democratic polyvalence.

Like other texts that participate in the trope of incidental indigeneity, *Made in Mexico* works to harness its medium’s propensity for establishing affective links between the viewer and its subjects. It does this by presenting the individual lives of nine nominally successful people living in CDMX in order to cultivate aspirational participation in “fresa” culture. Part documentary and part reality show (thus “docureality”), it is a series of cast interviews intercut with footage of either their daily lives or the content of their reflective or interpretative narration. Often, the narration represents the internal subjectivity of an individual. When the narration comes into conflict with the reality TV-style style of the scene, this produces tension. In terms of visual composition, the interviews are centered, medium shots in which the cast member

⁴⁵ The Real Academia Española’s online “Diccionario de Americanismos” defines “fresa” as: “*Referido a persona, en especial a un joven, que viste, habla y se comporta como si perteneciera a la clase alta o adinerada, sea esto cierto o no*” (original emphasis).

speaks directly into the camera, establishing a conversational tone with the viewer. Much like third-person restricted narration, the lack of a discernable narrator that nonetheless filters our viewing experience encourages the viewer to relate to the protagonists (Nichols, *Representing*, 40). But reality TV arguably goes the furthest of any non-experimental visual medium to cultivate affect. As Misha Kavka explains, reality TV is a form of aspirational self-representation wherein, “the public is represented by accretion, individual by individual, in a paratactic series that offers to answer the question (if only we had world enough and time), who are the people in your neighborhood?” (62). Thus, *Made in Mexico*, like other reality shows, indulges the viewer in a self-interested, participatory narrative. The viewer aspires to become one of the represented subjects or at least interact with them directly by virtue of seeing him/herself in the “particularities” (character traits) of one or more of the stars (*Ibid*). In this case, the reality TV format establishes an affective connection with the viewer in the hopes that they will forge a link between Mexico and high-class living, thus casting Mexico as space of aspirational wealth.

Though it is tempting to analyze reality TV stars as unfiltered human beings, they are highly mediated subjects inserted into a narrative and packaged for a target audience. Kavka argues that from the second generation (1989–2005) of reality TV on, programs have been choosing their participants based on their perceived fitness to fulfill targeted roles. However, she stops short of providing a standard taxonomy, pointing out that these roles are not rigidly defined, “e.g. hero, villain, helper, etc.,” but produced for targeted “cultural demographics” (65). That is, how an audience perceives a subject depends on the cultural imperatives of the audience itself (as understood by the production company).

In the case of *Made in Mexico*, the composition of the production team, the explicit anti-Trump conceit (addressed below), and the abundance of both written and spoken English⁴⁶ make clear that the target audience is American. This should inform our reading, as experts tailor a show's character tropes based on our discursively tempered expectations as viewers. The production team then disappears in an act of "constructed unmediation," an effect that extends to the real world insofar that the production team rarely speaks on behalf of the show, instead assigning this duty to the subjects (Kavka 61). Therefore, I am reading the nine featured individuals as characters in an American-audience-oriented narrative rather than real-world individuals. This includes their paratextual engagement with show's narrative post-production (interviews, Tweets, etc.), as it is in direct conversation with the polemics cultivated therein. I do not seek to dehumanize these subjects, but rather recognize that the process of mediated characterization has already done so. I reading them as fictionalized agents of cause and effect to parse out the relationships between their enunciated character traits/particularities and the plot during the first season of the program.

Though the genres of rhetorical documentary and reality TV have much in common in the sense that they make affective appeals to establish pathos between the audience and the viewer, the internal generic mixture can produce conflict if the respective purpose-and-points are thematically divergent, as they are in *Made in Mexico*. Bordwell and Thompson describe the sub-genre of "rhetorical documentary" as films that, "presents themselves as factually trustworthy," while they, "present a persuasive

⁴⁶ The fresas speak English frequently and the title cards of the show privilege English by placing it on top of the Spanish information and in a larger font.

argument” at the same time (339, 348). They go on to define rhetorical documentaries as conforming to four basic criteria: they address the viewer directly; present the argument as a matter of opinion not contingent on scientific veracity; appeal to emotion to convince the viewer; and present the viewer a choice (to agree with the facts as presented or not) (339-40). Based on the above discussion of reality TV’s inclination toward affective communication, it is obvious that *Made in Mexico* already participates in all of four aspects by dint of its formal, structural elements. However, I would argue that this taxonomy should only be applied to the parts of *Made in Mexico* that predicate themselves on the truthfulness of their content, i.e. the scenes in which the history of Mexico and its cultural peculiarities are highlighted for the benefit of its non-Mexican audience. This limits the number of sequences to consider, which in- and of- itself reveals the relative unimportance of the documentary mode as it exists in the show. What emerges is a conflict between an allegorical, documentary representation of Mexico City and an individualistic construction of a public-by-accretion in its reality TV mode. The reality show content sells an aspirational, cosmopolitan vision of Mexico City wherein, like the fresas, the viewer can (*now transnationally!*) decry the abuse of cultural appropriation by hegemonic actors as insensitive. They are part of a public-by-accretion in which their voice is solicited. Meanwhile, the authoritative (truth-claiming), documentary content presents an allegorical argument for Mexican cultural uniqueness by means of standard, post-Revolutionary nationalist tropes that are based on racialized hierarchies of power (See Chapter 2). Thus, an indigenous reading reveals a significant conflict in the show’s thematic arguments.

In the introductory montage of Episode 1, “A Bull at the Baptism,” Roby Checa

and Hanna Jaff frame their participation in the show as a service to their nation, thereby introducing its documentary conceit. Roby, our flawed protagonist in search of redemption, explains that he “took a leap of faith” (said in English originally) by choosing to participate because “para nosotros, aquí en México, este show es una oportunidad.” This affirmation is intercut with images of him passing through downtown CDMX. In a wide shot, Roby drives toward the viewer with the Angel of Independence in the left-most third of the frame, practically situating the monument in his passenger seat, suggesting that he is become a standard-bearer for the nation. When he adjusts the radio, you can hear the newswoman report that “Trump insistió en la construcción de un muro en la frontera,” establishing a tonal dissonance between Trump’s infamously perception of Mexican people and the clean, sophisticated imagery of the show. The production team is obviously working to highlight this stark juxtaposition, as evinced by the irony of the title and content of this montage. The next shot confirms this suspicion when the central antagonist Hanna, who the show goes to great pains to cast as a pretentious, self-aggrandizing *résumé* builder in Episode 2, refers to Trump’s famous, anti-Mexican presidential campaign kickoff gaffe in which he cast Mexican immigrants as criminals, rapists, and “bad hombres” (Gabbatt). She rejects this rhetoric as her self-introduction, declaring, “*No*, I am not a ‘bad hombre’ and I’m not a bad mujer, either.” Thus, by the one-minute, thirty-second mark, the show establishes its documentary conceit as a counter-narrative to Trumpism for people unfamiliar with the Mexican people outside of media-driven stereotypes. It seeks to present them as aspirational models analogous to our American ones, but with a desirable local flavor.

As alluded to in the structural analysis, the introductory arc of the series struggles

to balance its narrative of aspirational wealth and cosmopolitan, postcolonial ethics with its tendency to cast the cultural distinctness of Mexico as a function of its partial indigenous heritage. Again, this conflict is a symptom of the conflicting goals of documentary film and reality TV. Specifically, its nationalistically framed pro-Mexican agenda comes into direct conflict with the interpersonal narrative of the series, which is that nobody seems to like Hanna's fashion show because it appropriates cultural and religious symbols irresponsibly. While the conflict is effective at engaging the viewer on a structural-affective level, (in no small part) due to the fact that Hanna is easy to hate because of her constant name-dropping (Hale, M.) and stubborn reluctance to heed her peers' advice, the show fails to relate the day-to-day trivialities of this social circle to their Mexican identity. There is no causal relationship between the characters' claimed indigeneity (via *mestizaje*) and their actions aside from (a) their choice to do the show in the first place, and (b) the superficial themes of their activities in Episodes 1-3 (the 2017 Central Mexican Earthquake, *Día de Muertos*, etc.). The most salient examples of this type of incidental indigeneity appear in service to the documentary conceit and occur in the first two episodes.

Shortly after the introductory montage, Kitzia Mitre Jimenez-O'Farrill introduces herself as "muy mexicana" by touting her biological connections to both the European and indigenous sectors of Mexican history. Her introduction is thematically in-line with the introductory montage, serving as a mini-treatise on what it means to her to be racially Mexican. The impetus for her explanation, she states, is that her international peers are often reluctant to believe that she is Mexican because she appears so white, "Muchas veces, cuando estás en otras partes del mundo, y me preguntan, '¿Y de dónde eres?'"

‘Mexicana,’ y te dicen, ‘¿Cómo?’, o sea, ‘*No eres morenita, no tienes el pelo negro.*’”

Here, Kitzia argues that the outside world’s prevailing image of what it means to be Mexican entails being “dark-skinned” and “hav[ing] black hair,” i.e. having a more stereotypically non-European or indigenous complexion. She then defends her mexicanidad by explaining, in English, that she took a DNA test to verify her heritage. She says that she is only “3% Irish”, which answers a question only asked implicitly: “but how much *anglo-saxon* blood do you have?” In a post-launch interview, she specified that, “I am 21% indigenous; I am a Native-American” (Spearman).

In the second half of her cultural self-defense, Kitzia explains her relationship to both indigenous nobility and a Revolutionary political leader who are key to “Mexican”⁴⁷ history. First, she name-drops her great-grandfather, Gustavo Baz Prada, who held many important positions throughout his long life, including Governor of the State of Mexico, Revolutionary General, head of the Universidad Autónoma Nacional de México, etc. Then, she claims that her great-grandmother was a direct descendent of Moctezuma Ilhuicamina, or Moctezuma I, the Aztec Tlatoani who consolidated the various altepeme of central Mexico under the empire-defining Triple Alliance and subsequently presided over, arguably, the most prosperous period of Culhua-Mexica rule. Thematically speaking, it should come as no surprise that both of these political figures are famous for consolidating ethnically diverse communities under stable, economically prosperous regimes: the Aztec Empire and the post-Revolutionary State, respectively. Symbolically,

⁴⁷ In line with hegemonic notions of Mexican identity, she chooses to define Mexican-ness in terms of the history of the territory beginning with Aztec antiquity. However, Mexico, as a nation-state, would not emerge until after the Mexican War for Independence in 1821.

Kitzia frames herself as the embodiment of the union of disparate peoples.

All the same, upon closer inspection the sequence undermines the relevance of Kitzia's indigenous connection by lazily intercutting it with incoherent visual information. Most glaringly, her mention of the Aztec Emperor Moctezuma Ilhuicamina (Moctezuma I) appears over a montage of factually irrelevant images. These include an aerial shot of Teotihuacan (a Toltec site) and a simplified, stock-photo iteration of a portrait of Moctezuma II from André Thevet's 1584 compendium *Les vrais portraits et vies des hommes illustres grecz, latins et payens* (644r). The carelessness of the imagery in this montage (that represents neither the correct tlatoani nor correct geographic space) is indicative of a lack of concern for historical accuracy, especially when it comes to the portrayal of indigenous peoples and iconography. In fact, it directly undercuts the show's documentary claims to truth in a jarring fashion; it defers to superficially indigenous-coded imagery (pyramids, headdresses, etc.) rather than engage critically with this history. Despite this enormous fault, this is not surprising nor (arguably) necessarily unethical because this is the history of Mexico filtered through Kitzia's subjectivity, i.e. Mexico as *she* sees it. *Made in Mexico*. Thus, in the context of the story, the misrepresentation of indigenous cultural contributions is most notably symbolic of the uncritical manner in which Kitzia and her peers approach their own identities, which enters into direct conflict with the criticism they levy at Hanna's fashion line.

Ironically, the plot ascribes the conflict between Hanna and the others to their divergent opinions on cultural appropriation, despite all of them casually neglecting its role in their national iconographic tradition—but Kitzia in particular. In the final sequence of Episode 2, Hanna invites Kitzia and Columba (another cast member) to her apartment

to receive friendly feedback about her collection. Earlier in the episode the pair goes to an art studio to solicit lots for an auction to benefit the victims of the September 19, 2017 CDMX Earthquake. In this scene, Kitzia reveals she has earned a master's degree in Art, is a successful designer, and that she is a very direct person who even refuses call ugly babies cute. Planting this information sets up the climatic conflict at Hanna's. After qualifying her judgments by restating credentials, Kitzia remarks that the collection is so simple that it is incongruous with her high expectations of Hanna⁴⁸ and that mixing religious iconography is more likely to gain attention for generating interreligious "hate" than for promoting unity⁴⁹. Hanna responds, defensively, that she personally identifies with the collection because, as she puts it: "mi papá es musulmán, mi mamá es católica, ... pero yo me siento de todas las religiones porque yo me identifico con todas." As Kitzia does in her introductory monologue, Hanna predicates the discursive relevance of her cultural enunciations on her subjective perception of her own identity. It is at this point that Kitzia, ironically, makes the most incisive comment of the entire conflict. After Hanna explains that she identifies with all of the religions she is depicting, she immediately responds, "Claro, pero ellos no se identifican contigo," demonstrating she recognizes (a) that genetic relation to a culture does not justify the appropriation of its symbols and (b) that your subjective perception of a religion can be incongruous with its perception of you. In Episode 3, Hanna follows up on this criticism—admittedly in an

⁴⁸ Kitzia: "Siento que Hanna es una mujer que hace las cosas como muy bien, que está muy preparada. Me hubiera imaginado que, si quería sacar una colección de ropa, le iba a echar muchas más ganas con la colección. I wouldn't even call them that. En realidad, no son diseños de moda; son estampados."

⁴⁹ Kitzia: "Esto es crear controversia. Te vas a hacer famosa a través del hate."

attempt to prove Kitzia wrong—by convening a panel of religious leaders, who ultimately frustrate her by reiterating the criticisms of her peers.

The implicit double standard applied to cultural appropriation as evinced by the conflict between the theme and plot marks the entirety of the series, not just Kitzia's story. When the lens of incidental indigeneity is applied to the show more generally, the spaces they inhabit are implicitly coded as indigenous despite this serving no narrative purpose. In Episode 2, Roby takes Columba on a date on the gondolas of Xochimilco. In a moment of awkward, shoehorned-in narration that is part advertisement and part personal biography, Roby says (in English) that he has always wanted to have a first date there. He then explains, "Xochimilco is one of the canal routes of the Aztec culture," before abruptly abandoning the cultural topic altogether and never addressing it again. For the rest of the date sequence, Xochimilco is simply a colorful backdrop for the tentative and difficult potential romance between him and Columba. The audience learns nothing about the significance of the site, despite its foregrounding at the onset of the scene. In fact, after only seeing a preview screener of the first two episodes in September of 2018, *New York Times* reviewer Mike Hale critiqued the spaces featured in show as uncreative and "obvious." He chalks up the cursory use of the Zócalo and Xochimilco to allegorically represent the entirety of CDMX as blatant "manufactured reality" in service to its message of aspirational wealth. In short, at least in the first arc of *Made in Mexico*, incidental indigeneity (via state mestizaje) is simply a device aimed at fetishizing the otherness of the indigenous elements of Mexican identity in order to appeal to the colonizer's gaze.

This is an example of incidental indigeneity wherein the binary relationship of

colonizer/colonized, indigenous/non-indigenous takes place among characters coded as “colonizer.” For this reason, an indigenous reading is supplementary, as the narrative puts indigenous contributions under erasure except to ascribe to them the social benefits of pre-Columbian heritage. However, at no point does “being indigenous” contribute to the narrative. Though the plot contents itself by doubles-down on casting Hanna’s collection as problematic due to its egocentrism, the hypocrisy of Kitzia’s position only becomes clear when we read the show through the lens of incidental indigeneity. The relative invisibility of this conflict and the dissonance it reveals, when taken together, represent indigenous erasure-by-neglect. Therefore, an indigenous reading of *Made in Mexico* is supplementary because it points to a missing element that contradicts or undermines the plot in some fashion. By contrast, the above reading of *Sleep Dealer* was complementary because it provided a parallel reading to the film.

By means of a conclusion to this section, it is worth mentioning that *Made in Mexico* has faced a major public backlash for participating in “colorism,” an argument with which I am sympathetic only on a superficial level. “Colorism” is the visual component of racism. Whereas race is a systemically defined category attached to particular histories of various nation-states and to scientific discourses, colorism address how an individual is visually apprehended: a fact that *may* or *may not* subject them to racially-ordered hierarchies of power. While *Made in Mexico* is certainly colorist by definition, I this is an entirely uncritical response to the series because this is obvious based on the show’s genesis, production, structural choices, etc. In short, saying the show is colorist is tantamount to saying that the show is a docu-reality series; it is an undeniable, formal, motivated aspect of the show in service to its anti-Trump point-and-

purpose. This point of view is legitimate and viscerally important to many, especially for the purposes of activism in the popular sphere. However, for those that sat in front of their computer screens asking themselves, “I can accept the premise, problematic as it may be, but still can’t figure out why some scenes in this show make my hair stand on-end,” recognizing the use of incidental indigeneity may provide the answer.

3.4 *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo* (2009): Incidentally, Open to Interpretation

Yuri Herrera’s 2009 novel sees a young indigenous woman named Makina leave her unspecified “Pueblo” in an unspecified region of Mexico to deliver a message to her brother somewhere in the southwestern United States. She leaves because her mother, Cora, orders her to go. She is content with her life as the operator of the Pueblo’s *centralita*, or switchboard, where she has de facto job security for life because she is the only person in the Pueblo who can speak the “native tongue,” the “Latin tongue,” and the “new tongue,” which are an unspecified indigenous language, Spanish, and English, respectively. Because *sicarios*, or drug lords (also called *narcotraficantes*, or narcotraffickers), run the town, Makina is a qualified go-between in both civil and criminal circles because she can, “keep quiet in all three, too” (18–19). In preparation for her journey north, she enlists the help of several of the *sicarios* with whom she has cultivated trust. Ultimately, her connections to these illicit networks help her not only cross the border, but also orient herself after she arrives in the United States. There, she learns to survive in a new sociopolitical environment while chasing several dead-ends as she attempts to locate her brother. Eventually, she finds him on a military base posing as

the son of an American family; he has, essentially, voluntarily entered into a perverse form of modern indentured servitude in exchange for their feeble son's legal identity. Makina balks at the arrangement, but does not judge him. Despite leaving her pueblo with every intention of returning, she comes to appreciate the cultural openness she witnesses in the region. In the end, she decides to ask the sicarios for one more favor: her own falsified papers so that she, too, may remain in the American Southwest under a new identity.

In terms of its structure, *Señales que predecirán al fin del mundo* is another distant-engaging piece recounted in third-person restricted narration that relates the mental and perceptual point of view of Makina. As explained in the above sections, this means that the piece privileges above all else producing an affective link between the protagonist and the reader in order to communicate didactically its central message. On the jacket of the 2015 translation of the novel by Lisa Dillman –which itself is an award-winning piece of literature– novelist and radio-journalist Daniel Alarcón interprets *Señales* to be, “a haunting and moving allegory about violence and the culture built to support and celebrate that violence.” However, how are we to approach such an assertion when Makina herself makes it explicit that she moves between three distinct (though not necessarily separate) cultural spaces (the native, the Latin, and the new)? What culture is the allegorical subject of critique? I do not mean to challenge this quote as an affront to Alarcón, as I believe he is correct in his assertion. Rather, I would challenge uncritical or superficial readings of this quote (i.e. that it refers only to narco-traffickers), as the defining characteristic of *Señales* is its nondescript and interpretative narration in terms of both style and content.

What sets *Señales* apart from other similar texts is its radically open prose. Both

claustrophobic and liberating, the limited details provided by the narrator have the reader on the edge of their seat praying for Makina's safety (which is far from certain) while simultaneously giving just enough detail to extrapolate varied, multifaceted readings from the short novel. One symptom of this paradoxically open and closed prose is that Makina is not immediately recognizable as indigenous upon first reading. As the reader likely noted in the introductory sentence to this section, "unspecified" is a key word for any approach to this text, let alone an indigenous reading because Herrera refuses to assign easy labels or names to his subjects, a trait common in all his works. Thus, we only tune-in to Makina's incidental indigeneity by means of a process of deduction that requires a cultural literacy of Mexican demography, i.e. we must understand that the "native" in "native tongue" is both a toponymical articulation of the language as well as a marker of the cultural subalternity of those who speak it in Mexico (read: indigenous). However, by refusing to locate the language spatiotemporally, the narrator makes this fact incidental to Makina's journey, at least insofar that the text reads without this information being plot-critical. However, unlike the other texts in this chapter, the extreme semiotic open-ness of *Señales* allows for multiple indigenous readings, both complementary and supplementary.

Published interpretations and analyses of this novel, though few in number, see *Señales* as a parable for Mexican or female migration, etc. (Sánchez Becerril 105, Richardson 12); as a contemporary re-casting of death and the journey to Mictlán (the Mesoamerican underworld) (Richardson 13, Rioseco); as a spiritual successor to Juan Rulfo's seminal 1955 classic *Pedro Páramo* (Sánchez Becerril 118); and as a coming-of-age novel (Quintana Vallejo 1). For our purposes here, this means the piece can be both

nationalist and post-nationalist even when we perform an indigenous reading of it. For example, in “México nómada: *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo*, de Yuri Herrera,” Ivonne Sánchez Becerril explains that the atemporal and spatially oblique nature of the narration, “permite una lectura tanto alegórica como histórica; transforma así el fenómeno histórico en mítico y lo explora como constante en una visión diacrónica en la que Makina espacialmente trashuma: de la periferia a la Ciudadcita” (110). So, though the general vector of Makina’s journey is discernable, both the time period and exact coordinates of her journey are unassailable by the reader, which, as Sánchez Becerril points out, makes the text ripe for mythological readings as well as historical ones that place it various socio-political contexts. All the reader knows is that Makina is located in some place and time between the Colony and the advent of cell phone technology, which is as much spatially limited (because of uneven modernization processes) as it is temporally abstract. However, I would argue that Sánchez Becerril goes too far in her assertion that the text is radically atemporal, as scenes including touch-screen cell phones and an LGBT wedding figure as significant moments in the narrative, locating it at least in the political context of the 21st century. At the same time, and even in *the same chapter*, Sánchez Becerril remarks by way of a conclusion that Makina’s mythic journey to the underworld mirrors, “el viaje de Juan Preciado” in *Pedro Páramo*. He, “inicia [su trashumación] con el encargo de la madre ... igual que el [viaje] de Makina,” suggesting that the novel also has a fit home in Mexico’s national literary tradition (119).

For our purposes here, analyzing *Señales* in terms of incidental indigeneity yields at least two distinct readings. One, there is a complementary reading wherein Makina is a

conduit through which the reader feels the emotional toll of living in the indigenous periphery of Mexico. This reading deploys a spatial analysis of the text to ascertain the coloniality of Makina's lived space, which directly enters into dialogue with the state's real-world policy shifts and how they have affected indigenous communities. Two, there is an alternatively complementary or supplementary reading of the text as an analogue for the journey to Mictlán, the Aztec underworld as presented in the *Codex Vaticanus A*. Several critics and scholars have discussed the latter reading in detail, but no one has yet commented on the value of this mythic reading as it relates to representing modern indigenous peoples. Is it a complementary representation presenting an alternative epistemological perspective? Or is it a supplementary reading that highlights pre-Hispanic antiquity in the larger Mexican literary tradition of *mexicanidad* qua indigeneity? I would argue that both the complementary and supplementary perspectives are legitimate and worth considering. However, so that we may get to that point, let us begin with the spatial reading.

The first scene in *Señales* sees Makina nearly fall into a *cenote*, or sinkhole, produced by careless silver mining practices, a tone-setting introduction that puts on display the coloniality of her lived environment. She remarks that she lives in a, “slippery bitch of a city,” that is, “riddled with bullet holes and tunnels bored by five centuries of voracious silver lust” (11–12). Here, the sentence semantically likens the bullet holes and the mines, explaining that they are both the result of a violent, extractive, penetrative “bor[ing]” brought on by greed. In the original Spanish text, Herrera uses the word “plata” for silver, a word whose literal meaning is indeed “silver,” but whose colloquial definition is synecdochally understood to be simply “money.” Therefore, her town bears

the marks of continuous but varied violent extractions: colonial silver mining and neocolonial abstract capital. Respectively, they represent physical and abstract extractions, mirroring the shift in economic imperatives over time; from resources in the land to resources in the body (I return to this point below). After walking away from the sinkhole, Makina remarks that this is a common occurrence, and that, “a few houses had already been sent packing to the underworld, as had a soccer pitch and *half an empty school*” (12, emphasis mine). Here, the mention of the school in disuse calls to mind the stark contrast between the early post-Revolutionary State’s educational policies geared toward assimilation of indigenous peoples under the banner of *mestizaje* and the turn-of-the-century neocolonial turn outward and away from domestic assimilationist infrastructure (See Chapter 2, Section 2.3). That is, the school’s disrepair and destruction represent the results of the neocolonial nation-state’s new, encroaching paradigm of capital production, which now imports major staple crops like corn from the United States, impoverishing communities whose harvests were once critical to the state economy because their agrarian labor is no longer necessary to the economic success of the state. Taken together, the idea that a cenote provoked by colonial irresponsibility has swallowed a symbol of post-Revolutionary internal colonialism in a neocolonial, “bullet-ridden” town now dominated by narcotraffickers communicates that the logic of colonialism has literally collapsed in upon itself in the Mexican periphery. Living in a continuously colonized and re-colonized space marks Makina as a multi-layered colonized subject.

A later flashback solidly presents Makina’s town as existing on the margins of a neocolonial society. While traversing the desert borderlands on foot, she recalls that a

young man who had travelled north once returned for a visit. He came back wealthy and decided, as Makina puts it, to show off his new cell phone in a “la-di-da” fashion. She takes his ostentatiousness as a slight, wondering what she ever did to him to provoke him to show off new telecommunication technology at the outdated switchboard she operates. In front of a group of townspeople, he attempts to place a call to his mother in the next room. However, he is humiliated when the call does not connect because of the lack of digital infrastructure in the town. Unimpressed, those present proceed to disperse to tend to their responsibilities. Makina, resisting the temptation to be smug, then remarks, “Don’t worry, kid, they’ll get here one day,” referring to the cell phone towers that make possible the functionalities of the phone (44–46). When taken in concert with Makina’s observations of the North, this flashback underscores the uneven development of the various spaces she inhabits throughout the novel. The symbolic tension between the colonial-era silver mines, the Twentieth Century School, and the lack of contemporary modernizing infrastructure demonstrates the neocoloniality of the Little Town because its constituent parts reflect the different approaches to resource extraction deployed by the state. Like her fellow incidentally indigenous protagonists (i.e., as a colonized individual with additional racial coding), Makina’s story critically reflects upon uneven development in the neoliberal era. However, she is unique among the protagonists in this chapter in that she is aware of her colonized status from the very beginning.

Makina is self-aware and measured, albeit emotionally stunted, because of coming-of-age in such a harsh environment. In fact, much of the tension in the novel emerges from the disparity between Makina’s skewed perception of danger and the reader’s. That is, Makina walks into dangerous situation after dangerous situation, often

with no apparent regard for her own wellbeing, even resigning herself to a disinterested death while crossing the Río Grande. In this scene, the raft she and her *coyote* (border-crossing guide), Chucho, are paddling capsizes. When she fails to orient herself underwater, instead of continuing to fight she simply allows the current to drag her, and the narrator explains that, "...and then the panic subsided, and she intuited that it made no difference which way she headed or how fast she went, that in the end she'd wind up where she needed to be. She smiled. She felt herself smile" (39). Chucho eventually pulls her to safety. However, the flippancy and even joy with which Makina accepts the possibility of death as her final destination is disconcerting for the reader, as the mission of the plot –delivering the message to her brother– is still unfulfilled. More pressingly, losing our focalizer in a distant-engaging text is tantamount to ending the entire narrative. After a series of episodes like this one, wherein Makina explicitly assigns a positive value to stoicism, silence, and resignation, it becomes obvious that she has adapted to harsh circumstances by becoming radically pragmatic and emotionally guarded. In fact, as Richardson, Sánchez Becerril, and Rioseco have all also observed, Makina's name can alternatively be read as the word *máquina* in Spanish (machine) or as the third-person conjugation of the verb *maquinar* (to plot), both of which reflect her emotionless style.

Makina's lack of emotional expression as a character does not inhibit the cultivation of affect between her and the reader – the central organizing principle for incidental indigeneity. In fact, Makina is very much like Memo in that she is quite reserved, rarely speaking. When she does, her enunciations are not qualified with quotations, capital letters, etc., nor spatial variations on the page, appearing as standard

paragraphs⁵⁰. This arguably brings the reader even closer to Makina because even the *visual* obstacles to affective connection are elided, i.e. the narrator is making him/herself invisible by visually conflating their voice with that of the protagonist. Structurally speaking, Makina's few moments of intense emotional expression function much like Memo's mentally subjective montages in *Sleep Dealer* in that they serve to punctuate the plot with critical reflections on material inequality. Let us explore the most salient example of this phenomenon.

Near the end of the novel, Makina is exhausted from her journey and conflicted about her brother's choice to abandon the family by keeping his assumed identity, a conflict that will force her to address the colonality of her identity directly. It is at this point that she encounters a US police officer harassing a group of migrant workers and experiences an uncharacteristic emotional breakdown. He rounds her up with the rest, ordering her to get on her knees and join the lineup. He declares that he is a patriot protecting his country as he goes one-by-one down the line, berating each person individually. He eventually snatches a little book from one of the men, and proceeds to make fun of him for migrating with, "no money, no papers, but hey, poems." He bullies the man, demanding he write something on the spot. Makina reacts in a characteristically calculated manner, but with a righteous indignation atypical to her personality up to this point in the novel. Against the cop's protests, she seizes the book and feverishly writes a long, ironic diatribe for the officer in which she facetiously but passionately reaffirms his

⁵⁰ The only observable spatial distinction related to speech is when there are two or more speakers, in which case each piece of dialogue appears on a separate line, but never with more context. Within longer sentences, commas occasionally separate enunciations from descriptions.

views that they (the migrants in front of him) are, “the dark, the short, the greasy, the shifty, the fat, the anemic. We [are] barbarians” (97–100). Forced to confront his own rhetoric from the outside, the officer falls silent and leaves without arresting anyone.

In this moment, Makina emotionally unleashes her internalized coloniality and forces her oppressor (the cop) to confront the fact of colonial ambivalence, leaving him speechless, in turn. The impact of this scene is contingent upon the damming-up of emotions prior to this point (by both the narration and Makina) because it provides a profound cathartic release for the reader based upon their empathy with Makina. When our focalizer-protagonist finally has an emotional response, it is profoundly cathartic for the reader, who has been in conflict with Makina’s seemingly reckless, disinterested reactions up to this point. Interestingly, it could be said that Makina finds emotional liberation via the written word despite –or perhaps because of– her consciousness that it is critical to, “know how to keep quiet in all three [languages],” when interacting with authority (19). On another level, Makina’s emotional release via writing represents a problematization of the colonizer/colonized relationship wherein she mimics neocolonial authority by using its own tools against it. And, in truth, Makina is not expressing her own opinions about the immigrants, but instead parodying the language and rhetoric (i.e., discourse) of the police officer, thereby forcing him to confront the fact that neocolonial logic collapses in upon itself, like the school into the mine. This is most apparent at the end of Makina’s parodic diatribe when she writes that Northerners see her people as both “dark” and “anemic,” a conflicting set of adjectives that conjures both dark and pale complexions (100).

This spatial reading relies on the lived spaces of Makina to draw out how the text

codes her as colonized-indigenous by dint of her landscape. It is a complementary reading because the novel can be, and often is, read as a border novel, which means that the tale of migration is the standard reading that emerges from the chain of cause-and-effect in the plot. Makina receives a note to deliver in to the USA; she makes the arrangements, travels north, comes to recognize and confront the brutality of her day-to-day reality, and decides to stay. Analyzing the text for incidental indigeneity adds depth to this framework and allows us to read set pieces such as the school as synecdoche for post-Revolutionary assimilationist policies in rural, indigenous sectors of Mexico. Returning to Alarcón's claim that the novel is an, "allegory about the violence and the culture built to support and celebrate [it]," we can now see that the allegorical content of *Señales* is variegated, portraying conjugations of economic and cultural violence as inseparable from (and preceding) physical violence. Therefore, we can read the title *Signs Preceding the End of the World* as an enunciation of the self-defeating logic of late capitalism as evinced via the schizophrenic exploitation and neglect of neocolonial spaces and their inhabitants. Sadly, these abuses *precede the end* of entire lifestyles and communities just as they precede Makina's identity shift at the end of the novel when she gets her fake papers and decides not to return to the Little Town⁵¹, thus abandoning her previous identity.

At this point, I would like to remark upon the much-commented indigenous structural component of the novel. Rioseco and Sánchez Becerril have beautifully explained at length in their respective contributions that the novel is written in nine short chapters that are structurally and thematically parallel to the nine locations (and

⁵¹ Quintana Vallejo analyzes this scene as Makina's frustrated coming-of-age moment.

respective challenges) that the deceased must traverse on their journey to the land of the dead, or Mictlán, in Aztec mythology. For instance, the first locale of the journey is Itzcuintlán, where Xoloitzcuintli dogs help the dead to begin their journey by crossing the river Apanohuayan. As Rioseco notes, the first scene of the novel sees Makina not die herself by falling into a cenote but she does, “ve a *un transeúnte y su perro* devorados por la tierra que se abre bajo sus pies.” This mythic reading is an incidental one because the parallel structure of the novel, though interesting and rife with fascinating semiotic connections, is totally ancillary to the causal chain of events. It requires that the reader choose to read the story as a myth, a fact that is not obvious upon first glance. Indeed, Sánchez Becerril argues as much, as well, when she qualifies this interpretation as the result of an intentional “mirada de soslayo” (120).

Despite the structural parallels to indigenous mythology, I find the mythological reading to be ambivalent: it is simultaneously a complementary and supplementary reading. It is complementary insofar that the journey to the underworld allegorically represents Makina’s loss of identity (a significant part of which is indigenous) and in this sense runs parallel to the spatial reading. Put another way, it is complementary when the structure sheds light on Makina’s struggle on the personal, micro level. On the other hand, the mythic reading predicates itself on features of Aztec Antiquity prevalent in the popular imagination of Mexico: namely, the iconography of the *Codex Vaticanus A* (Rioseco). Like Kitzia in *Made in Mexico*, the novel extracts a form of social capital from the extinct Culhua-Mexica altepetl and, in a move that conflicts with the spatiotemporal elements of the text I discussed in the spatial reading, ascribes this journey to a 21st century indigenous woman, casting her as a synecdoche for indigenous peoples both past

and present. This move elides indigenous ethnic diversity under the principle of *mexicanidad* que indigeneity. In this way, the text participates in the larger Mexican tradition of Colonial Antiquarianism. Finally, I believe that calling this a supplemental reading is fair because of the obvious intertextuality with Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*, a book many critics consider the quintessential Mexican novel. As mentioned in the intro to this section, Sánchez Becerril has deftly pointed out that *Señales* strategically triangulates itself as a spiritual successor to Rulfo's seminal work by including many parallel elements. For example, Makina is sent on a mission by her mother locate her brother, and Juan Preciado is sent on mission by his mother to locate his father. In addition, both texts engage with themes of hopelessness and death in the face of economic and political hardship. In both novels, the protagonists end their plots literally underground –Makina in a cellar and Juan in a coffin– symbolizing their metaphorical and literal deaths, respectively. Thus, the radically open nature of the prose in *Señales* produces multiple and conflicting readings when we choose to read it under the lens of incidental indigeneity. Identifying and enumerating these multi-layered readings is key to discussing the value of an incidental indigenous representation.

3.5 Conclusion: On the Discursive Vectors of the Adjectival “indigeneity”

Incidental indigeneity is symptomatic of the choice to privilege the affective connection between the reader and the protagonist-focalizer via structural and organizational principles that cultivate empathetic pathos. The reader/viewer is drawn into the mental and perceptual subjectivity of a character by distance-reducing narrative devices. This allows the indigeneity of a character to appear as ancillary to the content of

the plot of the narrative; it is not immediately relevant to understand the discursive motivation, or point-and-purpose, of the text. However, by zooming-in on the elements that code indigeneity onto a character (via colonial and racial discourses), we can extrapolate readings that are either support or conflict with the plot of the text. Respectively, I have called these complementary and supplementary readings. However, neither of these categories is a value-assigning modifier. That is, they do not mean to signal a perceived morality or immortality of a piece, but rather if and how they challenge the state discourse of mestizaje (even if they do it accidentally). They provide a framework for asking who assigns the trait to “indigeneity” to whom, and why. This is important because the use of incidental indigeneity –whether complementary or supplementary– reveals a preoccupation with de-privileging that trait (embodied indigeneity) as a superficial status. Therefore, it is worth addressing why that is, especially given that state mestizaje privileges (nominal) hybridity in representation. In the next chapter, we will address a series of texts that foreground this trait so that we can compare and contrast both species of representation and thereby understand the larger trend as it exists in the 21st century.

CHAPTER 4. DOCUMENTARY INDIGENEITY: SYMPATHETIC PATHOS AND AUTHORIAL FRAMING

4.1 Documentary Indigeneity

In the last decade, a growing number of authors and filmmakers have elected to present indigeneity with a pronounced degree of real-world verisimilitude. In these pieces, the texts foreground indigeneity, making explicit the connections between the characters' identities, motivations, and actions. The reader/viewer can observe—readily and often unavoidably—the causal link between the central conflict and the protagonists' indigenous identity. At the same time, the texts lack the subjective depth and reflexivity that is critical in works of incidental indigeneity (like those analyzed in the previous chapter). The lack of perceptual depth is perhaps due to the recognition that explicitly subaltern protagonists are unfit focalizers for hegemonic audiences because racial or cultural subalternity codes as “deviant”⁵²—interrupting direct empathetic connection. Therefore, an overwhelmingly non-indigenous audience will struggle to empathize with the subjectivity of a culturally deviant protagonist. In order to compensate for this empathetic lack, these texts work to make the audience a second-person interlocutor who will engage with the texts in a dialectical exchange to create meaning and form judgments about the characters and their circumstances. This is accomplished by reducing the perceived distance between subject and spectator via paratextual, generic, and thematic organization. The pieces considered in this chapter methodically present the quotidian realities of the lives of their protagonists in order to develop a sense of intimacy between the spectator and the explicitly subaltern-indigenous subjects, thus reducing (but

⁵² Refer to the previous discussion of racial coding in Chapter 3 (pp. 92–97).

never erasing) the narrative distance between the two. I call this trope **documentary indigeneity** because it utilizes the generic conventions of documentary film in that it relies on convincing the audience to buy-in to some central conceit based on the truth-value of its contents (Bordwell 339-40). Here, the texts use documentary-like framing to convince the reader/viewer to sympathize (rather than empathize) with the protagonist *in spite of* their apparent coded deviance.

In this chapter, I analyze three texts that work to cultivate objective pathos, or sympathy, between the audience and their indigenous protagonists by reducing the narrative distance between the interlocutors via strategic paratextual, structural, and thematic choices (i.e. they participate in the trope of documentary indigeneity). They are *Café: cantos de humo* (2015), a Nahuatl-language documentary film by Hatuey Viveros Lavielle; *Nemiliztli tlen ce momachtihquetl* (2011), a Nahuatl-language didactic play by Nahuatl educators Eduardo de la Cruz and Abelardo de la Cruz; and *Roma* (2018), a historical drama by Alfonso Cuarón that features on-screen use of the Mixtec dialect of Tlaxiaco, Oaxaca, Mexico. I begin my analyses by first identifying the genre and context of each text before proceeding to discuss how they explicitly code their protagonists as indigenous and place the nature of this identity at the center of their narrative conflict/s. I then analyze their structural and thematic elements, identifying how their constructions work to cultivate sympathy for their protagonists, who, as deviant subjects, are objects of observation or study for a hegemonic audience. This is primarily done via representation of the intimate and the quotidian, which merges the political and the autobiographical or semi-autobiographical conceits of the pieces. However, like incidental indigeneity, documentary indigeneity is also a pole on a spectrum of representation that informs the

construction of an indigenous-inclusive text.

As the reader will have undoubtedly noticed by now, only one of the texts considered in this chapter is a bona fide documentary. *Café* is a documentary, *Nemiliztli* is a didactic play, and *Roma* is a historical drama film. For this reason, it is important to not read the term **documentary indigeneity** literally as indigeneity as it appears in documentary films, but instead as allegorical indigeneity in texts purporting a high-level of real-world verisimilitude. In order to understand my decision to use the adjective “documentary” in this broad sense, let us take a moment to explore the definitional limits of the documentary genre and why its conventions lend themselves well to the construction of narratives geared-toward cultivating objective pathos.

Bill Nichols has argued that all visual modes of representation are documentaries to some degree, stating that what we would normally classify as fiction films are “documentaries of wish fulfillment” that rely upon the audience’s suspension of disbelief. By contrast, he argues that what we generally understand to be documentaries are “documentaries of social representation” that “instill belief” in the audience (*Introduction*, 1–2). Or, as Bordwell and Thompson put it, “a documentary usually comes to us identified as such,” and, “this labeling leads us to expect that the persons, places, and events shown to us exist and that the information presented about them will be trustworthy” (338). However, the borders between “documentaries of wish fulfillment” and “documentaries of social representation” are poles on a spectrum; they are not strictly delineated categories because visual media cannot possibly present an unmediated version of events. By the very nature of being a narrative text (with all its structural and productive baggage), a “documentary of social representation” will always be

fictionalized to some degree, be it a matter of necessary time dilation, the framing of an image, etc. (339). Because of the implicit tension between encouraging the suspension of disbelief and instilling belief, the field of documentary theory is rife with philosophical questions regarding authorial responsibility. However, recent documentary scholarship has begun to question and reframe the polemics surrounding this tension, giving more credit to the viewing audience and de-emphasizing (though not erasing) the role of the author.

One of the central concerns for documentary theorists has been the question of authorial participation and responsibility. That is, there has existed for some time a generalized concern that an author may choose to present a radically inauthentic representation of a person, place, or event, using the credibility afforded to him/her by the conventions of the genre (ascribed culturally) as a defensive crutch. This means that an author could play on an audience's expectations and potentially uncritical trust of documentary film and pass-off a fiction film as such. However, 21st century theoreticians like Stella Bruzzi have challenged this assertion by assigning more agency to the viewing public. In the introduction to the second edition of her book *New Documentary*, she argues that the spectator knows they are watching a documentary and therefore, "is not in need of signposts ... to understand that a documentary is a negotiation between reality on the one hand and image, interpretation and bias on the other." She then restates the generally understood notion that, "[d]ocumentary is predicated upon a dialectical relationship between aspiration and potential," in order to articulate that the spectator implicitly understands the impossibility of authentic representation, i.e. that all narrative media are aspirational representations (6–7). By casting the role of the author as implicit

and obvious, Bruzzi displaces the polemic of authorial intervention by assigning more agency to the spectator: a pivot towards a reader-response-oriented theory of documentary.

Nichols and Bruzzi come into (an admittedly marginal) conflict based on their understandings of meaning construction in documentary media, at least insofar that they assign importance to different (f)actors. For both Nichols and Bruzzi, a documentary is a triangulation between the author, the subject, and the spectator. Nichols expresses the various modes by which this occurs as short sentences, presenting a grammar of sorts for documentary film. The modes are, “*I speak to you about them,*” “*It speaks to you about them,*” and “*I/We speak to you about us*” (*Introduction*, 13–17, original emphasis). Bruzzi recognizes that the “*you,*” i.e. the viewing public, is the common factor in all of these modes, and instead assigns the position of grammatical subject to the spectator. That is, she re-articulates the grammar of documentary film as, “*I listen to them via you.*” For Bruzzi, what emerges from this understanding is, “a new definition of authenticity, one that eschews the traditional adherence to observation ... [and] replaces this with a multi-layered, performative exchange between subjects, filmmakers/apparatus and spectators” (9–10). She de-privileges the author by merging them with the media itself, turning a *triangulation* into a *dialectic*, relegating authorial mediation to a prepositional clause, or less-critical position (“*via you*”). Thus, for Bruzzi, viewing a documentary is not a passive, rigid taking-in of structured input, but a performative experience between subjects (on-screen and in-front-of screen) mediated by formal elements of the text (that are now grammatically conflated with the author).

Taking into account both Nichols's broad definition and Bruzzi's call for a reader-response oriented understanding of the genre, I use the term "documentary" to describe the use of the tropological conventions of "documentaries of social representation" insofar that they are used to cultivate objective pathos between the subject and the spectator. Practically speaking, I argue that the formal characteristics of documentary film often appear in other genres of media as tools geared-towards cultivating sympathy for the subjects on-screen in the subjects in the audience. Specifically, documentaries of social representation tend to employ more objective representational modes than a typical fiction film, by which I mean that they treat their protagonists as objects with whom to sympathize rather than subjects with whom to identify. As opposed to the texts of incidental indigeneity analyzed in Chapter 3, the mental or perceptual subjectivities of documentary protagonists are not part of the narrative as presented, forcing the reader/viewer to draw conclusions about their emotional states and motivations based solely on their observations of the content of the text. For example, in *Sleep Dealer* moments of emotional, subjective self-reflection from Memo punctuate the narrative and guide the audience towards the central point-and-purpose of the film. As I explain in that analysis (See Chapter 3, Section 3.2), we get to listen to Memo's reflexive internal monologue as narration and see surreal representations of his thought processes via shock montages, guiding us through the logic of the narrative. By contrast, *Café*, *Nemiliztli*, and *Roma* do not use subjective framing, i.e. we cannot directly access the mental or perceptual subjectivities of the documentary subjects. Instead, they encourage viewers/readers to connect to the protagonists by zooming-in on the quotidian, intimate aspects of their lives. The texts make the reader/viewer feel present (or even *be* present,

like in *Nemiliztli*)—at times even uncomfortably so—, encouraging them to gather evidence and draw conclusions in a dialectical exchange.

Texts of documentary indigeneity make objective appeals to pathos rather than subjective ones because their protagonists, explicitly coded as “Other,” are unfit focalizers for hegemonic audiences. That is, documentary indigeneity, like the incidental variety, is primarily a structural, narrative concern organized around cultivating pathos via affective transference between an indigenous subject and the reader/viewer. However, the texts at hand work to bring the subjects and spectators together despite the pronounced otherness of the former. In the previous chapter, I identified and explained the import of indigenous coding in those texts, as much of it was implicit or sub-textual. Briefly, those texts put indigeneity under erasure in order to help the audience identify with the protagonist directly, a fact reflected in the technical construction of the pieces themselves. By contrast, the texts in this chapter announce the “Other” as a key part of an explicit attempt to apprehend their foreign subjectivities. In all three cases, what codes the protagonist as indigenous is not subtle at all: in *Café*, almost the entire film is in Nahuatl (very few viewers will not require subtitles); in *Nemiliztli*, Nahuatl is the language of both the reading and the performance; and in *Roma*, the Mixtec language appears in bracketed subtitles to mark its difference. What’s more, the characters are less ethnically and racially ambiguous than those in texts of incidental indigeneity. They are of darker complexions, they wear unambiguously traditional garb, and/or make explicit mention of their ethnic roots. All of this makes them unrelatable to a general audience without significant efforts to contextualize them, i.e. place them figuratively into a larger societal context.

In her seminal essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Laura Mulvey argues that narrative cinema implicitly espouses hegemonic principles, creating, “a gaze, a world, and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire” (17). Put another way, consuming narrative film is an act of mass voyeurism on behalf of the viewing public wherein they take in images tempered by popular social discourses external to the film. In the case of documentary film, the representation of subaltern peoples is still the fulfillment of a hegemonic desire despite its representation of deviant subjects and subject matters: the desire to apprehend and understand the “Other.” Therefore, even texts that purport to provide a window into the lives of culturally deviant actors are generally structured around hegemonic principles, even when their narrative contents challenge popular apprehensions of the subjects they represent (as all the texts analyzed in this dissertation aspire to do). It is prudent to approach films of documentary indigeneity as, “cut to the measure of [the public’s] desire,” (Mulvey 17) because it foregrounds the role of audience expectations in the production, distribution, and interpretation processes.

Texts of documentary indigeneity conform to audience expectations by priming them to consume images of the “Other” both inside and outside of the text. Postcolonial scholar Stuart Hall has argued that hegemonic societies apprehend images of the “Other” by taking in and comparing their denotative and connotative interpretations. A denotative interpretation of an image is a literal reading of what is depicted therein (often isolated from, or devoid of, context). By contrast, a connotative reading of an image takes into account the discourse surrounding it to contextualize its contents (227–28). Keeping in mind Mulvey’s observation that narrative film is the fulfillment of the hegemonic

public's desire to consume its imagery, Hall's concept of connotative reading proves a useful framework for ascertaining how these texts cater to the expectations of the viewing public. In the cases of *Café*, *Nemiliztli*, and *Roma*, there are generic (of-genre), paratextual, and textual factors that work connotatively to overcome the alienating gesture of foregrounding a deviant protagonist whom the audience would not be able to comprehend. Unlike the works of Incidental Indigeneity, it is not likely that the audience will come to empathize with the indigenous protagonist based on shared experiences. Rather, tense and viscerally uncomfortable representations encourage us to sympathize with them as an object of analysis, i.e. subject of pity, instead.

The final way in which films of documentary indigeneity overcome intercultural alienation and thereby cultivate objective pathos is by privileging depictions of the intimate and the quotidian. However, the tendency to recur to realist depictions of the everyday is not a modern innovation. In the case of Latin America, Michael Chanan has summarized that the New Latin American Cinema that arose in the 1960s, though wide-ranging in its modes of representation, primarily concerned itself with, "the alliance of aesthetics and politics." He expounds on this notion by explaining that Latin American filmmakers employed neorealist techniques such as, "a strongly realist *mise-en-scène*, and the incorporation of non-professional actors into narratives from their own everyday lifeworld," to make implicit arguments about the real-world political struggles the films' subjects faced (15). In this way, a film draws the audience into its political discourse by presenting the everyday lives of their subjects, which audiences then compare and contrast with their own quotidian routines. In this vein, Alvaray has argued that the New Latin American Cinema both emerged from, and propagated in, modern audiences an

implicit desire to consume depictions of the difficult-to-represent heterogeneity of their constituent national cultures and their respective, disparate experiences under modernity (63–64). In this way, we can see that Latin American Cinema deploys documentary representations of the intimate and the quotidian to satisfy the audience's desire to relate to the heterogeneous peoples that inhabit their national landscapes.

Structurally speaking, the quotidian exists at the nexus of a documentary text's "information line" and its "line of interest." Swain explains that the "information line" is the film's topic and general perspective on the issue, while the "line of interest" is the "creative element [meant] to capture the attention of the audience and focus their attention on the conflict" (Swain 26, 30 cited in Cervantes 153). In an essay on late Twentieth and early Twenty-First century Mexican documentaries, Cristina Cervantes insists that the quotidian appears as an allegorical representation of how the societal discourse addressed in the "information line" affects the lived practices of the protagonist/s, who inhabit the "line of interest." That is, societal discourses filter through the micro, day-to-day experiences of the protagonists, making subject's performance in a text the crux of both the logical and affective lines of communication (159). In this way, an objective, sympathetic coming-to-consciousness of the conditions of politically subaltern peoples is also a logical argument for a new understanding of the discourses that regulate the relationships between the hegemonic state and its disparate peoples. In *Café*, *Nemiliztli*, and *Roma*, this is the case. In *Café*, Jorge and his family's struggle to subsist provides emotional weight to the implicit argument that modernity has problematized the lifestyle of the indigenous peoples of Puebla. In *Nemiliztli*, Chalino and his family face a similar struggle in Northern Veracruz when their subsistence crops

are devalued by the expanding international market. Finally, in *Roma*, Cleo becomes a surrogate mother to upper-middle-class children in Mexico City while her own baby is stillborn. Namely, these texts demonstrate how the exigencies of the modern economy slowly quash the indigenous subsistence and cultural practice by demonstrating how their quotidian routines are interrupted, forcing them to adapt.

When the information line and the line of interest merge as a function of manipulating the temporal and thematic construction of the film to approximate reality, film theorists call this “slow cinema.” This term describes a disjointed, international trend in which authors from various cultural contexts work to represent the temporalities of marginal peoples via the representation of their quotidian realities. Specifically, Matthew Flanagan (the originator of the term) clarified in 2012 that slow cinema works to represent alternate temporalities; it represents the day-to-day conditions of the peoples and places obscured by the ever-accelerating global capitalist market (118). However, slow cinema does not make critiques of the market explicitly. Instead, as Cervantes’s merging of the “lines” suggests, it relies on its subjects’ performativity to accumulate affect⁵³ between the content and the public. In this sense, slow cinema seems to overlap significantly with Nichol’s “performative documentary mode” that, “brings the *emotional intensities* of situated experience and embodied knowledge to the fore ... [to] help us *sense* what a certain situation or experience *feels* like. They want us to *feel* on a visceral level more than understand on a conceptual level” (*Introduction*, 151, emphasis mine). In

⁵³ As a reminder, I do not use the term “affect” as a synonym for “emotion.” Instead, I used it in the Deleuzian sense that defines it as an unqualified intensity that precedes and subsumes emotion. While describing an emotion requires context and reflection, affect simply describes a sensation felt in response to a stimulus. (See Chapter 1, Section 1.3)

order to accomplish this, slow cinema uses a collection of technical maneuvers that slow the filmic experience of time, allowing viewers to stay, linger, and engage with the text. Examples of such techniques include long shots, panning shots, continuity editing of visual information laid over continuous diegetic music, etc.

The slowing of time in performative texts accumulates affect as a function of two key, interrelated variables: by countering the structural expectations of a hegemonic film-going audience and by relying on the inherent overdetermination of audiovisual media. Regarding the former, De Luca and Barradas have summarized that slow cinema subverts mainstream cinematic representations of time that prioritize narrative utility over real-time experience by, “mak[ing] time noticeable in the image and consequently noticeable by the viewer ... this is often achieved by means of a disjunction between shot duration and audiovisual content” (5). In this way, the hegemonic audience will have ample time to take-in an audiovisual composition and engage with elements that would otherwise pass too quickly to observe without pausing or rewinding. By comparison, most Hollywood films eschew temporal fidelity, as it would conflict with the demands of the narrative. In fact, one analytical trend used in commentaries on slow cinema is the quantification of a film’s average shot length, or ASL: the average length of all shots in the film (*Ibid*). On an affective level, one could argue that lingering on an audiovisual composition allows the spectator to engage with the overdetermination of the ordinary, the second key factor.

In her book *Ordinary Affects* (2007), Kathleen Stewart argues that a subject’s quotidian experience is the product of a multiplicity of factors that no single epistemological system can adequately apprehend. The “ordinary” is a “shifting

assemblage of practices and practical knowledges, scenes of both liveness and exhaustion, a dream of escape or of the simple life” (1-2). Understood this way, the quotidian (or the “ordinary”) is a fecund site for an intersubjective dialectical exchange because of the potential for both overlap and deviation from presupposed or practiced norms. Existing at the crossroads of the aesthetic and the political, the “ordinary” of a text is “overdetermined,” or not necessarily bound by the epistemic regime that structures it. Instead, it is in dialogue with its reader/viewer. Therefore, when a slow text allows its audience to linger, it allows more elements of the composition to be observed and engaged with. This increases the likelihood that a member of the public will develop a personalized affective connection on either a conscious or a subconscious level. As De Luca and Barradas put it:

... a slow cinematic aesthetic not only restores a sense of time and experience in a world short of both, it also encourages a mode of engagement with images and sounds whereby slow time becomes a vehicle for introspection, reflection and thinking, and the world is disclosed in its complexity, richness and mystery. (16)

In this way, the quotidian becomes the nexus at which the logical, narrative point-and-purpose and the emotional conceit of a text become one, working together to make affective—rather than purely logical—appeals for intersubjective social solidarity to a hegemonic audience by developing sympathy for explicitly “Othered” indigenous protagonists.

4.2 Audience Intrusion: Framing for Shame in *Café: Cantos de humo* (2015)

Hatuey Viveros Lavielle’s *Café: cantos de humo* is a documentary of the slow

cinema variety that privileges the performativity of the audience. Its framing de-emphasizes narrative affect while working to make the audience feel as if they are imprudent intruders in the lives of the protagonists. In doing so, the film implicitly comments on the consumer-driven network of festival and museum films, locating itself both within and against the tradition of New Latin American cinema. By doing this, it affectively communicates such consumerism to be a conjugation of state mestizaje's indigenous fetishism. Articulating hegemonic regimes of genre and culture against themselves, *Café* provokes a sense of shame in the audience by making it an uncomfortable experience to consume the intimate lives of the protagonists, strategically casting the viewing experience as an intrusion of the subject's quotidian lives, thereby urging viewers to question the regimes of power and legitimacy that encircle indigenous documentaries.

The documentary follows Jorge, a young law student from Cuetzalan, Puebla, Mexico, as he and his family work to overcome emotional and economic hardships following the death of his father, Antonio. Jorge himself works to balance the interests of his family and community with his own personal and economic interests. Namely, as a law student he faces an existential crisis brought on by his abandonment of the family's subsistence practice of cultivating coffee beans. Meanwhile, his sixteen-year-old sister Chayo struggles to decide what to do regarding her unexpected and unwanted pregnancy. She explicitly states that she fears premature maternity will prevent her from following in her brother's footsteps and perpetuate the local cycle of poverty she seeks to break. In both cases, the documentary leaves the viewer without a tidy resolution. Jorge completes his studies and then remains in his community as the first and only indigenous-raised

lawyer in the region, only to discover that the economic abuses of his community run deeper than he knew, signaling that he has taken on a monumental burden with an uncertain and difficult trajectory. Similarly, in the final scene Chayo gets on a bus to the city, where she says she will make a decision about whether to abort the fetus or not. All of this takes place against a backdrop of grief and celebration as the family spends months preparing to mourn on the one-year anniversary of Antonio's passing.

At its core, *Café* is an allegory for the life, death, and potential rebirth of the community in Cuetzalan. Both narrative threads (of Jorge and Chayo) speak to an intergenerational cultural crisis brought on by the devaluation of traditional, subsistence practices and commodities by international economic forces (Chapter 1, Sections 1.2 and 1.3; and Chapter 2, Section 2.4). At the beginning of the film, their mother Tere explains that Antonio hoped that his son would soon wrap-up his studies so that he could die in peace, presumably because he wanted the peace-of-mind of knowing that Jorge would be ready to inherit his responsibilities as patriarch and support the family. However, despite his choice to pursue a culturally nontraditional career, Tere suggests to Jorge that his father's disapproval did not stem from a lack of respect for Jorge's academic choices, but rather from the anxiety that his studies made him a less productive member of the family unit. Because this conversation occurs after Antonio's death, there can be no formal reconciliation between the two men, and Jorge must take up the mantle of family patriarch while grappling with the imposing, spectral presence of his father and the similarly ephemeral cultural traditions that died with him. As for Chayo, her (tentatively) stilted maternity and the pursuit of her studies similarly represent an intergenerational conflict in that she wishes to end the cycle of poverty in her family by establishing herself

professionally and economically before having children⁵⁴. Thus, the siblings wrestle with specters of the past and future as a function of survival. However, despite the indeterminate and bleak nature of the filmic narrative—and, by extension, their community’s future—a positive interpretation exists: that both Jorge and Chayo have embraced a newfound agency whereby they articulate the social systems of the hegemonic culture of Mexico for their own purposes (the school and medical systems, respectively). In turn, *Café* shows that they then plan to invest their gains back into the community (or, in Jorge’s case, continue to invest in it), thereby contributing to its long-term survival. For this reason, it is fair to characterize *Café* as an aspirational text in which the community of Cuetzalan is metaphorically reborn into the hegemonic culture as a function of intergenerational shifts in productive and reproductive labor practices.

A partially dramatized documentary film, *Café* participates in many paratextual conventions typical of the genre. In terms of the paratext, *Café* appeared only on the film festival and museum circuit in the four years immediately following its release (2014–18), including stints at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City. What’s more, upon its DVD release, the production company Icarus Films priced *Café* at a prohibitive \$398 USD (“Café”). This is because the film exists for museum and library distribution rather than personal viewing. This is typical of a performative documentary of the slow cinema variety, as they framed the text literally with the walls of museums

⁵⁴ On another level, more than Jorge’s, Chayo’s conflict is a gendered one because abandoning maternity to pursue a career by definition requires her to eschew the gendered division of labor in her community. Jorge also faces a similar conflict, as his legal work moves him into the domestic sphere instead of the coffee fields. The film’s third act evinces this fact by showing him interviewing a client (a female head-of-household) in her home. I address the topic of gendered division of labor more significantly in the next section.

and metaphorically with the prestige of festival participation to present its contents as legitimate, authoritative in its verisimilitude, and educational. The production company then doubled-down on this paratextual-framing-as-authority by erecting economic barriers to the efficacious distribution of the film until its festival and museum run was complete. It finally became available for digital rental via Icarus's website in late 2018.

Like the rest of the texts of documentary indigeneity, *Café* uses a series of structural maneuvers to de-privilege the role of the documentarian and turn the typical triangulation of meaning in a documentary (author-film-audience) into a dialectic exchange between the text and the audience. Classified as a documentary, it treats its subjects as objects to observe, primarily establishing its implicit claim to real-world verisimilitude via the use of elements that privilege performativity. On the formal level, the documentary does this by drawing on the neorealist tradition of casting non-actors, relying on them to afford legitimacy to the film—at least insofar that it casts itself as an allegory for the fraught nature of contemporary indigenous life—by speaking Nahuatl for most of the runtime. On the more technical side, *Café* favors a shaky cam aesthetic that makes use of relatively long shots (duration) that often remain fixated on a space well after a subject has abandoned the shot. What's more, a great many of the shots of the subjects themselves are close-ups (or extreme close-ups) that tend to linger. By mimicking quotidian temporality via long shots and the unsteady human gaze via shaky cam, the documentary makes the viewing public feel as if we are visually eavesdropping on intimate moments; we are staring at a person who may catch us looking at any moment.

The combination of temporally patient but spatially dynamic compositions creates

an uneasy aesthetic that transforms the consumption of *Café* into a witnessing rather a viewing. The use of shaky cam, which is not excessively shaky, contributes to the audience's experience of the film by mimicking the micro adjustments the human body makes as it moves in place: it is rarely still, even while focused on a single subject. In his discussion of the film *The Blair Witch project* (1999), Jerome P. Schaefer argues that this combination of elements converts a film, which usually participate in "trans-media storytelling," into an act of "trans-media theater" (132). That is, putting the documentarian under erasure by making the viewer feel present as a second-person interlocutor, i.e. it is as if we are present with Jorge, Chayo, and family throughout the narrative. We *are* the camera. The second-person-style framing is perhaps at its most explicit when we see Chayo confront her sexual partner's family about the pregnancy. In this scene, the camera-as-audience (still slightly shaking) observes the tense but polite confrontation through a window, literally peeking through the sheer, white curtains. This framing casts the witnessing of this extremely personal conversation as an illicit and intrusive act. Given the tension of the scene, it is no wonder that Schaefer primarily associates this aesthetic with the horror genre. All of this begs the questions: "Why does the film seemingly seek to make us feel viscerally like intruders via its framing?" and, by extension, "What is the discursive function of this choice?"

Regarding the first question, the slow, uncomfortable framing of *Café* plays with Mulvey's assertion that the hegemonic gaze constitutes cinema as a fulfillment of its desire to apprehend the "Other" by causing the public to feel a modicum of shame for intruding on the intimacy of this family. Throughout the film, the camera lingers on close-ups of the characters' faces. We see them go about their activities, perhaps even

talking to someone else off-screen. Because the long, slow shots often seem to lack narrative motivation, the audience must reflect, perhaps unconsciously, on our performative role as witnesses. This technique is at its most potent when the character is doing nothing. For example, in the opening funeral sequence several tight close-ups linger on silent mourners for ten to fifteen seconds at a time. We practically squirm in our chairs as these subjects' eyes dart around contemplatively. By employing the temporal conventions of slow cinema such as these, the film produces tension by pitting our desire to apprehend the "Other" against our conviction that it is rude to stare. Silvan Tomkins famously defined shame as an affective auxiliary that accompanies and modifies positive affects like joy, effectively signaling when our, "desire outruns fulfillment," like eating a whole bag of candy and making ourselves sick, for instance. (406). Using this definition, we can understand that *Café* allows us to consume so much information about the filmic subjects⁵⁵ that we cross a line, gluttonously transgressing social norms instilled in us by societal conditioning. In the vocabulary of Stewart, we experience the auxiliary affect of shame by overindulging on the ordinary, a fact we become aware of when we feel that the filmic subjects may observe and consume us, in return.

In much the opposite way, *Café* frames major narrative events as ordinary, draining them of the affect most films would afford them. To understand how *Café* does this, it is important to recall that affect and emotion are not the same thing. Rather, affect is an "intensity" experienced by a subject as a reaction to a stimulus. It precedes and subsumes emotion, which, in turn, is a retroactive interpretation of affect qualified by

⁵⁵ As mentioned in the intro, Mulvey also reminds us that filmic subjects are conjured by the hegemonic public's desire to consume them in the first place (Mulvey 118).

context and reflection (Massumi xvii). In sequences critical to the narrative, most films strategically increase the audiovisual stimuli, or otherwise modify them, to elicit stronger intensities in their audiences. For example, we have already discussed that staring at another person's face for too long produces a visceral intensity that makes us want to turn away. In mainstream Hollywood action film, one can readily observe that action sequences will cut frequently, stress dynamic motion of the filmic subjects (often several at a time), increase the volume, play segments of the score, etc. In this way, the viewer experiences a multiplicity of intensities that emerge in direct proportion to the density of the audiovisual composition. At the climax of the film, the propagation of intensities anticipates the narrative payoff, contributing to a satisfying catharsis just before the action winds down, i.e. the narrative denouement takes place. However, *Café* does not anticipate its narrative payoffs by providing more or different stimuli, instead opting to remain relatively consistent in its compositional density.

Café maintains a steady affective stream throughout the film, refusing to punctuate critical narrative events with varied audiovisual density. In terms of the narrative, the film begins in medias res: precluding the audience from experiencing the inciting incident that is Antonio's death. Similarly, it also ends in a truncated fashion: we never get the narrative pay-off of learning what Chayo ultimately decides to do about her pregnancy. However, the most unsatisfying moment of the film is the meager, truncated catharsis of watching Jorge obtain his degree and begin to practice law in the foothills of Cuetzalan. About two-thirds of the way through the film, Jorge successfully defends his thesis with the unanimous approval of his committee. His chair announces that he will graduate with honors and therefore will become the first indigenous advocate, "hecho,

formado, criado y desarrollado en Cuetzalan.” However, despite the triumphant content of the scene, the structural elements do not deviate from the rest of the film. The sound design remains realist and diegetic, e.g. there is no music to accompany the accomplishment, there is no applause, and the committee chair reads in monotone from a pre-prepared statement. Visually speaking, the formal structure of the shots do not vary from those of the rest of the film in this sequence. That is, there are a few establishing shots of the room and committee, but the camera remains on a close-up of Jorge most of the time. The only payoff in the scene, though powerful in relation to the profoundly ordinary inclination of the piece, are a few split seconds when Jorge cannot contain a smile ... that he proceeds to quickly subdue each time. In sum, the content and the composition of the sequence clash with one another, subverting the hegemonic expectation that a narrative payoff be accompanied by increased compositional density (and therefore affectivity). This design choice is an anticipatory gesture that foreshadows the continuity of Jorge’s struggle despite his accomplishments. That is, when he begins practicing law in the third act as, “el mejor defensor de los derechos humanos de tu pueblo,” the film’s content shows us that his work is only just beginning. By placing elements of the narrative outside the scope of the camera-as-audience’s perceptive and affective fields, and by de-emphasizing the affective weight of the only on-screen narrative payoff via consistently flat audiovisual density, the film flattens the narrative’s affective topography and relegates death, graduation, and maternity to the realm of the quotidian despite their potential narrative weight.

Though the neutralization of affect in the film’s narrative certainly contributes to the slow-cinema-like quotidian realism of *Café*, it highlights the shame of intrusion (by

the camera-as-audience) as a metadiscursive commentary on the fetishization of indigenous Mexican peoples in popular culture. Early in the film, Chayo wakes up and begins to prepare coffee for the family. Before she starts the fire on the stove, she takes a moment to analyze her matchbox. In a close-up, we can see that it is emblazoned with the image of a Maya pyramid, most likely Chichén Itzá. The fact that this image appears on such an innocuous, everyday product speaks to the rampant commodification of indigenous iconography (disembodied, abstract indigeneity) in the wider cultural context of Mexico. Further, its appearance in a documentary about the ongoing struggles of indigenous peoples in rural Puebla speaks to the stark contrast between how indigeneity and indigenous peoples appear in contemporary discourse, often divorced from one another. Put another way, it is ironic that Chayo, an indigenous woman who is considering literally aborting her bio-cultural progeny in order to survive in the 21st century Mexican economy, takes a moment to observe how hegemonic authorities proportion an anointed status to indigenous antiquity. However, *Café*'s uncomfortable framing takes this a step further; the affective modifier of shame draws a genealogical line between the state mestizaje evinced in the imagery of the matchbox and the genre of indigenous documentary itself. That is, the matchbox is a metonymic device that symbolizes both its own participation in the popular discourse of state mestizaje as well as that of the indigenous documentary genre as a whole. By framing for shame⁵⁶: *Café* encourages us recognize that the documentary, like the matchbox, is a product made for

⁵⁶ Meaning: Framing the film in such a way that the audience experiences the affective modifier of shame. According to The Tomkins Institute, "shame occurs when positive affect is incompletely reduced," and has the effect of, "help[ing] us define the boundaries of our positive pursuits," thereby limiting our desire and reducing the frequency destructive behaviors in the long-term ("When").

consumption that predicates its value on the fetishization of indigenous peoples, their cultures, and their poverty. Therefore, *Café* infers via its very structure that it would be shameful to consume this narrative and then proceed to not act in solidarity with its subjects. Working on the structural level, the documentary's lines of interest (Jorge and Chayo's struggles) and information line (the argument that we fetishize indigenous peoples in the media) become one via the affective modifier of shame, encouraging the audience to reflect upon its own gaze. Therefore, it is arguable that an implicit point-and-purpose of *Café* is to draw affective parallels between the indigenous fetishization of the past with that of the present in order to discourage the former.

Zooming out to generic level, one of the central critiques of slow cinema has been its neoliberal economic model that fetishizes and relegates to subaltern status the lives of its subjects. In terms of production and distribution, this means that the films in question are festival films. Paul Julian Smith has characterized festival films as ones that employ long takes, non-professional actors, and understated performances that tend to be "inconclusive" in their narrative scope (72). Based on our discussion thus far, *Café* fits these criteria. Going further, Juan Poblete has argued that festival films predicate their success on being, "legible both nationally and internationally," meaning that their structures and contents meet general expectations of the genre (24). What this means is that many international festivals expect Latin American cinema to conform to engrained expectations. Since the advent of the New Latin American Cinema of the 1960s and 70s, the overarching expectation has been that films from the region will be political in nature. In the introduction to *The Routledge Companion to Latin American Cinema*, D'Lugo, López, and Podalsky summarize that there exists a generalized, "notion that films from

the region come with a necessary political *charge*, yet seldom address the complex social or political contexts out of which those ‘political’ films have risen” (5, emphasis mine). That is, Latin American films on the festival circuit will use strategic aesthetic choices to communicate political content and, in turn, will be judged based on this expectation. *Café* is certainly assailable in this regard as a pre-determined product meant for a target audience. It was produced by the well-known documentary production company Icarus Films, appeared on the international festival circuit, and is praised on its own webpage for the deft representation of, “sensorial ethnographies,” that constitute a, “vital register of linguistic diversity in the region” (“Café”). In sum, the film received international praise for conforming to hegemonic expectations of Latin American film, presenting inherently political content (non-hegemonic linguistic diversity, here) as affective content; it has the politico-affective “charge” D’Lugo et al. identify as being key to the genre. That is, one could critique *Café* as being oriented towards hegemonic expectations of genre with little regard for the real-world sociopolitical complexities of its subjects. However, *Café* seems to have preeminently internalized this critique of the genre and counterbalanced it by privileging the performativity of the audience via shame.

What sets *Café* apart from other indigenous documentaries produced in Latin America for distribution on the festival circuit is that it was received well by a major indigenous festival jury, a fact arguably attributable to its metadiscursive commentary on its role as representational documentary. In 2015, it won first prize at the Montreal First People’s Festival, an annual celebration and competition of indigenous-related art. In the announcement of the award, the jury recognized how *Café* merges the political with the aesthetic arguing, “[the] weight of history provides the film a strong incantatory power ...

each gesture, each tone of voice, each glance is a part of a continuum in which the smallest aspects of everyday life take on a ceremonial value” (Welsh). The content of the jury’s comments highlights the power of the quotidian in the film, evincing the efficacy of the affect produced via the slow, patient representation that plays on the overdetermination of the ordinary by the viewing public. As a testament to the framing’s effectiveness, the representation did not ring false to a group of indigenous jurors, despite Lavielle himself not being indigenous. Instead it was read as a faithful, “espousal of the silent rhythms of labours and days ... making visible ... a Nahua family’s intimate life,” demonstrating that *Café* does not exclusively play into the expectations of international festival juries. It certainly does this, but it also navigates the (trap)ings of its genre enough to avoid pandering uncritically to hegemonic audiences by fetishizing its subjects as totems of subalternity to be consumed. It is arguable that this is due in large part to the performative nature of the documentary that encourages viewers to sympathize with the subjects by placing them in the same room, thereby transforming the positive intensity that accompanies the fulfillment of the desire to consume the “Other” into a shameful, intrusive act. On a more allegorical level, *Café* articulates transnational regimes power that afford legitimacy to representation (festivals, museums, thesis committees, etc.) to challenge those very same regimes. In doing so, it promotes solidarity between its indigenous subjects and its non-indigenous spectators by portraying both parties as being equally aware of, and participative in, hegemonic culture.

4.3 A Gendered Quotidian in *Nemiliztli tlen ce momachtihquetl* (2011)

Nemiliztli tlen ce momachtihquetl is a didactic play written by Eduardo de la Cruz and Abelardo de la Cruz, who are both instructors of Nahuatl for the Instituto de

Docencia e Investigación Etnológica de Zacatecas (IDIEZ), a program hosted by the Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas. In English, the program goes by “The IDIEZ Project for Nahuatl Language Revitalization.” *Nemiliztli* is a short, one-act, Nahuatl-language play that follows a Nahuatl family from the town of Tepoxteco in Chicontepec, Veracruz, Mexico, (a small pueblo in the Huasteca Veracruzana) in the 1980’s. Over the course of four intimate, quotidian vignettes separated only by brief interjections from a nameless narrator, the protagonist and pre-adolescent son of the family, Chalino, tries to convince his father, Mecinto, to allow him to continue his studies beyond primary school. At first, Mecinto is unmoved, demanding that Chalino discontinue his studies upon graduation to join him in the family’s milpa, as is tradition. When Chalino insists, his sister Chela expresses that she, too, would like to continue her education. The rebellion of the two children against their father leads to an emotionally charged climax over a family dinner. During the confrontation, Mecinto becomes a more sympathetic and complex antagonist. When Chalino states explicitly that the economic devaluation of traditional farming practices has made subsistence living in Tepoxteco unsustainable, we discover that Mecinto’s aversion to continued education stems from his existential fear of intergenerational identitary loss rather than stubborn contrarianism, as seems to be the case for the first half of the play. In the end, both he and the children’s paternal grandfather, Chanito, decide to support Chalino’s decision by giving him some of the precious little money they have saved to support his studies. However, Chela’s fight to continue her education is more difficult because she must overcome labor norms on two separate levels: tradition and gender. Therefore, it is important not to conflate the children’s individual conflicts with their father. Rather, they are distinct challenges to

local hegemonic norms with gendered elements and consequences brought on by, in turn, the advent of the Mexican State's economic hegemony.

Before analyzing more closely the content of the play, it will prove instructive to first unpack *Nemiliztli*'s documentary-style approach to drama because its claims to authenticity arise not from the performance itself, but the context, content, and authorship. In their work on Russian documentary theater, Birgit Beumers and Mark Lipovestsky explain that stage productions of this nature must establish their real-world verisimilitude based on their methodology more than on their content. That is, because the content of a stage narrative is by its nature disembodied from its subjects (performed by different actors in various times and spaces), the author instead must work to establish the illusion of quotidian realism via the play's *mise-en-scène*, stage directions, and, above all, speech acts (616). In the case of *Nemiliztli*, this observation is particularly salient because the students performing the play are typically novice- and intermediate-level Nahuatl learners from diverse backgrounds, meaning that the indigeneity of the characters categorically does not derive from the performing bodies and is always aspirational by definition⁵⁷. Therefore, the explicit didacticism of *Nemiliztli* lends credence to a theory of documentary theater that privileges paratext, genre, and speech acts. On the paratextual level, the play takes place in the context of IDIEZ-organized sessions of Nahuatl instruction, framing itself within the context the hosting academic

⁵⁷ In fact, as a rare but relevant anecdotal aside, there are often more men than women in the IDIEZ classes, necessitating that men don traditional huipiles and skirts to play the roles of Chela (as I did in the Summer of 2016) and her mother, Mela. The gender bending in the casting is unproblematic for the instructor-directors given that, as Beumers and Lipovestsky point out, content maintains primacy over performance in documentary theater, especially when the didacticism is the most important factor.

institutions⁵⁸. This is similar to *Café*'s use of museums and festivals to establish paratextual legitimacy as a documentary. Regarding the formal elements of the text, the play lists its learning objectives on the title page in Spanish, explaining in an accessible way that it seeks to engage the audience (performers and spectators alike) in its efforts to transmit linguistic and cultural knowledge. Finally, the use of Nahuatl as the language of performance (Beumers and Lipovestsky's "speech acts") engages with neorealist modes of representation that establish authenticity with quotidian language use. However, by definition, *Nemiliztli* cannot establish legitimacy based on the performances of non-professional actors who are carefully selected for their performative value vis-à-vis their ethnic materiality, as is the case in *Café* and *Roma*. Instead, the use of Nahuatl is the primary means of establishing real-world authenticity because the bodies of the performers are indeterminate and interchangeable.

For Beumers and Lipovestsky, speech acts cannot carry the weight of establishing documentary authenticity on their own. Instead, such an approach to quotidian representation carries with it a genre-specific aversion to narrativization, leading to an overall flattening of the theatrical aesthetic because, "characters cannot develop and have neither past nor future" (637). In *Café*, we can say that Viveros Lavielle played into this narrative flatness, presenting his film as an uncomfortable intrusion into the mundane, everyday lives of his subjects by manipulating the affective content of its compositions: there is no traditional character development for Jorge and Chayo. This is something *Nemiliztli* cannot do because the medium of theater cannot manipulate factors such as

⁵⁸ Depending on the year and session, IDIEZ hosts its in-person camps at USC, Yale University, the University of Utah, or la Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas.

distance, angle of observation, temporality, and gaze as readily or specifically as film. This being the case, how can it be that *Nemiliztli* is both a piece of documentary theater and a narrative with clear, delineated story beats? The answer is that, instead of putting the authors entirely under erasure, the play's claims to real-world verisimilitude emerge from its implicitly semibiographical conceit. Though it would be problematic to characterize the content of *Nemiliztli* as biographical in a strict sense, it presents itself as a faithful representation of life in Tepoxteco in the 1980s because that is the context in which co-author Eduardo de la Cruz grew up. What's more, this is an indigenous-authored piece that exclusively represents indigenous characters in an indigenous community, providing significant weight from the perspective of identity politics. Taken in concert with the paratextual context of the performance and the generic conventions of documentary, this implied biographical authority forms the third leg of a network of legitimation that props-up the play's claims to authenticity, and therefore its capacity to transmit cultural information faithfully.

Although implied biography helps to form the tripod of legitimation on which *Nemiliztli* bases its claims to verisimilitude, the story is an allegory for the community's identity crisis rather than the biography of any one individual. As mentioned in the synopsis, it is an allegory for the existential and physical growing pains of transitioning from subalternity to hegemony in an indigenous community in Northern Veracruz. We can understand the allegorical nature of its conceit by studying its title in translation. To begin, the root verb of the noun "nemiliztli" is "nemilia," which literally means "to walk." Therefore, the term "nemiliztli" signifies "life" only in a metaphorical sense, casting it as a, "going about the everyday." The use of this term is not a text-specific

aberration, and means “life” across many Nahuatl dialects, even showing up in some dialogue in *Café* (I return to this point below). Luckily, English has a similar titling convention wherein the quotidian means to represent synecdochically the general condition of a subject: “A day in the life of (subject).” Therefore, a loose interpretation of the title that captures the life-as-the-aggregate-of-quotidian-practices implied in the original Nahuatl is *A Day in the Life of a Student*. Here, “a student,” or “ce momachtihquetl,” appears in the singular, despite there being two students represented: Chalino and Chela. Taken together, this observation and that fact that neither of the authors claim the story as their own allows us to see the play as an allegorical device that means to make an affective argument to the audience about the condition of the Nahuatl-speaking peoples of the region, especially the youngest generation.

In *Nemiliztli*, the family’s struggle parallels that of Jorge’s in *Café*. Just as is implied in the case of Jorge and Antonio (his deceased father), Chalino and Mecinto’s interpersonal conflict is an allegorical proxy for the fear of linguistic and ethnic identity loss in indigenous Mexican communities. The paratextual framing of the play makes this context all the more potent. That is, it takes place as part of a language re-articulation seminar that seeks to curtail the death of the language. Like Jorge (and like Memo in *Sleep Dealer*), Chalino seeks to abandon the milpa and pursue a hegemonic career, provoking a defensive reaction on the part of his father that is as harsh as it is rooted in love for his family, community, and culture. In response to Chalino’s argument that choosing subsistence farming in 1980s Tepoxteco is tantamount to choosing a life of abject poverty and suffering, Mecinto breaks down in tears. He laments that his children have come to turn away from him—and therefore from tradition—because of their

circumstances. Therefore, Mecinto, like Antonio in *Café*, symbolizes a resistance to change rooted in fear of loss. Like his filmic counterpart Antonio, Mecinto reveals that his conflict is not with his son's chosen path, but with the advent of an unfortunate economic status quo (in *Café*, Tere reveals this to Jorge upon Antonio's death). His emotional release and subsequent recognition that his son is simply being pragmatic allows them to reconcile, and it is settled that Chalino will study. In turn, Chalino comes to recognize and internalize the anxieties that undergird his father's perspective. What is important here is that Mecinto sees giving-in to hegemonic economic paradigms as a cultural defeat, while his children don't make the same association. Rather, like the instructors at IDIEZ who use the US and Mexican educational systems to codify, promote, and expand their language and cultures, they view hegemonic institutions as malleable to their local needs.

Based on the plot synopsis, structural breakdown, and content analysis herein provided, *Café* and *Nemiliztli* foreground the quotidian, operate within the conventions of performative documentary, and communicate their political content via affective appeals grounded in aesthetic choices: they merge their narrative "lines" in order to make affective appeals to their audience. In both cases, the specters of the past and of the future haunt these indigenous families as they struggle to survive in the neocolonial context and the texts deploy affect to generate objective sympathy for the subjects. So, rather than re-treading the same argument made in the previous section, let us consider this phenomenon from the perspective of the female characters, as it is urgent to discuss how the tension of cultural indeterminacy affects women differently from their male counterparts in texts of documentary indigeneity. This observation emerges from the

curious fact that both pieces feature difficult-to-resolve storylines for their leading women (Chayo and Chela, respectively) despite their disparate media, production, and contexts. It behooves us to address the questions, “Why are these women’s storylines similarly fraught in such relatively disparate pieces of art?” and “What is the discursive signification of such a representation?”

In foregrounding the quotidian, these texts of documentary indigeneity represent an implicit gendered division of labor. In *Café*, men are shown to work outside (or in offices outside the home), building pagodas, cleaning gravestones, visiting other residences, etc. By contrast, the women’s work (cooking, cleaning, caring for children and domestic animals, etc.) overwhelmingly takes place in the domestic sphere. In much the same way, *Nemiliztli* shows Jorge and Mecinto working in the milpa (1), while Chela and Mela only leave the home to wash the family’s clothes in the river (2). Tad Mutersbaugh has summarized that Mexican indigenous communities employ, “a socially-constructed gender-differentiated worksites geography,” that implicitly differentiates “productive” labor from “reproductive” labor. Respectively, the first refers to the production of commodities (to be sold or consumed in the home) while the latter refers to activities that “reproduce the capacity to labor.” The interdependency of these two types of labor produces a hierarchical spatial organization in which tasks become either “gender segregated or gender sequential” (440): men’s work operates in the productive sphere, while women’s work operates in the reproductive sphere. However, these lines may blur as productive practices cross the domestic threshold. When a family’s crop produces a surplus, the productive, quality-oriented work of refining raw materials (such as shucking and grinding coffee beans, grinding corn, etc.) enters the home and under the

purview of the women, compounding the amount of work expected of them (451). In both *Café* and *Nemiliztli*, the women continue to work throughout the day, cleaning, cooking, and refining materials, while the men generally participate sparingly—or not at all—in work inside the home. A notable exception occurs when Jorge helps to shuck coffee beans, but he otherwise remains inert in the home as the women around him run the household.

Regarding the crisis of cultural transition in both pieces, a consequence of the gendered division of labor on display in both texts is the indispensability and stubborn resilience of women’s reproductive labor roles. The walls of the home do not bind Jorge and Chalino and, by extension, neither do the reproductive labor practices associated with that space. This fact affords them a modicum of self-determinative power in their work preferences because they are not responsible for reproducing labor capacity, just generating capital. This helps to explain the abrupt 180-degree shift in Mecinto’s attitude regarding Chalino’s ambitions. The family can adapt to new technologies of power in the field of productive labor without necessarily destabilizing the internal cultural hierarchies of Tepoxteco because it would not necessarily provoke a radical shift in domestic paradigms, i.e., the material input into the home will still have the potential for continuity. As evidence of this line of thinking, Mecinto frames his refusal to Chalino as an abstract, cultural conflict: “nopa tlamantli zan puro tlatzcayotl” [“such things are only for outsiders”] (3, my translation). By contrast, when Chela confronts Mecinto about continuing her education, he responds at first by categorically refusing her request, exclaiming, “¡Ta axtlen xiquihto! ta nican timocahuaz, ticpalehuiz monanan: ¡pan metlatl, pan cocina!” [“You don’t say another word! You will work here, you will help

your mother: at the *metate!* in the kitchen!"] (4, my translation). Thus, we can recognize that Chela must not only overcome a shift in productive labor demands, but she must also convince her father to set aside gendered ideas of who can perform productive labor outside of the home. She insists, "axcanah pampa nicihautl axcanah nihueliz nimomachtia" ["[Just] because I am a woman does not mean I cannot study"] (5, my translation). Though the narrator clarifies that this argument causes Mecinto to relent and give Chela his reluctant approval, it is important to note that Chela needed to make a different argument than Chalino in order to continue her studies. Namely, Mecinto sought to compartmentalize changes in labor practices in order to maintain domestic continuity. Therefore, Chela needed to problematize that gender-specific expectation.

Mutersbaugh and Lyon have explained that the gender-differentiated worksites geography of indigenous communities in Mexico disproportionately affects women negatively, but also affords them a modicum of power in gendered sequential labor (439, 317). In *Nemiliztli*, Chela's argument that she continue to study superficially appears to be rooted in an abstract, political call to gender equality. However, it is instead couched in an argument for labor withholding. Mutersbaugh notes that the sequential nature of gendered labor requires that women often perform the quality-oriented tasks of productive labor (440). This means that women can, and do, sometimes slow their labor or refuse to carry out certain tasks in protest of their treatment (451, 453). Lyon concurs, explaining that indigenous women in Oaxaca often have much control over household coffee incomes, but that this comes at the cost of "time poverty" brought on by the compounding of both productive and reproductive labor (317). When read in this light, when Chela argues that she does not want to be "at the metate" or "in the kitchen" with

Mela, she is inferring that she may perform the labor in a disinterested manner, which would harm the family's yields. Specifically, she argues, "Axcanah nicnequi nopeca ma nechcahuacan huan teipan axnicmatiz tlen nicchihuaz" ["I don't want you to make me do this and then realize later that I don't like what I am doing"], implying that they may be forcing her to do something she is not meant to do, and therefore would do half-heartedly (5, my translation). Chela articulates the domestic power afforded her by gendered labor geographies by implicitly arguing that she may be an unfit reproductive worker. In this way, she convinces her father to allow her to continue her studies by appealing to his sensibilities regarding traditional indigenous Mexican paradigms of labor division.

Café provides a more complex narrative that parallels the gendered dynamics of power evinced in *Nemiliztli* while also addressing the advent of hegemonic technologies in present-day Puebla. Specifically, Chayo's struggle with her pregnancy represents a conflict between her productivity and re-productivity. Tere (the mother) explains late in the film that Chayo's choices are either (a) have the baby with neither maternal nor paternal support (as a function of local poverty), and subsequently struggle to survive, or (b) abort the baby and suffer the trauma of loss. Fundamentally, the choice is whether to use an available technology to abort the child and be a more productive and economically stable individual. This is significant, culturally speaking, because it represents the opportunity for an indigenous woman to reject one of her reproductive labors as the result of a major shift in productive labor expectations. That is, the gendered sequence of labor is so profoundly interrupted by the crisis of productive labor in Cuetzalan that, at least in Chayo's case, reproducing labor capacity via maternity is inefficient and likely a hindrance to survival. At the same time, Chayo is still held to pre-existing cultural

standards. In a conversation with her older sister Rosario, she scolds her (albeit in an understated way, given the film's aesthetic). Rosario frames the transgression that led to the pregnancy as a result of "wandering around in the streets," or the result of disregarding the cultural norm that women should be in the home. In fact, her punishment is that she may only go to school before coming directly home. An American audience will likely find this sequence of scenes jarring, as the decision regarding the potential abortion emerges almost entirely from gendered, spatial labor pragmatics, rather than religious morality (though this is implicit from time to time). In this way, Chayo's body becomes the site of cultural tension in which the productive and reproductive imperatives of the past and present come into conflict, problematizing the status quo and forcing Chayo to make a hard decision that is emblematic of her people's economic and identitary crisis.

When it comes to Chela and Chayo, their plotlines' information lines and lines of interest merge to create affective appeals for the audience to recognize the doubly fraught status of indigenous women in the texts. In both cases, the "information line" communicates that these women face a crisis of labor because traditional, sequential practices of productive and reproductive labor are out-of-sync due to the advent of neocolonial technologies of power. At the same time, the works present this argument sub-textually by developing a "line of interest" centered on the deeply personal conflicts of the women themselves. Both texts present their narratives as performances of the quotidian that, ironically, represent a fragmentary reality in which the problematization of the gendered quotidian has become the norm. In another evocative parallel to *Nemiliztli*, Chayo laments that her lover has not visited her since she and Tere disclosed her

pregnancy to the boy's family (in the uncomfortable scene observed through the window). She tells Rosario that they are not helping her and that, "nehnemiliah," which means, "they just go on with their lives," as if nothing has changed. Again, the use of the root verb "nemilia" represents life as the aggregate of everyday practices. Therefore, Chayo is arguing that life is going on without her, and that the social contract between productive and reproductive labor has been broken. That is, her lover's lack of affection and support evinced by his absence and perceived indifference encourages Chayo to consider non-traditional options. Likewise, Chela must emotionally confront her father on the grounds that she may not be suited for traditional reproductive labor. In this way, the interruption of the indigenous quotidian paradoxically becomes the status quo in the temporal diegesis of both *Nemiliztli* and *Café*. At the same time, both female characters exercise a modicum of agency insofar that they (a) recognize the double, gendered nature of their crises and (b) articulate hegemonic technologies of power in an attempt to overcome them.

4.4 Manufactured Verisimilitude and Transcultural Maternity in *Roma* (2018)

Alfonso Cuarón's 2018 Academy Award-winning⁵⁹ semi-biographical historical fiction film *Roma* uses documentary modes of presentation to manufacture a sense of

⁵⁹ It won the 2019 Academy Awards for Best Foreign Film, Best Director, and Best Cinematography. Receiving ten total nominations in all, it was also a contender for Best Picture, Best Actress for Yalitza Aparicio (Cleo), Best Supporting Actress for Marina de Tavira (Sofía), Best Original Screenplay, Best Production Design, Best Sound Editing, and Best Sound Mixing.

What's more, *Roma* boast the first-ever nominations for both a Spanish-language film and an indigenous-language film (in the Best Picture category), the first-ever nomination for a film produced by any online streaming service (Netflix), and the first-ever nomination for an indigenous woman.

real-world verisimilitude in order to represent allegorically the socioeconomic and identity struggles of female indigenous migrants in 1970s Mexico City. Although overtly a fictional prestige film with a refined art-house aesthetic meant to appeal to the festival and award circuits, *Roma* also employs many of the conventions of documentary indigeneity discussed in this chapter to cultivate sympathy between the indigenous protagonist, Cleo, and the audience. On the paratextual level, Cuarón and lead actor Yalitza Aparicio gave a series of interviews in which they explained that the film draws inspiration from Cuarón's childhood in Mexico City and his indigenous family nanny, Liberia "Libo" Rodríguez⁶⁰ (Tapley). In terms of construction, the film employs objective framing techniques (long pans, second-person positionality, etc.) that make the audience feel like a fly on the wall in the quotidian lives of the protagonists. Last, the content of the film plays into the expectation that Latin American cinema be political, using affecting storytelling to transmit Cleo's struggles as an allegory for the status of indigenous household laborers in Mexico more generally. In sum, *Roma* challenges the discourse of state mestizaje by using documentary indigeneity to transmit in a retrospective fashion the positive affect Cuarón feels towards his childhood nanny. Allegorically, it is an affectionate recognition of the indigenous women like her who serve as supplementary or surrogate mothers to young, non-indigenous urbanites like himself; a recognition that middle- and upper-class families in Mexico rely upon racialized hierarchies of labor to sustain the status quo.

The film follows Cleo, a Mixtec woman from Oaxaca who works as a nanny in Mexico City's Colonia Roma, which was a middle-class neighborhood in decline at the

⁶⁰ In addition, the epigraph to the film reads: "For Libo."

time (Valasis). Cleo spends her days caring for the children, cleaning the house, picking up their dog Borrás's droppings, and spending her free time in the city with her fellow Mixtec-speaking household nanny Adela. When Cleo becomes pregnant unexpectedly, she fears that her employer and the mother to the children, Sofía, will fire her. This is because Sofía is predisposed to taking out her marital anxieties on her and Adela, concerns proven well founded when her husband, Antonio, abruptly abandons the family over the New Year's holiday on the pretense of conducting research in Quebec. Despite the fraught situation, Sofía supports Cleo, affectionately calling her silly ("mensa") for believing that she would consider firing her for such a thing. The rest of the film sees the women cope with both their individual and mutual predicaments. As Sofía switches careers and learns to take charge of the household in the subplot, Cleo confronts the abandonment of her lover (Fermín), her inability to help her mother in Oaxaca as the government seizes their ancestral family lands (off screen), and ultimately the tragic stillbirth of her baby girl. In the end, Cleo and Sofía work together to form a tenuous family unit, growing closer all the time, but always while leaving many of the social barriers between them intact. That is, Cleo is still Sofía's live-in employee, albeit a deeply loved one, a fact critical to the underlying allegory of the film.

Roma represents the apotheosis (so far) of Cuarón's authorial tendency to sympathize with the struggles of indigenous Mexicans in his films. In order to understand this conceit as a theme throughout his oeuvre, let us turn for a moment to his breakout film *Y tu mamá, también* (2001). This coming-of-age film follows two adolescent boys from Mexico City, Julio and Tenoch, as they go on a road trip across Mexico with an older woman named Luisa. Tenoch is the son of a PRIista (from the long-dominant

Institutional Revolution Party, or PRI) politician. His name derives from the Nahuatl word for the species of cactus (“tenochtli”) featured in the Aztec place-name for Mexico City, Tenochtitlán. The political nature of his name is made explicit when the narrator interrupts him and his friends as they are rolling a joint, explaining, “... nació el año en que su padre entró al servicio público y, contagiado por un nacionalismo inucitado, bautizó ‘Tenoch’ a su primer hijo varón.” As María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo points out, the scene is framed by a hallway in which his family has hung many indigenous artifacts, “underscore[ing] this desired identification with indigenous, subaltern Mexico” (764). Taken together, this audiovisual composition implies that Tenoch’s indigenous name is an ornamental feature of his identity ascribed to him arbitrarily in order to evince the supposed patriotism of his father. As a result, he becomes the site of an ontological tension that exposes state mestizaje as a false appropriation of indigenous iconography by non-indigenous elites in order to pander to the masses⁶¹. The film continues to play with this theme via its omniscient narrator and its visual content, which interstitially interrupts the story to provide context about the wider world as the boys journey clumsily towards maturity. In a particularly jarring moment, the final act sees the trio arrive in Oaxaca. In the establishing shots, we see indigenous women cleaning clothes in the river and their children playing joyfully alongside them as the trio crosses a bridge in the background. At the beach, they meet an angler named Chuy, his wife Mabel, and their children. After spending a lovely day at the beach, the narrator interjects that within a year the

⁶¹ Further, Saldaña-Portillo has argued, “one can read [the] interstitial scenes [of narration] as an irruption of the subaltern onto the scene of masculine nationalism, as an expression of another knowledge of neoliberalism, one existing on the porous borders of the bourgeois elite’s experience of Mexican sovereignty during the era of what I call NAFTA’s ‘fiction of development’” (752).

government will claim the indigenous-held communal lands (or “ejidos”) near the beach to build a hotel, forcing all of the families to move, including Chuy’s. Eventually, he summarizes, they will end up working as hotel laborers and “never fish again.” When read as part of a corpus that also includes *Roma*, we can see that Cuarón’s oeuvre consistently addresses the conflict between the government’s identitary trappings and its actions when it comes to the interests of indigenous Mexican peoples.

Although *Roma* and *Y tu mamá, también* share a central theme in that they both implicitly question national paradigms of Mexican identity, *Roma*, like *Café* and *Nemiliztli*, opts for a more documentary approach because it features a subaltern protagonist rather than a hegemonic one. That is, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter, Cleo is not as accessible to a hegemonic audience as Tenoch because the film codes her as racially and linguistically “Other.” As a result, it must work around this fact to facilitate an affective connection based on sympathy (an objective affective argument) rather than empathy (an intersubjective affective argument). Like the other two texts in this chapter, it operates in the mode of performative documentary, making structural, technical, paratextual, and thematic choices that privilege the dialectical exchange between the audience and the text.

On the paratextual level, *Roma* is similar to *Café* in that its paratext contributed strategically to the prestige and perceived verisimilitude of the film. Regarding the former, it is indispensable to discuss *Roma*’s production and distribution. Although it is standard in that its promotion team vocally touted its success on the festival circuit and participated in a highly successful for-your-consideration campaign throughout the 2019 awards season—as evinced by its many accolades—, it is unique in that it is the first film

produced by an online streaming-service (Netflix) to receive an Oscar nomination. However, in order to qualify for many of the awards programs, Netflix took a gamble and gave it a limited release in theaters, despite the fact that it was available for streaming as of its 21 November 2018 premier. Somewhat impressively, it still grossed an estimated \$3.8-4.4 million at the box office⁶²—or about 25-29% of its \$15 million budget—, despite being available online. The unique circumstances of its production and limited release entered into the popular discourse in late 2018 and early 2019, generating significant buzz for the film that likely contributed to its success and raised the profile of its press junkets. Regarding the perceived verisimilitude of *Roma*, interviews with the cast were instrumental in establishing the credibility of its conceit as a semi-autobiographical historical drama. In interviews, Cuarón made it clear that the film was fiction, but that the screenplay intends to represent the life of the nanny who helped to raise him. However, he has clarified that the film is not a strictly a biopic of himself nor of Libo, but instead a glimpse into the past through the eyes of the present in which he addresses his lingering anxieties about the racial inequalities he observed during that time in his life (Tapley). At the same time, Cuarón agrees that the film conveys an overall positive affect, rightfully coming off as a “love letter” to Libo and her contributions, despite the context of her subordination (Hattenstone). Therefore, the paratext of the film establishes *Roma* as operating in a performative documentary mode that seeks to communicate affectively the tension between the hierarchical, racialized power dynamics in Cuarón’s childhood and

⁶² Netflix closely (and infamously) guards all information regarding its programs: individual revenue, box office revenue (both domestic and international), demographic projection statistics, etc. Therefore, this number is an estimate from Box Office Mojo, a cinema data aggregator.

the innocent, unqualified love a child feels for their caregiver/s. Therefore, as opposed to the mono-indigenous casts of *Café* and *Nemiliztli*, the relationship between hegemonic and subaltern actors is made manifest in *Roma* (as opposed to being a spectral presence), as its thematic explicitly regards the structural and emotional ambivalences of intercultural cohabitation in a family unit.

On the generic level, *Roma* is conventional slow-cinema fare that operates in a performative documentary mode. In terms of the expectations associated with slow Latin American cinema, it participates in the neorealist convention of casting non-professional actors. However, *Roma*'s use of nonprofessional actors is an unusual case insofar that Yalitza Aparicio, though certainly from the predominantly indigenous community of Tlaxiaco de Oaxaca, does not speak the Mixtec language. In fact, Nancy García, the actor who plays Cleo's fellow live-in maid and roommate Adela, helped Aparicio memorize her lines in the Mixtec dialect of Tlaxiaco before filming each scene (Salmerón). These facts underscore the fact that the neorealist tendency in slow cinema to cast nonprofessionals for the sake of authenticity still operates with the hegemonic gaze in mind. Here, the linguistic nuances of the "Other" are virtually imperceptible to most and were therefore not of primary importance to the production team. When asked precisely about the professional-versus-nonprofessional conundrum of casting Cleo, Cuarón stated, "I didn't mind if she was professional or not professional. I just wanted them to look alike and be alike. But there was something studied-jaded, even-about the professional actors I interviewed for Cleo. Yalitza didn't have any of that" (Hattenstone). Based on this statement and the ultimate choice to cast a non-Mixtec-speaking (but still racially indigenous) woman, he prioritized the appearance and the affect as the key factors in

representing the Libo's true essence, rejecting strict adherence neorealist nonprofessional casting, even if his choice was conventional in a more general sense.

In the thematic level, *Roma* plays into the festival and awards-circuit expectation that Latin American prestige cinema will bake political arguments into its narrative via aesthetic choices (see the *Café* section above, Section 4.2). Like *Café* and *Nemiliztli*, *Roma* achieves this by presenting a crisis of the quotidian. Throughout the film, the day-to-day lives of the family unit become more and more unstable, beginning with external crises and then a series of internal ones. Externally, one cannot ignore that the film takes place in late 1970 and early 1971, a period of significant civil unrest in Mexico City during which (primarily) student protestors were engaging in regular demonstrations throughout the city. Due to the high level of tension between government and the protestors—especially after the 1968 Tlatelolco Massacre—political violence became a feature of the city. At the first dinner-table scene in the film, we join the family as they discuss the day's events. The scene begins with Toño, the second-oldest son of the family, recounting in a matter-of-fact way that he saw a young boy throw a water balloon at a police jeep. He tells the family that the jeep then stopped, an officer got out, and then proceeded to shoot the boy in the head, killing him in public in the middle of the day. However, the affect of the room does not change. Cleo briefly murmurs, “Ay, qué horror,” to express the temerity of the situation, but just then Sofía returns from work and the topic changes instantly and the tone remains light. In this way, the narrative presents the Chekov's Gun of quotidian violence while also communicating how the family has internalized civil unrest as an everyday occurrence. This pays off during the climax of the film when Teresa (Sofía's live-in mother), takes Cleo crib shopping. Outside the shop,

gunshots sound, and a man and his wife subsequently enter the shop, trying to escape the violence in the streets. Assailants follow closely behind and eventually murder the man in front of his wife, Cleo, Teresa, and the other customers before fleeing the scene.

However, before leaving, we see that one of the assailants is Fermín, the father of Cleo's baby. The shock causes Cleo's water to break. It takes two hours for Cleo to get to the hospital and be seen, presumably directly contributing to the stillbirth of her daughter. In this way, the external, everyday violence presented at the beginning of the film comes to affect the family directly, with serious, tangible consequences. This is also true of the family itself: they struggle to cope with Antonio's abandonment, often through fits of rage in which they physically or verbally lash out at one another or, in Sofía's case, at Cleo.

On the allegorical level, the stillbirth of Cleo's baby can be read as a physical and philosophical consequence of living with violence and dispossession as a quotidian norm. Aside from the more obvious narrative thread of Fermín's abandonment, the film lends itself to this reading by way of two parallel and interconnected thematic elements: first, by presenting a parallel relationship between family dogs and family staff⁶³ and, second, by making occasional references to the circumstances of Cleo's mother and pueblo back in Oaxaca. Throughout the film, the ethnically indigenous staff of various households

⁶³ In *Roma*, this is certainly as much a loving gesture as much as it is a critique of Mexico's systemic racial hierarchies. While the family loves Cleo and Borrás, these members of the household must remain outside the home proper when not performing their functions for the family: Borrás in the driveway, and Cleo in the apartment behind it. It likens the condition of household staff to dogs in that they are a sub-unit that exists separate and apart from the family, despite giving and receiving much affection. The near-constant ambient barking throughout the film coupled with the practical omnipresence of dogs in the workspaces of indigenous reproductive laborers seems to confirm this suspicion.

occupy the same spaces as the family dogs. In fact, the film begins and ends with Cleo doing chores in and around the driveway, accompanied by the largely neglected family pet, Borrás. In fact, one of the first things we see Cleo do is use a separate bathroom, which is directly in front of the driveway where Borrás does the same. Later, in a mildly off-putting scene, Cleo travels with the family to visit friends of Sofía's over the New Year's holiday. There, she reconnects with Rosa, the head live-in maid for the hacienda. They deliver the children's bags to their sleeping quarters, where there are dozens of taxidermied dog heads hung on the walls: generations of family pets. When Rosa explains that she found them in the bodega of the ranch⁶⁴, she also makes mention of the death of Canela, the dog Cleo is familiar with. She says that, although they say that the dog ate a poisoned rat the previous summer, she believes that the dog was instead a casualty of the ongoing land dispute between Don José, the head-of-household, and the surrounding landholders. Later that night, there is a fire in the woods surrounding the hacienda. However, like Canela, the origin of the destruction is ambiguous; as viewers, we never discover if the families' careless use of fireworks caused the fire, or if it was the result of more nefarious intentions. In this way, the neglect or death of beloved family pets parallels how the political quarrels of the ruling class (Don José, Don Antonio) negatively affect their supportive companions; their paid household staff (on the micro level) or their national cohabitants (on the macro level). Similarly, the fire in the woods represents how the disparate peoples come together to protect one another from a serious threat; when it comes to survival, their class divisions are of little consequence.

⁶⁴ This is the same space the workers' New Year's party takes place in, as well, further confirming the affectionate but race-critical thematic parallel between dogs and lower-class, indigenous workers in the film.

Earlier in the film, Adela informs Cleo that her mother has been dispossessed of their family lands by the local government, demonstrating how acts of political violence—be they literal violence or undue dispossession—have permeated and interrupted Cleo’s life at every level. Taken in concert with the climactic shock she experiences at the department store, she becomes a body in crisis unable to perform reproductive labor for herself or her originary community in Oaxaca (literally, in this case). In this sense, Cleo’s struggle is similar to that of *Café’s* Chayo, who also must confront a similar crisis of reproductive labor, albeit in her own way and in contemporary Puebla. However, although Chayo’s ending is ambiguous, Cleo’s is not. In the third act, she ends up saving the lives of Sofía’s two middle children (Paco and Sofi) when a strong ocean current nearly drowns them. Despite receiving love and support from the family, and nearly giving her life for them, she ends where she began: in the driveway, doing chores to support them. In the end, her circumstances remain relatively unchanged and her future is, like Chayo’s, left ambiguous insofar that we can only infer that she continues working for the family, a cog in the hegemonic machinations of a racialized systemic socioeconomic power.

Cuarón’s film is a retrospective piece meant to pay homage to the physical and existential sacrifices made by his childhood live-in maid that he, as an adult, is now fully capable of recognizing. Specifically, it is an homage to how his own nanny prioritized his family’s wellbeing over her own. In the film, this hierarchical order-of-concerns manifests itself as Cleo losing her own baby and then proceeding to risk her life for those of her employer. At the same time, the film is an allegory for the racialized socioeconomic hierarchies of power that permeate the nation both in urban and rural

contexts, a truth Cuarón was not fully conscious of until coming-of-age. It demonstrates how the political concerns of the upper- and middle-classes in Mexico problematize the quotidian lived practice of their subordinates, therefore replacing their quotidian with violence, dispossession, or the threat thereof. Ultimately, *Roma* presents Cleo's story as a performative allegory that synecdochically argues that the reproductive labor on which upper- and middle-class Mexicans predicate their success is the result of indigenous erasure and dispossession. In addition, I would argue, it reads as both a critique of these systemic abuses as well as a whole-hearted "thank you" to reproductive laborers like Cleo/Libo.

4.5 Conclusion: On Authorship and Framing

Two salient thematic threads come to the fore when we read *Café*, *Nemiliztli*, and *Roma* in concert as pieces on the documentary end of the spectrum of 21st century indigenous representation. First is the observation that authorial identity—be it indigenous or non-indigenous—seems to be a relatively minor concern in the construction of these texts. That is, all three of the texts derive their legitimacy and claims to verisimilitude based on their participation in, and adherence to, hegemonic modes of representation. Paratextually, they all rely upon the context of their presentation to afford them legitimacy as documentary representations of real-world crises (albeit allegorically). Generically, they adhere to, or are in conversation with, the conventions of narrative film and theater, employing many of the same technical maneuvers to appear objective in their portrayals. Finally, they are thematically in-sync, presenting the growing pains of indigenous communities as a crisis of reproductive labor and, therefore, an interruption of the local socioeconomic status quo and its potential continuity going forward. Therefore,

they work to challenge the discourses that code these peoples as “subaltern” and allow them to enter the popular discourse and thereby promote possible material change via coalitional solidarity within hegemonic networks of representation. Although *Nemiliztli* undoubtedly derives some of its legitimacy from its authorship, this is only one of several factors that work in concert in to produce this effect. Otherwise, all three texts remain consistent in the way they structure their representations of indigeneity.

The observation that authorial identity is a poor methodological approach to the analysis of these texts is key because it reveals that these texts do not represent a subaltern discourse emergent from, or indicative of, alternative epistemologies. Rather, they represent a direct challenge to Mexican State discourses of indigeneity on the international stage that transcends identity barriers. That is, all three pieces work *within* hegemonic modes of representation to cultivate affect between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in order to cultivate coalitional solidarity. Therefore, they are aspirational in nature, seeking to use the very modes of hegemonic legitimation that precipitated their socioeconomic crises over the course of the 21st century as tools to “call the question” of State indigeneity in popular discourse. That is, they play the “indigenous/race card” to strategically posit, “If our cultures are a source of nationalistic pride, why not accept us as symbols of Mexican success?”

In 2018, this representational crisis manifested itself around the star of *Roma* herself, Yalitza Aparicio. Although Aparicio herself seems content not to be the “face of Mexico,” her role and Awards-circuit success burst into the national spotlight, and certainly provoked a national debate about indigenous people’s place in the nation (Sharf). In one particularly egregious case, Mexican actor Sergio Goyri even said it was a

shame that a, “fucking Indian,” was nominated for an Oscar. Due to an extensive and powerful public backlash, Goyri relented, stating that it is an honor that any Mexican receive such a prestigious international nomination (Love and Angulo). Therefore, I would argue that these texts most certainly are having the desired, aspirational effect of explicitly challenging *indigeneity que mexicanidad* in 21st century discourse, which will in turn—hopefully—lead to better representation in public discourses and political decision-making processes in the long-term.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Palatable Resistance: The Inverse Relationship between Indigenous Coding and Active Resistance to Neocolonialist Infrastructure

By this point, I hope to have made clear that indigenous Mexican representations in the 21st century weave together three distinct but interrelated tendencies: (a) they address the pitfalls of state mestizaje in Mexico, (b) they organize their narratives around the protagonist's level of perceived indigeneity, and (c) they use transnational networks of legitimation to promote affective solidarity. In doing so, they aspire to build a popular inter-ethnic political coalition against state mestizaje that could affect policy and improve the lives of ethnically indigenous peoples. What's more, this seems to occur across the spectrum of authorship, including indigenous and non-indigenous authors alike. This confirms that the trend reflects a larger shift in popular discourse in which the same transnational networks that the state used to legitimize itself on the international scene throughout the 20th century are now actively undermining and destabilizing its longstanding national discourse of mestizaje. However, despite the progress such a shift implies, considering the six texts analyzed in Chapters 3 and 4 as a group reveals that the spectrum of indigenous representation in popular sector is still bound by at least one epistemic carry-over from the Indigenista period: the idea of the passive Indio (Taylor 2–3). That is, there is an inverse relationship between the aggression of an indigenous protagonist and their respective racial coding in their text: the more aggressive the character, the less obviously indigenous they appear. In order to understand the inverse relationship between indigenous racial coding and resistance, let us compare *Sleep Dealer's* Memo and *Roma's* Cleo. These texts represent the two most extreme examples

(of the text analyzed) of Incidental and Documentary Indigeneity, two phenomena that are ultimately best understood as *poles on a spectrum* of indigenous representation.

In *Sleep Dealer*, only paratextual and visual information inform the viewer that Memo is indigenous. As highlighted in that section (3.2), the film recognizes that the hegemonic audience will apprehend Memo as terroristic if he is portrayed as being too similar to the fictional, EZLN-analogue Mayan Army for Water Liberation (MAWL). This is because that organization, devoid of context, codes visually as terroristic (because of their ski masks and automatic weapons). So, the piece structurally de-emphasizes the superficial similarities between the MAWL and Memo, instead focusing on Memo's personal journey to a momentary, justified, and passive moment of resistance wherein he assists Rudy (the Mexican-American soldier-for-hire) to destroy the dam in Santa Ana del Río. Because the objective of the film is to build real-world political solidarity along empathetic lines by encouraging us to identify with Memo's economic struggles, any violence enacted must be hesitant, justified, isolated, and passive, or else run the risk of alienating the audience by virtue of wading into bloodier political waters. Therefore, Memo's resistance is a momentary rupture that can only occur in the context of, and interest of, helping his family survive. Despite being the most aggressively anti-hegemonic protagonist analyzed here, he is a quiet, put-upon character throughout the film who only acts out defensively. In sum, the film keeps the content of Memo's grievances limited to his personal sphere so that he is not perceived as a radical and in so doing makes a sub-textual argument in support of the MAWL's/EZLN's objective of reducing state neocolonialist intrusions in indigenous and non-indigenous peasant communities because they problematize the quotidian survival of non-violent, non-radical

individuals. However, it can *only* do this sub-textually and within the confines of hegemonic modes of power. As mentioned in the introduction, the Zapatistas themselves have noticed that armed resistance hurts their public image (and thus hurts their cause) at this point in the 21st century.

By comparison, *Roma's* Cleo is so explicitly indigenous that she is functionally incapable –narratively speaking, of course– of resisting the racialized, socioeconomic hierarchies that negatively affect her life. Like Memo, she is put-upon throughout the film, suffering Sofía's intermittent abuses, Fermín's abandonment, the dispossession of her family's lands (off-screen), and a near-death experience that leads to the stillbirth of her daughter. In every case, Cleo does not mount active resistance to the injustices that follow her wherever she goes. Instead, she is portrayed as noble for gracefully putting up with the struggles in her life. She is a paragon of patience, love, balance, and tenacity. We can observe this in the scene where she goes to the outskirts of the city to find Fermín at this martial arts training camp. There, guest-instructor Professor Zovek (who was a real-life Luchador) invites the trainees and onlookers to close their eyes and then attempt to stand on one leg with their hands over their head. Since all of the subjects on screen have their eyes closed, the audience is the only witness to the fact that the *very pregnant* Cleo is the only person on screen capable of performing the difficult feat. At no point does she resist or rebel, and this presents as simultaneously admirable and tragic. Cleo becomes both sympathetic character and a role model for endurance and perseverance in the face of injustice.

In both *Sleep Dealer* and *Roma* (as well as the other texts) political solidarity with indigenous Mexican peoples is promoted via a protagonist whose actions are well

contextualized and whose motives are relatively unassailable. Still, the more a character violently resists the negative impacts of neocolonial hegemony in their quotidian lives, the less indigenous the text codes them on a sliding scale that ranges from Incidental to Documentary Indigeneity. Provisionally speaking, it seems that this is to minimize the negative associations with indigenous peoples in the wider conversation regarding their place in the nation. This allows the reader/viewer to alternatively empathize or sympathize with their struggles as much as is epistemically possible and politically feasible and palatable. In the end, the message this seems to send is that indigenous Mexicans do not seek to problematize or destabilize the lives of other Mexicans, but rather advocate for a more complete and representative incorporation into the hegemonic structures that exist via the dissolution of the old, Indigensita structures that ravaged their cultural and linguistic diversity throughout the 20th century. They seem to be asking the question, “Are we/they not Mexicans, too?,” challenging the state discourse of mestizaje by making us *feel* the negative effects of de-Indianization and the impacts of the racialized, socioeconomic hierarchies it obfuscates.

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Instituto de Docencia e Investigación Etnográfica de Zacatecas (IDIEZ) Intensive Winter Course in Nahuatl, Intermediate level.	Jan. 2017
IDIEZ Intensive Summer Nahuatl Program, Beginner level. Yale University	Sum. 2016
M.A. in Foreign Languages and Literature, U of Nevada, Reno	May 2014
Graduate Certificate in Gender, Race, and Identity Studies	
B.A. in Political Science and Spanish, University of Nevada, Reno	May 2012
Study Abroad in Puntarenas, Costa Rica	Fall 2011
Study Abroad in San Sebastián, Spain	Sum. 2011

Awards and Honors

Dept. of Hispanic Studies Summer Stipend Award, U of Kentucky	May 2018
Service Award to the Dept. of Hispanic Studies, U of Kentucky	May 2017
Hispanic Studies Community Service Award, U of Kentucky	May 2017
Daniel R. Reedy Quality Achievement Fellowship, U of Kentucky	Mar. 2014
The Kentucky Opportunity Fellowship	Apr. 2014
Outstanding Graduate Student 2013-2014, U of Nevada, Reno	May 2014

Peer-Reviewed Articles

“*Paisana de los metales: Abstract Indigeneity in Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz’s ‘Romance 37’*” (Forthcoming in the autumn 2019 *Hispanic Review*)

Scholarly Professionalization

Curated Exhibition

“Los Códices: An Exhibit of Illustrated Books from Indigenous Mesoamerica.” Sep. 2018-Present. University of Kentucky Margaret I. King Special Collections, Lexington KY.
https://uknowledge.uky.edu/los_codices

Published Interview

Christen, Kimberly and Jacob Neely, et al. “Traditional Knowledge and Digital Archives: An Interview with Kim Christen.” *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 27, no. 5, pp. 8-14.
<https://uknowledge.uky.edu/disclosure/vol27/iss1/5/>

Conference Direction

Founder and Director of the Indigenous Studies Track, Kentucky Foreign Language Conference	2017-present
https://kflc.as.uky.edu/Executive-Committee	
Assistant Director of Logistics and Operations, KFLC.	2015-17

Archival Research

Transcription of 16th and 17th century documents from the Colegio San Gregorio in Mexico City; archival work for Dr. Mónica Díaz 2018-present

Teaching Experience in English

University of Nevada, Reno

Core Humanities (CH) 203: "The American Experience."

Survey course on the history, politics, and art of the United States, 1850-Present

Teaching Experience in Spanish

Universities of Nevada, Reno, and Kentucky

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