Identifying a Traditionalism of the Past: Settler Colonialism and the Rhetoric of Mexicanness

By

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Abstract

This dissertation arose from discussions around privilege and the settler-slave-exogenous triad popularized in settler colonial studies, specifically regarding this project's object of study: Mexicanness or Mexican cultural identity. The triad maps out uneven relationships created through the structure of settler colonialism but can unproductively flatten political dynamics of communities and their relationships to settler states. To pivot from discussions of privilege, this project instead considers complicity with the settler colonial states by examining how practices of identification with or of Mexicanness are informed by their (settler) colonial contexts. Chapter 1 surveys ways in which settler states have structured ways of identifying Mexicanness from the inception of New Spain, the rise of Mexico as a settler state, and the effects of incorporating Mexican citizens into the U.S. after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. This pan-historiography provides a "palimpsest" of history that serves as a reference for the second and third chapters of this project. Chapter 2 examines over 50 genetic ancestry videos and their comments published on YouTube from 2014 to 2023 by self-described "Mexicans.". Chapter 3 examines practices of identification in promotional material surrounding Mexico's recently operational railway development project, Tren Maya, from its announcement in 2018 to its operation in 2023. While the latter two chapters differ in the structural view they provide on practices of identification, the first through the affective reactions from communities themselves and the second through the contextualized actions of the Mexican settler state, the case studies trace when the histories of the settler states are not confronted or averted. In sum, this project aims to highlight the importance of considering historical and transnational structures with practices of identification and Mexicanness, especially in response to colonial experiences.

Introduction: Rhetorically Grappling with Mexican Identification

In 2019 creator @hadasaaa_, a blonde, green-eyed, markedly pale woman, published a TikTok in which she dances to a song in Spanish, “Siempre Es la Misma Situación” by Barrabox, translating to “It’s Always the Same Situation.” The video is edited to flash text on-screen what the creator says are “things i hear bc i'm mexican.” In short, the video showcases the reactions of others to her identifying as “Mexican.” The song’s genre is Banda music, which is a regional type of Mexican music with brass and percussion instruments, to which she shuffles and box-steps while gesturing to the following: “Why arent [sic] you brown tho?”; “Did your parents adopt you?”; “But like, can u speak spanish [sic]?”; “Youre [sic] mixed with white, right?” The end of the video cuts to her lip-syncing the beginning of the song: “Siempre es la misma situacion cuando paso por mi chava para salir a pasear,” while rolling her eyes. The caption of the TikTok is “mi vida jajajaja don’t let this flop [Mexican flag emoji] #fyp #foryou #mexican,” translating to “my life hahaha”(hadasaaa).

Assumptions regarding race, the body, and ethnicity are embedded within these reactions to the creator’s representation of who a “Mexican” identifiably is. These assumptions have specific histories that are also specific to places, such as the U.S. or Mexico, and they accumulate across time—from the violent establishment of New Spain onward. The commenters’ disbelief of “Mexican” manifesting as phenotypically White speaks volumes regarding the racial contestation within the Latinx community. Importantly, the problematic of racialized identification also connects to structural issues and power dynamics that affect the way we build intra-ethnic coalitions, but also the way we come to understand our practices of identification. Therefore, this rhetorical project studies the way settler colonial structures historically surface in practices of identification with and of Mexicanness.

Rhetoric as a field has heard calls from rhetoricians, such as Lisa Flores, Karrieann Soto Vega, and Karma R. Chávez, to provide sustained attention to race, a call to which this project responds by offering historical contextualization. In "Rhetoric's rac(e/ist) problems," Lisa Flores calls for examining the field's biases and lack of investigation of race. Soto Vega and Chávez, in nodding to Flores's 2016 "imperative of racial rhetorical criticism," also call to consider the intersectionality of Latinx rhetoric (Flores, "Between Abundance and Marginalization"). Explicitly, these scholars encourage rhetors to reflect on "their discussion of racial positions, given the potential simultaneity of privilege and oppression, and the heterosexist colonial histories from within which racial/ethnic positionalities arise." In other words, just because an investigation of Latinx rhetoric may come out of the same imperative for generalized racial rhetorical criticism— "a perceived lack of rhetorical criticism that attends to race, and the deficiencies such a lack creates for our understanding of rhetorical contexts and practices"—one cannot just add Latindad as a consideration (Soto Vega and Chávez 324).

Racial rhetorical criticism requires nuance, Soto Vega and Chávez stress, to highlight "the complexity of interlocking systems of oppression and privilege," which my project aims to do with Mexicanness or Mexican cultural identity as its object of study (Soto Vega and Chávez 320). As such, this project does not "add" the consideration of "Mexican" to rhetorical studies but seeks to extrapolate what "Mexicaness" rhetorically signifies in the context of settler colonialism, working against the racialized assumptions that keep the settler colonial state both obscured and thriving.

Rhetorical studies is primed to examine settler colonial tensions through contextualizing language, action, and bodies across time. But identifying what "Mexicanness" is, even in a nationalistic sense, is sticky, to say the least. To ground the trickiness of approaching practices of

identification with Mexican cultural identity, let us return to the opening TikTok, “things i hear bc i'm mexican,” which conflates race and ethnicity. As Soto Vega and Chávez have made clear, this conflation, “a common consequence of racialization processes,” means that “any ethnicity that is not Anglo-Saxon is racialized as nonwhite” (Soto Vega and Chávez 322). Yet if one takes a step back from what is being pointed out by others in the captions (e.g., her phenotypical whiteness is linked to material privileges and experiences), the title of the video could have also been “Things I Hear Because I am White.”

Yet, through the rhetorical decision to not title the video “Things I Hear Because I am White,” various implicit arguments surface. First, not titling the video to directly confront Whiteness suggests that phenotypically white people must prove themselves to be “Mexican.” In other words, phenotypically White people must justify themselves if they are to be a part of a Mexican community. In bolding the frustration this creator experiences when identifying as “Mexican,” she is also speaking to dominant logics that Latinxs are generalized brown people, which necessarily excludes phenotypically white(-passing) peoples. This simultaneously supports the idea that White people cannot identify with “Mexicanness” and that people who are Latinx fit into a phenotypical box. This box contains people who are brown, not people along a phenotypical spectrum, which also includes Black people. There is much happening rhetorically within the “common sense” underneath these arguments, and to make these assumptions productive we might turn to history, which provides them with context. For instance, the exclusion of Whiteness and Blackness from the phenotypical Latinx “box” has a long colonial history from New Spain onward.

There is also a political valence to not confronting the histories inherent in rhetorics of identification, specifically for Mexicanness. For instance, in not confronting Whiteness in the

titling of the video, the creator situates Whiteness as exceptional to general discussion and investigations of what is identifiably Mexican. The logic is as follows: there are Anglo-Saxon White people, whose Whiteness is invisible, and there are ethnic Whites whose "flexible ethnicity" can racially code them as exceptional to discussions of whiteness (Vasquez). Again, the conflation of race and ethnicity, in this case nonwhiteness and non-Anglo-Saxonness, is crucial in this argument. True, this is not a startling element of the argument, but it has direct implications for the Latinx community. In using "Mexican" as a placeholder for "White," she is attempting to signal that her Whiteness is conditional on someone not understanding what her "Mexicanness" means. "things i hear bc i'm mexican" means "Things I hear because I am a white Mexican—" just as another video could have been titled "Things I hear because I am a Black Mexican." The least likely video that would appear in this rendition would be "Things I hear because I am a brown Mexican," which, again, concerns the default body that haunts Mexican cultural identification. By not foregrounding Whiteness, not only is an opportunity missed to discuss representation and inclusion but the creator misses an opportunity to discuss privilege or structural experiences and how Whiteness influences both structural and interpersonal/kinship futures.

For instance, it is not uncommon for Latinx to be encouraged to marry as light as possible to ensure lighter and lighter generations so that they might ascend as close as they can to Whiteness. Therefore, while interpersonal rhetorical dynamics are at play within this TikTok, fully understanding them requires understanding the role of structural powers at play across history, and specifically, the history of settler colonialism across the U.S. and Mexico.

Using an approach with a close attention to history, this project contributes to rhetorical studies an examination of how identification with or of Mexicanness is informed by its (settler)

colonial contexts. In naming Mexicanness or Mexican cultural identity as an object of study tied unequivocally to a settler nation-state, I complicate discussions around privilege and the settler-slave-exogenous triad popularized in settler colonial studies to discuss complicity with the state that moves communities away from decolonial aims. To study such moves, this dissertation employs a Burkean sense of identification to study Mexicanness within different contexts and their connection to settler colonialism as a structure. I identify these structures of coloniality concerning identification with and of my object of study to trace moments when the relevant histories of the settler state are not confronted or averted.

While I am studying identification as a process specifically popularized by Burke, discussions of 'identity' are also relevant to this dissertation as my object of study concerns Mexican cultural identity. Therefore, the other theorist informing how this project views the process of identification is Stuart Hall. According to Hall, identities are "subjectivities," "points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us" (Hall, "Who Needs 'Identity'?" 5–6). Yet distinct from Burke's formulation of identification, Hall outlines two conceptions of "cultural identities" created through the discursive process.

Hall's perspective is necessitated for this project's study of this discursive process because both types of cultural identity are judged against whether they confront the colonial experience for a diasporic subject. For the first cultural identity, according to Hall, "position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common" (Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 226). Within this dissertation, this first creation of cultural identity can be seen in Mexicanness recapitulating what Frantz Fanon terms a "traditionalism of the past," creating "'individuals

without an anchor, without horizon, colourless, stateless, rootless - a race of angels'" (Fanon qtd. in Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 226). Hall frames the second formulation of cultural identity as an ongoing process. Burke's formulation of identification, which "aims toward an end point, a state of connection…that remains relatively permanent once established, barring violent disavowals," resonates with Hall's first formulation of cultural identity in that it is less open to change, which might be different, per Hall, through the confrontation of the colonial experience (Ashby 101).

In this project, I approach the colonial experience of which Hall speaks as synonymous with the division inherent in both scholarship by Burke and Hall. Both acknowledge identification simultaneously begets division As Jenell Johnson writes: "Burke's theory of identification is only possible, in other words, and only necessary when one understands the original human condition to be separation, division, and individuation, or what Amaya Querejazu describes as the 'modern Western myth' of the universe"(Johnson 29). While both theorists point to division involved in identification, their posture toward division is my focus.

I view Burke's theorization of identification as resonant with Hall's first formulation because the division in this case is a "commonality" that will not wrestle with the division that necessitated it—for this project, that is settler colonialism. While Burke, writing in the aftermath of atomic bomb deployment, does acknowledge the power inherent in rhetoric, Hall's second theorization centers on an ongoing confrontation of the colonial experience for diasporic populations—specifically Hall meditated on the tensions inherent in his own experience as a Caribbean immigrant to Britain and for his wider community. Yet because this project centered on studying Mexicannness within settler colonial contexts, I utilize Burke because he was not necessarily thinking of political contingencies from something like Hall's perspective, which

begets a "becoming" informed by one's political positioning. This is why I primarily draw from Burke's theory of identification while also utilizing Hall's insight to draw attention to moments when the colonial experience, along with the structures that inform it, are averted in practices of identification with and of Mexicanness.

This attention to history and utilization of identification allows the nuances of context to surface so I can attend to the main research questions of this dissertation, such as: How do practices of Mexican cultural identification illustrate complicity with settler colonialism? What does the contemporary Mexican settler state argue to move a people to identify as Mexican? How do practices of Mexican cultural identification for those not explicitly within Mexico show complicity with settler colonialism? How do these practices of identification with or of Mexicanness relate to a deeper discussion about colonial history?

With my focus on Mexicanness, or Mexican cultural identity—which, for this dissertation, is explicitly an identification with a settler colonial state—attention to context and its contingencies is crucial. Throughout the project, case studies on practices of identification will illustrate that settler states benefit from a lack of historical engagement. While contingencies of context are illustrated across this dissertation, identification's flexibility can be seen working across national contexts through how it sets up settler affiliation or racialized hybridity to become beneficial for capitalist ends. While identification with a colonial state, be it New Spain or the U.S., is easily rooted within place, the settler state benefits from the neutral mutability that makes identification a marvel of rhetoric and community politics. Therefore, this project foregrounds decolonial goals by engaging "an interlocking or intersecting analysis of oppression" that the "privilege model" does not confront (Jafri).

Interdisciplinary Guidance from Rhetorical Studies, Settler Colonial Studies, and Chicanx Studies

This rhetorical project on identification is indebted to literature from Chicanx Studies, Rhetorical Studies, and Settler Colonial Studies. Rhetorical studies has crafted a range of work reflecting on Latinx identity, with which I see my project conversing. For example, several rhetorical scholars in vernacular rhetoric acknowledge that the Latinx body is a site of "resistance and revision," one that, considering mestizaje, "becomes a contested site where colonial ideologies and ensuing racisms continue to reverberate" (Holling and Calafell 23). Mestizaje is "a term that may concurrently signify both biological and cultural mixture," born from "genetic and cultural admixture produced by the encounters or 'dis-encounters' (*desencuentros*) between Europeans, the Africans who accompanied them to and in the New World, indigenous groups, and various others who arrived in the Americas from regions such as Asia" (Miller ix, 1). As a concept, mestizaje points to special considerations for the study of identification with or of Mexicanness as it signals a variable racial hierarchy from that of the United States but essentially "fossilizes" Indigenous peoples as outside of the present and body politic (Alberto, "Nations, Nationalisms, and Indígenas").

The subfield of visual rhetoric has investigated the variance of cultural and racial identifiers in this literature on Latinx rhetorics (Calafell and Delgado). Discussions raised the theme of Chicano nationalism (K. Jensen; Jensen, Richard J. and Hammerback), in-group contestation (Delgado "When the silenced speak"), and the polysemy rooted in Chicanx rhetoric (to only name a few: (Flores and Hasian Jr.; Wanzer-Serrano). Yet, while there is a small amount of literature considering settler colonialism, I found even fewer pieces of literature considering the relationship between Mexicanness and settler colonialism. Aimee Carrillo Rowe, in "Settler

Xicana," is one exception. Her probing has considered shared struggles between Indigenous peoples and Chicanxs, and theorizes "the relationships among Chicana identity, indigeneity, and land [are] incommensurate" (Rowe 525). The piece opens a reflective place from which to delve further into analyzing Mexicanness within settler contexts.

While the scope of this literature is rich and wide-ranging, to grapple with the identification of Mexicanness I turn to a piece of scholarship that also motivates my historical and structural approach: "Latinx rhetoric and intersectionality in racial rhetorical criticism" by Soto Vega and Chávez. The authors argue for an intersectional Latinx racial rhetorical criticism as coalitional. Importantly for my project, they also underline specific considerations for analysis of power, suggesting that such rhetorical criticism "should account for race, racialization processes, and the rhetoricity of racialized bodies (*both imposed and performed*) (Soto Vega and Chávez 319, emphasis mine). While it would be far too simple to explain that "Mexicanness" is an identification not only concerning "race" (as understood within a U.S.ian context), such rhetorical criticism in this context demands understanding the multiple levels of rhetoricity, whether it be performed online between "Mexicans" who are not state actors, as I examine in my second chapter, or explicitly imposed by nation-state Mexican actors such as through the 65th and current president of Mexico President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, as I examine in my third. As I argued earlier, these practices of identification—from the everyday to the institutional—have histories, which my first chapter seeks to trace.

In what follows, I narrow my investigation to the role of the settler and settler-ness more widely in this history. What can be seen from calls to better the discipline is that rhetoric should be aware of othered voices (Shome "Postcolonial Interventions; Baugh-Harris and Wanzer-Serrano "Against Canon;" Flores "Towards"). However, because rhetoric lacks consistent

attention to this settler problematic, and because other fields do have pertinent perspectives on my research problem, I have turned to Chicanx Studies and settler colonialism studies to fill this gap.

Chicanx studies, another field fueling the insight of this project, has also not consistently elaborated on settler colonialism's import to Mexican cultural identity. Pieces of Chicanx studies literature that have focused on the question have been María Eugenia Cotera's and María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo's "Indigenous but Not Indian? Chicana/os and the Politics of Indigeneity" and Laura Pulido's "Geographies of Race and Ethnicity III: Settler Colonialism and Nonnative People of Color." In "Indigenous" Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo theorize that because Mexicans were made to disavow Indigenous heritage to have a chance at being considered citizens within the U.S., they are in a type of "mourning" over this loss. This loss is tied to the historical displacement of Chicanx and Indigenous people, which is a geographical issue of violence in the Americas. Racial ideologies that exacerbated violent displacement were also geographically informed. For instance, in

> state and federal legislatures, and before the Courts, Mexicans could not be Indians and Indians could not be Mexicans [in the U.S.]. This rupture of the previously intimately connected categories of mestizo and indigenous identity produced a condition that we are here calling mestizo mourning, mourning for the loss of a historically filial relationship with indigenous peoples forged over centuries of interaction, intermarriage, collaboration, and alliance.(Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo) [x]

While this historical tie should not be easily dismissed, it should be troubled.

As I pointed out earlier, appropriation of Indigeneity, such as through ideologies like mestizaje, recommits colonial harm. In the context of identification with Mexicanness, this harm surfaces through the reference to Indigenous ancestry without acknowledgment of contemporary communal connection, acknowledgment of, or action with contemporary Indigenous peoples. This mourning will be taken up within the second chapter of this project, an analysis of YouTube

videos publicizing genetic ancestry results on behalf of some identifying as Mexican. Again, while colonial trauma is not to be made light of, identificatory practices have room for complication in light of the influence of settler colonial structure.

Pulido, as a geography scholar focused on ethnicity, race, and environmentalism, turns her attention toward Chicanx studies' purposeful gaps in studying settler identification. Her stance, slightly more critical of the objective of "mestizo mourning," observes that,

> Chicana/o studies' ambivalence [in addressing the Chicanx location in settler colonialism], is due to settler colonialism's potential to disrupt core elements of Chicana/o political subjectivity. … it unsettles Chicanas/os' conception of themselves as colonized people by highlighting their role as colonizers. Acknowledging such a role is difficult not only because it challenges key dimensions of Chicana/o identity, as seen in Aztlán, Chicanas/os' mythical homeland, but also because of the precarious nature of Chicana/o indigeneity. (Pulido 310)

There have been overt and muted violences that Mexico and those affiliated with the state have committed against Indigenous peoples, such as enslaving Indigenous peoples through the mission system, yet they often are glossed over for the reasons Pulido outlines. Consequently, we must take seriously practices of identification with Mexicanness, especially when they instrumentalize indigeneity as a specter to distract from that complicity with the state or—in doing so—make the Indigenous figure a person of the (genetic or national) past, not a part of the currently settler colonized world.

How settler colonial studies has theoretically and practically influenced me in imagining this project is priceless—yet, it too leaves a gap when it comes to my object of study: Mexicanness. For instance, in their now-foundational essay "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," Tuck and Yang stipulate "moves to settler innocence" that postpone accountability and decolonization for White people and "Black and brown people," but never people referencing Indigenous ancestry and who are contemporarily (often) considered people of color. They instead

explain rules of racialization that illustrate how "white people can stay white, yet claim descendance from an Indian grandmother" (Tuck and Yang 13). While this can apply to the problematic of this dissertation, identification with Mexicanness and its specific settler colonial influences deserve more expansion. While this field has attended to race, Indigeneity, and decolonization, there is a paltry amount of work that illuminates how practices of identifying Mexicanness are informed by their past and present settler colonial landscape. Therefore, while providing me with insights from Indigenous peoples and settlers alike, settler colonial studies invigorates this project with its absences as well.

Method: Rhetorical Historiography as Analytical Approach to Mexican Identification

This project originally sprang from my engagement with literature on the positionality of people of color within settler contexts, such as a 2011 book chapter by Malissa Phung, "Are People of Colour Settlers Too?" (Phung). Scholars of settler colonial studies at times reference what is known as the settler-native-slave triad in these discussions. Wayne Yang, writing under the self-described avatar "la paperson," describes the importance of this triad in *A Third University Is Possible*: "For grasping the twisted plotlines written by colonialism, the settler–native–slave triad is one of the most useful and most problematic heuristics in settler colonial studies" (paperson). Ultimately paperson bolds that "The triad is a structure of settler colonialism… It describes what power wants, not who you are" (paperson). In other words, one's place in the triad is a convenient place for the settler state so that such structurally ascribed power relations may continue. As a rhetorical scholar invested in decoloniality, in moving away from settler colonial structures in thought and along the most concrete ways and toward collective liberation, my project centers on Mexicanness by rhetorically explicating "what power wants" in the making of this cultural identity, one which is tied to multiple colonial states. The

case studies of this project highlight the intertwined symbolic and systemic actions that crafted what Mexicanness is and what is now done in the name of Mexican cultural identity across time through the practices of identification.

Studying identification within settler colonial Latinx contexts through the method of rhetorical historiography has been modeled expertly by rhetoricians such as Christa Olson. Olson has specifically highlighted how identification can provide specific insight into Latinx contexts where the Indigenous other is elevated to a figure of the past and on which the nation-state builds a lineage, sponsoring a superficial political inclusion:

> Being of one substance with indigeneity reimagined it in service of the national self. Such performances of an indigenous self take the actualizing force of topoi to another level, incarnating it. They also point simultaneously toward the strength and the porousness of national identification. As the discourse of carnal mestizaje makes particularly clear, identifications bleed and breathe. They are lived yet partial. (Olson, *Constitutive Visions* 184)

This project understands the way identification can be instrumentalized by the state in the name of inclusion but also the element of division that is inherent in the rhetorical process of identification. If the process of identification involves the process of division, of setting apart discursively, what marks a Mexican cultural identity as complicit with settler colonial structures?

Per Burke, the process of "'identification'… confront[s] the implications of division," which this project considers part of the colonial experience that diasporic peoples confront through identification (Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* 22). Burke's perspective guides this project's analysis because he holds that identification "affirm[s] with earnest…precisely because there is division." Stuart Hall resonates with scholarship such as that seen by Navarro in *Settler-Colonialism in Mexico: Mestizaje as a Project of Elimination*, who writes: "The Mexican state created a 'cultural process' of 'legitimizing' their power to create a homogeneous and 'unifying effect' on the population (Navarro 47–48). Burke also acknowledges the manipulative power that can be harnessed through division, noting that "division may be idealistically buried beneath a

terminology of love, or ironically revealed in combination with varying grades of compensatory deference or where the continuity is snapped, and there is war, hate, conspiracy, with a new terminology of 'love' to mask the divisions among the conspirators" (Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* 139–40). Yet, to consider the colonial experience through identificatory practices would, I argue through the dissertation's case studies, provide the potential for change through confrontation of history.

For those in the diasporic Black community of whom Hall writes in mind, the trauma of the colonial experience meant both understanding and seeing oneself as "othered" and marginalized. Much like the subjective process of DuBois's double-consciousness or Paterson's social death, the systemic logics manifest in "subjective" knowledge extend to communal negotiations such as rhetorics of identification. Of understanding "the traumatic character of 'the colonial experience'" Hall clarifies that it outlines how "we constructed as different and other within the categories of knowledge of the West by those regimes. They had the power to make us see and experience ourselves as 'Other" (Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 226). Because Burke's theory of identification names power but does not illuminate the negotiation of a colonized subject, a pitfall of settler identificatory practice, I instrumentalize it to highlight when systemic histories and political positionings that benefit the settler state are at work.

In this project, my approach necessitates a close eye to history, and in particular the way that history unfolds across time and surfaces at particular moments. Rhetorical scholars informing my approach have taken into account long stretches of history and globalized currents of communication and policy, such as Rebecca Dingo, Sara McKinnon, and Matthew Houdek. My method is informed by what Houdek offers in his circulation study on "racial sedimentation," which "is a rhetorical process that is activated by public racial crises to

materialize a set of discourses that normalize[s glazing over structural violence]" (Houdek 280). What is key here is that I can, like Houdek, trace arguments that ultimately have structural repercussions. I believe this makes the method of tracing circulating rhetorics around these arguments even more relevant because the violence that is ignored is settler colonial violence. This method allows me to connect practices of identification to their conditions of historical emergence while not ignoring the structural violence they help to create in the present. Using methods deployed by Houdek and Dingo, I will be able to trace the connections between ideologies and language "that simultaneously gives [ideologies] form and conceals [them]," and which also gives ideologies the rhetorical weight of "common sense" (Houdek 280). While Houdek was studying the commonsense logics bolstering white supremacy and the rhetorics that obfuscate it, I am studying the circulation of mestizaje and Mexican nationalism, for instance, and the logics that propagate and recirculate settler colonial harms within community rhetorics. These rhetorical patterns have sedimented in salient ways, such as the practice of allowing documented "lineage" in New Spain documentation to be altered in consideration of the favorability of a father's social position, which will be covered within this dissertation's first chapter.

My decision to focus on context is a priority modeled by Dingo. While not focused on vernacular rhetorics specifically, more so the circulation of rhetorics across institutions, Dingo's *Networking Arguments* elucidates a method focused on circulation that is also attuned to how arguments circulate across spaces. This means studying "the 'variety of sites' whereby 'subjects…become constituted and connected'" (Grewal qtd. in Dingo 14). McKinnon's work also provides guidance in investigating "the movement of gendered discourses" by noting their movement but also "attending to the geopolitical interests that buttress their movement and

intelligibility"(McKinnon 14). I too aim to study circulation concerning how it constitutes and connects identity claims, not taking for granted what makes them "intelligible" as persuasive in unifying a people. According to Dingo, this requires considering "historical moments, social actors, and cultural memories," but especially the context for the rhetoric circulated (Dingo 25). Because, Dingo writes, in an echo of this dissertation's argument, depending "on context, gender mainstreaming arguments…might draw on colonial discourses or racial and ethnic stereotypes…." (27). Therefore, my emic method of analysis will bring into focus historical and political contexts important in understanding how Indigeneity surfaces in practices of identification.

Having an eye to history allows me to account for the broader contexts of the "imposed and performed" rhetorics circulating within these practices of identification (Soto Vega and Chávez). In these contexts, there is much to consider, which fixes my attention on settler colonialism as a structure. Speaking on the contingencies of settler domination globally and across history, paperson says that "Machines of genocide, enslavement, land mining, and war run through the colonial apparatus and produce multiple colonialisms as adaptations to each particular place and time. This is why specific colonial apparatuses differ but similar technologies recirculate in them—pieces of desiring machines that assemble into new machines"(paperson). Therefore, through studying structures of power as they are related to identification of Mexicanness, rhetorical analysis allows me to speak on contingencies and also the mechanics of overlapping structures of power to provide transferable insights.

Chapter Previews

The first chapter of this dissertation, "A Pan-Historiography of Mexicanness," serves as a diachronic backdrop from which to read the other two chapters in the project, which provide

more of a synchronic look at Mexican identification. This chapter marks "slices" of history that make up the palimpsest of the Mexican, which includes Mexico's social and aesthetic paradigm that "fossilized" Indigenous others through indigenismo and policies or programs like the Bracero Program that exercised racialization for the economic benefit of the United States. Hawhee and Olson, in their now classic chapter "Pan-Historiography: The Challenges of Writing History across Time and Space," point to Foucault's lectures from "Society Must Be Defended" as diachronic in that they point to "enduring" connections that are drawn "between history and war" (Hawhee and Olson 105). Chapter 1 therefore maps what Daniel Alarcón has described as the "palimpsest" of Mexican cultural identity (Alarcón). This first chapter charts longer histories of various empires, from New Spain onward, to assemble the palimpsest of "Mexicanness" across overlapping policies, law, reference of bodily markers, and cultural artifacts from the Spanish conquest of the Americas. Through this pan-historiography, this first chapter assembles some of the many colonial structures throughout history that might be alluded to in the next two chapters.

The second chapter, "Settler Complicity, Affect, Identification, and Time in Mexican Genetic Ancestry Test Reveal Videos," is an analysis of over 50 genetic ancestry videos published on YouTube from 2014 to 2022 by self-described "Mexicans." In this chapter, I examine the ways race is implicated through the range of affective reactions from creators sharing and identifying with their results, along with the range of reactions in the comments. In dividing the analysis along the lines of Whiteness, Blackness, and Indigeneity (as understood under mestizaje), I foreground the historical tensions in these identifications that are averted, in particular the tensions that arise from settler complicity within efforts at liberal inclusion. Settler complicity through this dissertation will be flagged in multiple ways; in the pan-historiography, the

movements across time are structural and involve settler states. These patterns of identification for contemporary "Mexicans" illustrate a politics and communal identification that avoids colonial contextualization or confrontation with systemic considerations respective of acknowledging anti-Blackness and continued updates to Mexican nationalism's trademark indigenismo.

The third chapter of this project, "'¡Súbete Al Tren!': Settler Identification in the Mexican Megadevelopment Project of Tren Maya," examines Mexico's recently operational railway development project, Tren Maya, from its announcement in 2018 to its operation in 2023. Tren Maya is a large-scale infrastructure project aimed at boosting tourism, economic development, and connectivity across the Yucatán Peninsula. The train became operational in December 2023 and involved constructing a 1,525-kilometer railway network linking major cities and tourist destinations in five states: Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, Yucatán, and Quintana Roo. In writing deeply about this short span of time with references to "longer" histories, this case aims to echo what Hawhee and Olson remark of Foucault's "genealogies" as a historiographical genre and method: "the diachronic effect…is achieved through synchronic comparison…." (Hawhee and Olson 104). Taking advantage that "the two work in tandem to provide comprehensiveness as well as depth," I engage this approach by highlighting the logics of racial capitalism and border imperialism that are constrained by current geopolitical and international pressure and fall in line with historical fracturing along identificatory lines in the history of development in the Yucatan Peninsula. This third chapter takes as its focus texts from the leading proponents of the train, such as press conferences from Mexican President Obrador and promotional videos from the Mexican government, and situates these voices against those currently fighting the state's development of this land and exploitation of the peoples of this place.

In the conclusion, I turn toward revitalizing a Chicanx concept already utilized in rhetorical theory by Kelly Medina López in her 2018 article “Rasquache Rhetorics: a cultural rhetorics sensibility” (Medina-López). Looking forward, and inspired by Stuart Hall, the conclusion foregrounds an alternate understanding of identification that grounds creators of cultural identity in the present, suggesting an understanding of history’s political implications without a reductive understanding of race, ethnicity, or communal identity. As Hall writes in a passage well worth quoting at length:

> identification is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation. In contrast with the 'naturalism' of this definition, the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed - always 'in process'. It is not determined in the sense that it can always be 'won' or 'lost', sustained or abandoned. Though not without its determinate conditions of existence, including the material and symbolic resources required to sustain it, identification is in the end conditional, lodged in contingency. Once secured, it does not obliterate difference. The total merging it suggests is, in fact, a fantasy of incorporation….Identification is, then, a process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination not a subsumption. There is always 'too much' or 'too little' - an over-determination or a lack, but never a proper fit, a totality. Like all signifying practices, it is subject to the 'play', of différance. It obeys the logic of more-than-one. And since as a process it operates across difference, it entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of 'frontier effects'. It requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process. (Hall “Who Needs Identity” 2-3)

Central in Hall’s description of cultural identity is contingency and its characterization as an ongoing, unending rhetorical creation. Hall also acknowledges the influence of structural power, histories, and the body upon practices of identification. Considering the aversion to (settler) colonial history illustrated throughout the dissertation, I put forward rasquache as a form of cultural making-do amidst ongoing settler domination.

Ultimately, my project aims to add to rhetorically robust literature that examines potential paths for decolonization. Decolonization is widely understood not to be a metaphor because of Tuck and Yang’s now-classic piece. While decolonization is not a metaphor, and many could

argue metaphors are not *just* metaphors, I hold that the ways that we rhetorically identify with others and those who share commonalities with us as racialized and ethnic people affect decolonial possibilities (Tuck and Yang). Practices of identification as a rhetorical activity are a part of decolonial work as much as it is part of colonial work. Rhetoric helped constitute a colonial class and interests that serve settler states and modernity writ large to this day, starting from the imperial Spanish maxim of "Gold, Glory, and God" that led them into conquest. Through attention to history and contingencies of context, practices of identification make manifest the structures and group dynamics that require change in our time.

Chapter 1: A Pan-Historiography of Mexicanness: Imposition and Performance across Colonial Powers

In his introduction to *The Aztec Palimpsest*, Daniel Alarcón explains that his conceptual use of the palimpsest to discuss Mexican cultural identity is grounded by a "process of erasure and superimposition resulting in a tangle of contentious and sometimes contradictory texts…characteristic of the production of Mexicanness" (Alarcón *The Aztec Palimpsest* xvi). This project begins with a pan-historiography not to trace a stable category of identification of Mexicanness but to historically explicate the "palimpsest" that is at times referred to when discussing Mexicanness or Mexican cultural identity. In other words, this chapter functions as a referential foundation for the following two chapters of this dissertation when asking: What is rhetorically and historically implicated when discussing Mexican cultural identification within a settler colonial context?

There is no absolute definition of "Mexicanness." Therefore, this pan-historiography also exists as a kind of definitional reservoir for my object of study: Mexicanness, or Mexican cultural identity. As a dissertation centered on settler colonial rhetorics and identification, this pan-historiography provides the broader context for Alarcón's palimpsest—"the Mexican" or "Mexicanness"—which serves as its "farm boy," to allude to Burke's classic example of identification. The artifacts across these slices of time are varied in time and geography, because Mexicanness, for this dissertation, involves understanding identification with respect to settler colonial rhetorics tied to a Mexican settler state that incubated even within New Spain. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that the Mexicanness of this dissertation is not an inherently liberatory identity category, as Ono and Sloop argue in their now classic "The Critique of Vernacular Discourse" (Ono and Sloop). Instead, this dissertation traces complicity with settler structures surfacing within practices of identification with or of Mexicanness. To trace

identification as a rhetorical phenomenon, the archive of this chapter will follow not only structural factors that contributed to what is identifiably "Mexican," but also what is performed across time to see how Mexicanness "moves" (Hawhee and Olson 101).

The latter two chapters of this project will focus on identification with a settler state in ways that invoke logics of race, nation, and the body. This pan-historiography thus functions to provide a background for these alluded logics with a wide-ranging archive. In discussing two "networks" producing the palimpsest of "Mexicanness," Alarcón points to "a discursive network producing Mexicanness, and a network of divergent interests seeking to manipulate that discursive network," (Alarcón *The Aztec Palimpsest* xvi). Because of rhetorics of law and those of performativity, the palimpsest of this panhistoriography references "texts" proper but also the "bodily residues" Hawhee and Olson note as topics potentially capturable through a pan-historiographical method, which I will explore in further detail in the next chapter.

This chapter explicates identification with and of Mexicanness across empires to highlight its colonial roots, and in hopes of moving toward liberation, by providing a brief sketch of four relevant "moments" in that history: 1. The beginning of the conquest of the area by Spain in 1519; 2. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848; 3. Mexican Indigenismo of Mexico post-Independence; and, 4. The systemic and extralegal violence against Mexicans in the U.S. after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Rhetorical pan-historiographies are useful in providing "more expansive histories," and the next section will provide a rationale for how I chose these five movements in order "to create a larger narrative arc" for Mexicanness (Hawhee and Olson 94). While there has undoubtedly been important rhetoric from this community after the 1960s, which complicates a singular voice, I do not survey more recent rhetorical movements to prioritize the longer settler colonial sedimentation referenced in contemporaneous identification of and with

Mexicanness. I conclude the chapter by noting implications for identification that keep complicity with the settler state in view, arguing against the utilization of the "settler" category for this group whose experiences under colonization are varied and uneven.

Pan-historiography and the Palimpsest of Mexicanness

This pan-historiography brings to light a cross-section of the palimpsest of Mexicanness. Depending on one's perspective, Mexicanness or Mexican cultural identity may not seem polysemous, but it should be taken as such when evaluating settler complicity. For instance, Indigeneity, conceived of from Western colonial perspectives, comes into play when discussing Mexican cultural identity. Association with Indigeneity does not encapsulate the cultural experience for many who identify with Mexicanness, though. This dissertation does not function to designate those who identify as Mexican as "Indigenous," "settlers," or "real Mexicans" against those who are not. Indigeneity is not the focus of this dissertation, but that such an element is unavoidable in the rhetorical object of Mexicanness signals that bringing complicity to the fore is a necessity to hold practices of identification accountable to the practices of appropriation. As Alarcón notes: "as in a palimpsest, an indigenous discourse precedes those (super)imposed on it, one that is never completely erased. Therefore, the types of Mexicanness produced by Mexicans and Mexican Americans occupy crucial sites of analysis.…for example, the disturbing parallels between many Chicano configurations of Mexico and their Anglo counterparts, and the relationship between Mexicanness and tourism as a form of neocolonialism actively promoted by Mexicans themselves" (Alarcón *The Aztec Palimpsest* xv-i). The last topic of this observation, Mexican tourism, will be the focus of the last chapter of this dissertation through an analysis of Mexico's recent railway project, Tren Maya.

Throughout this dissertation, I will reference Burke's conception of identification because of its utility in describing constitutive dynamics, including how identification relates to the idea of division. In *A Rhetoric of Motives,* Burke notes that "one need not scrutinize the concept 'identification' very sharply to see, implied in it at every turn, its ironic, counterpart: division," adding that, "Rhetoric is concerned with the state of Babel after the Fall. Its contribution to a 'sociology of knowledge' must often carry us far into the lugubrious regions of malice and the lie" (Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* 23). For Burke, that identification "transforms" "universality…into a partisan weapon" is fitting for analysis within colonial contexts because of division's treatment within this rhetorical process (Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* 23).

As I explained in the introduction, Stuart Hall, like Burke, acknowledges division as part of identification; yet, important for this project, Burke's theorization does not treat division as part of the colonial situation to which those in the contemporary world can respond to through the process of identification. Hall speaks of a specific audience, Black diasporic subjects, when discussing division and the (re)creation of cultural identity. In the last two chapters of this project, the colonial situation will be shown to be averted or obscured through practices of identification. In this chapter, however, I point to what is being historically sidestepped.

Within the realm of Burkean identification, this palimpsest concerns social divisions, but also how they echo and foil racial, national, border imperial, and capitalist logics across time and bodies. In many ways, these logics and systems are indicative of coloniality. In *Rhetorics Elsewhere and Otherwise*, Damián Baca and Romero García note that "Coloniality is the establishment of world power and authority implicitly agreed upon by 'core' countries about what would constitute 'order,' an order premised on biological/hierarchical categories, regardless of whether a territory is/has been colonized" (García and Baca 4). Tracking these logics will

function to assist comprehension in the latter chapters but also work to illustrate the specific contours within the settler landscape of Mexicaness or a figure one might attempt to slot in somewhere within the settler-slave-exogenous other triad of settler colonial studies. Through this pan-historiography, I read these logics as operationalized to racialize, responsibilize labor sources, take the land as product or profit, and target some for genocidal ends through technologies like borders or the casta system. My reading also follows reading colonial structure in "multi-site" identificatory practices as fitting the method of pan-historiography per settler colonial studies, such as Patrick Wolfe's work, which famously highlights settler colonialism as a structure and not an event.

What motivated bundling these movements together was to create a palimpsest of Mexicanness as it was structurally created and also as it is put into practice amongst people. With Hawhee, Olson, and Wolfe in mind specifically, I mark movements across this pan-historiography for what I believe they enlighten about settler colonial structures in association with Mexicanness. In "'They Are in Our Town but Not of It'– Patrick Wolfe and Belonging," Lynette Russell emphasizes a large contribution of Wolfe's, as a canonical intellectual of settler colonial studies, might be described as "explor[ing] and interrogat[ing] how he might hold on to the arguments about structure, [he]…also… develop[ed] a model that allows scholars and activists to make broad historical claims that are not merely reduced to micro histories while at the same time incorporating contingencies" (Lynette Russell 171). This focus closely aligns with Hawhee's and Olson's guidance for "enlivening" pan-historiographies through "the right mix of scholarly rigor and imagination, the right mix of a long, diachronic view and a more tightly attenuated synchronic perspective….[, which] allows a broad cultural context even as it offers an opportunity to ask what sense of movement a rhetorical perspective might add to the

conversations" (Hawhee and Olson 101). In short, the movements across this pan-historiography create a palimpsest of Mexicanness through movements of structural history in relationship to settler colonialism.

By following these structures, I also avoid the "additive model" Soto Vega and Chávez bold as a pitfall for rhetoricians of Latinx discourse. They instead suggest rhetoricians "illuminate and locate the complexity of interlocking systems of oppression and privilege" (Soto Vega and Chávez 319, 320). Soto Vega and Chávez repeat the sentiment that systems of oppression should be considered when performing racial rhetorical criticism precisely because race and ethnicity are such slippery terms: "To render a thorough explanation of racialized violence and erasure, we suggest researching coloniality, white supremacy, and imperialism as systems of domination entwined with race and ethnicity" (Soto Vega and Chávez 320). Through discussing, for instance, key moments that led to the popularization of mestizaje and indigenismo, I aim to complicate the breadth of discussion for the identification of Mexicanness by marking the settler/colonial histories underneath these key concepts.

The five movements within this chapter were chosen for their interdependence in revealing the settler colonial roots of identifying Mexicanness. As Hawhee and Olson state, consolidating separate slices of time is not justification enough for the use of a pan-historiography; "theoretical and methodological orientations" should guide the selection of pan-historiographic moments so that the "evolutions and breaks" are also "integral to the analyses they forward" (Hawhee and Olson 96). As previously stated, these moments were chosen for the colonial logics they illustrate; these moments also forward an illustration of what complicates a rhetorical analysis of identifying with or of Mexicanness in the chapters to follow. In choosing

the specific slices, I demonstrate how competing nationalisms complicate the analysis of Mexican identification and instrumentalize common logics that persist into the present.

1. Colonial Structure Introduced; November 8, 1519, Spanish conquistadores reach Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Aztec empire

> "Within fifty years of the conquest, Spanish-Indian relations were redefined and race became a principal factor in the social and economic organization of Spanish colonial society"
> Martha Menchaca, *Recovering History, Constructing Race*, 49.

I start intentionally with the colonial structure introduced with Spain's conquest to source the racial and genocidal regime that incubated the state of Mexico. The beginning of Spanish conquest is structurally crucial. This first moment is one of colonizers moving into a space to make and take resources and impose hierarchical domination for God, Gold, and Glory.

The Spanish would come to what would be known as the Americas and the history of Mexico would be marked by the contact between the Europeans and the Mexica, a group more popularly known as The Aztecs. The land north of present-day Mexico City, where thousands of groups lived, was termed the Gran Chichimeca by the Spanish. The majority of these groups were Chichimec, one of which was the Aztecs or Mexica. The Mexica were "one of the seven Chichimec tribes of northern Mexico that migrated south and settled in the Valley of Mexico in approximately A.D. 1111" (Menchaca 34).

In 1492, the Queen commissioned Christopher Columbus to conquer lands in the name of the Catholic Church. By 1517, the governor of Spain's colonial center, Diego Velázquez, commissioned Hernán Cortés to explore Mexico while conquering its Native people (Menchaca 42). On the way to Tenochtitlán, the Spanish had become allies with the Aztec's enemies, such as the Tlaxcala and Cempoala, in the region. When Cortés reached Tenochtitlán, the capital of the Aztec empire, on November 8, 1519, they were greeted by the Aztec emperor Moctezuma

Xocoyotzin and given gifts and a place to stay. While the Spanish had been greeted amiably with gifts and gold, Cortés and his men were moved into the emperor's palace where they held him hostage. In the spring of 1520, while Cortés was away, Pedro Alvarado, Cortés's first officer, surprised thousands of Aztecs during a religious ceremony in the temple's courtyard by slaughtering them. Some sources, such as Nies, say some 600 celebrants were killed during the event. In response, the Aztecs rebelled, fighting until Spanish forces fled the city through a causeway. Moctezuma was killed in the fighting, even though, according to Nies, the Aztecs could have "obliterated the Spanish; "a war of annihilation was a foreign concept to them. They fought wars for tribute and to take live captives" (Nies) x. In this battle, the Spanish lost more than half of their men (Foley 18).

In their wake, the Spanish colonizers left disease, which ravaged the population, including the new king. This must be kept in context when, in 1521, a four-month siege by the Spanish began in Tenochtitlán. Thousands died; Nies approximates that 24,000 Aztecs were killed, including almost all the nobility of this civilization, by the hand of Cortés and 10,000 to 15,000 Tlaxalan warriors. Allies of the Spanish, the Tlaxcalas and the Texcocos, unfortunately also fell victim to the biological warfare. On August 13, 1521, Tenochtitlán fell.

The pan-historiography begins with this moment not because of the encounter's violence (that even here can be seen to be dispersed among many factors and actors), but because the racialized and gendered logics, particularly of the Indigenous other, it falsified are still imposed today through indigenist and broader colonial logics.

I mention gender as introduced into the space from the conquest because of a key character I left out of the narrative: Malintzin. Many familiar with Mexican culture might know that "La Malinche" is synonymous with "traitor," especially in a sexually disgraceful way for a

woman. La Malinche refers to this Indigenous figure, Malintzin. In general, malinchismo is used to point to "Latin American locals, from native, negro and/or mestizo ancestors, [who] adopt the values and play the role of the dominant side (...) and treating their native subordinates worse than the powerful foreigners and local whites do"(Calderón-Moncloa qtd. in Valdeón 173). Captured and enslaved, Malintzin was an interpreter for Hernán Cortés, sold to him by a Mayan lord in 1519 with 19 other women. Many sources name her as a "mistress" to Cortés—she would eventually bear his child, Martin Cortés—but fail to reckon with the machista (patriarchal) value system that rendered this narrative and made possible realities under which Indigenous women were sexualized, raped, and murdered. I therefore will not refer to her as a mistress, but as a prisoner who survived as a "cultural intermediary" made to be of service to the colonial success of Spain (Valdeón 169). Without Malintzin, Cortés would have had less political insight into norms and society and been less likely to make alliances with tribes who plotted against the Aztecs like the Tlaxcalans (Foley 16-7).

Key to note for the power dynamics of identificatory practices, the term malinchismo, while generalizable as denigrating for non-white populations has been found to not originate within that population per se. According to Luis Barjau in *La Conquista de la Malinche*, the "negative term was promoted in the 1950s by the urban upper-middle classes." Valdeón writes that "It is paradoxical that for Barjau the term was particularly popular precisely among those that are likely to have stronger connections with the European settlers than with the descendants of native Americans" (Barjau qtd. in Valdeón 174). I do not find it surprising that such a narrative that creates factions within a population distinct in class and other racialized markers was popularized by those with closer ties to wealth and power. This is especially notable as the

narrative of “La Malinche” typifies her as a lone interpreter, when Jeronimo de Aguilar would join her in translation by translating to Castilian for Cortés (Valdeón 167).

This strategic denigration of Malintzin has carried over identification-related effects for a “hybrid” Mexican population: “For good or ill, Malintzin would symbolize the intermixture of Spaniard and Indian that would make the Mexican nation” (Foley 17). Narratively cast as the mother of mestizos, she is despised and made invisible behind a name that is not hers. While Malintzin was instrumental in the trajectory of the Spanish conquest, she is a person dispersed ultimately within the actions of hungry colonial states with exploitation in mind. Yet, she still stands in for an indigenous population in the equation of blame for their conquest.

Malintzin’s role functions as a reminder that gender or even race may place one on the “side” of settlers or not, depending on the colonial structure in which these categories derive meaning and gain power. For instance, within this project’s final chapter on Tren Maya, women are championed as workers for the Mexican state. This sentiment is hinted at again by Foley: “In many ways, the creation of New Spain owes as much to indigenous peoples as the Spaniards whose Indian allies vastly outnumbered them” (Foley 18). Malintzin as a figure has engendered the way stereotypes surface in the logic of indigenismo: the Indigenous woman is fertile and servile and the white man the literal conquistador. The meeting of multiple (not two as it is so often simplified) civilizations generated the possibility for New Spain and then Mexico to exist. As Taylor pointedly states, “In locating the origins of modern Mexican in the sexual union of the historical figures of Malinche and Hernán Cortés mestizo nationalist imaginings negate the multiethnic composition of pre- and post-conquest Mesoamerican society” (A. Taylor 100). Therefore, it can already be seen that the origin story for the Mexican national identity is not a simple translation of racial formulas but a simplification of the encounter.

A new regime of labor and race also marks this first moment of this pan-historoiography. Because conquest in the mind of the Spanish meant God, glory, and gold, they saw themselves bestowed with the divine right to control land conquered for the Catholic Church. This land, and the life imbricated in its relationships, needed labor to make use of it, which meant utilizing technologies of slavery: the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and the encomienda system. In the creation of Mexico, nearly 200,000 Black people were kidnapped from Africa and taken to New Spain, which was a number comparable to the number of migrants coming from Spain (Menchaca 42).

Indigenous populations were harnessed for forcible labor through the encomienda system. Because, under the 1512 Laws of Burgos, the Spanish saw a need for acculturation of Indigenous people, who were to be "protected and Christianized," like "orphans, widows, and the wretched," (Menchaca 51). The encomienda was a type of vassal slavery in which Indians were under the direction of a Spaniard. Importantly, for the encomienda system, as with the chattel slavery, "The slaves were always…employed far from their place and culture of origin ("History of Latin America - Indians and Spaniards"). While the Spanish viewed the institution as providing "acculturation sites to civilize and Christianize Indians, they became unofficial slave institutions" (Menchaca 52). Enslavement of Indigenous people became illegal in 1537 by pronouncement of Pope Paul III, who held that Indigenous people were humans with a right to be Christianized and own property, which of course included their role as tax-paying subjects within the larger colonial structure.

Cedric Robinson understood how the creation of a targeted and enslaved labor force in New Spain fed capitalistic order but also necessitated the colonial power creating specific legal impositions through the casta sysem: "Slave labor required the elaboration of systems of control

and discipline. Moreover, the intercourse of the several races extant in Spain's new possessions precipitated the formation of rather complex racial codes and codifications. The results were practical while being barbaric and absurd" (Robinson 130). And while such a system was supposedly rigid and "common sense" through observation of visible racial characteristics, Izaguirre has noted that "a set of 'rules,'" outlines "a way of seeing physical phenomena and asserting probable conclusions from observable traits, is both enabled and limited by a sign's physicality," which impacts "…how a sign is usable and how it is usable in this way" (Izaguirre III, "Persuasion's Physique" 354). In other words, rhetoricians are familiar with the phenomenon that although a body "should" signify "traits" by way of its visuality, the body is polysemous, which is an affordance and constraint for what it means. The affordances and constraints for how people were "seen" and affected by the casta system in New Spain, in other words, were dependent on more than what was simply observable on their bodies.

Despite many arguing that class not race has structured modern-day Mexico and Latin America more widely, Whiteness has defined race relations in Latin America since its colonial inception, relegating non-Whites without political leverage to the bottom of social and racial hierarchies. This has meant that "Whiteness in Latin America has been synonymous with privilege, and as a currency, it has allowed for the continuous disenfranchisement of dark-skinned persons. In the case of the indigenous, this combination has created a context in which indigeneity is closely associated with docility and economic and legal disenfranchisement" (Vienrich 3). The way racial meritocracy played out through the casta system as already stated was imposed due to the people New Spain enslaved as labor forces through the encomienda system and the kidnapping and forced labor of peoples mainly indigenous to the West coast of Africa.

The casta system, the system of racial hierarchy in Spanish-ruled countries, was essentially an appraisal of how much Spanish "blood" an individual possessed, their phenotype, and their skin color (Vienrich 4). This in no way should be confused with directly translating genetics: "The culturally constructed racialized 'types' (the phenotypes) were so far from genetic make up that each of a couple's six children might be categorized as being in a different casta" (Whitten 359). What would identify their likeness was the label of mestizo "that encompassed the castas, set[tting] them off from elite Spanish or whites, and from those classed as black and Indian" (Whitten 359). In other words, the casta system still stratified a "hybrid" population across definite racial lines (elite White (e.g., Spanish)/mestizo/Black/Indian), which is crucial to note for rhetorical analysis of Mexican identification.

Hybridity is a prominent theme in Mexican identification and yet the lines across racial classes are distinct, along with the logics of racial "dilution" or intensity that contradict an understanding of pure hybridity. Whitten notes that, "In the Spanish colonies, by 1500, the concept of raza (race) replaced that of generación in the Americas and the phenomenon of el mestizaje emerged in the early-modern crucible of European hybridity that stressed the blending of civilization with savagery" (Whitten 359). This blending can be taken as a "diluting," that while still involving aspects of hybridity, promotes racial identification for a nation across "obvious" visual markers. These logics of reproductive control, racial, hierarchy, organization, and capitalistic exploitation are not divorced the from practices of identification of Mexicanness in the present day.

As Menchaca makes clear in *Recovering History,* "Racial meritocracy was founded upon real and presumed racial differences" (Menchaca 4). For instance, a difference between mestizos and afromestizos was at times dependent on the father's social position or if the child was born

out of wedlock. If the father was of high social prestige but the mother was of color, the child could be counted as part of the white population, being labeled a criollo (Menchaca 65). By including only the race of the father in the baptismal registry, priests could register mestizo children or children who did not appear to be Black as criollos. From its primoradial instantiations, race can be said to have a hold on racial others in New Spain, which becomes more beneficial the closer to Whiteness one can be identified. As in the case of New Spain, identifying closer to Whiteness granted privilege. Through the entrance of the Spanish into the space that has become the settler state of Mexico, a structure took root: the land became commercialized and privatized, the people made intelligible through hierarchy and slotted within the capitalistic order accordingly.

2. 1848: The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

> "At times Mexican Americans may be confused with whites, but they bear the trace of the indio bárbaro, ultimate sign of proper exclusion from American justice. 'American-Indian' and 'Eskimo' bear witness to repressed imperial dispossession: territorial dispossession of the indigenous peoples and Mexicans throughout U.S. imperial history, and the ancestral dispossession of Mexicans and Indians *from each other*."
> María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *Indian Given,* 212.

The second moment, The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (TGH), illustrates the clashes of U.S. nationalism and Mexican nationalism, each with their own supremacist bodily ideals operationalized on common sense like race, 'calidad,' or 'casta.' From 1598 onward, New Spain expanded its territory northward; and in 1821, after a decade of war, Mexico declared its independence from Spain. The new settler country of Mexico was not without political contestation within the space, resulting in the U.S.-Mexican War, which in turn brought about The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed on February 2, 1848, and ended the U.S.-Mexican war. For the Mexican state, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which marked its loss, was a moment of embarrassment. However, while the embarrassment of "losing" a war can be counted as an acute wound, the dispossession of land and the denial of citizenship provided more complicated effects on Mexican cultural identity and the lived realities of its people. Under the treaty's terms, Mexico ceded over 50% of its land to the U.S., including land in present-day Arizona, California, New Mexico, Texas, Colorado, Nevada, and Utah in 1848. The treaty, specifically Article 8, proclaimed that the Mexicans incorporated would have "the right to their property, language, and culture." Yet, because citizenship was dependent on Whiteness in the U.S, the racial ambiguity of the Mexican was seized upon to deny these aspects of the treaty.

Because this cession of territory also meant rapid incorporation of the negatively racialized population of Mexicans into the U.S, this moment provides context for the motivation on the part of U.S.-based Mexicans to disavow association with Indigeneity and aspire to Whiteness after the TGH. This moment also serves as an important reference point for the Chicanx Movement of the U.S. 1960-70s, which I will discuss briefly in this chapter's conclusion, as the treaty is at times cited for injustices related to the dispossession of land.

The U.S.-Mexican war took hold when Mexico loosened the restrictions on immigration policies in the contemporary U.S. Southwest. They allowed settlers from the United States to move to Texas, but there was a problem: slavery. Many Anglo Americans moving to Texas had with them enslaved peoples, which went against Mexico's 1824 Constitution (Menchaca 165). By 1829, those who were proslavery were defeated with the announcement of Mexico's Emancipation Proclamation, which was issued by President Vincent Guerrero. Not fully accepted by slave owners, Texans formed the secession movement when they were given an order to

comply the following year (Menchaca 166). After Texas separated from Mexico in 1836, matters would worsen politically when the U.S. annexed Texas 1845. This took place the year leading up to the start of the U.S.-Mexico War, which began on May 11, 1846 (Menchaca 216). In total, after given a year to decide if they would stay to become U.S. citizens or leave, approximately 115,000 people chose to stay within present-day U.S. territory (Montoya).

I provide this brief account of the events leading up to the U.S.-Mexico War to put into context the competing racial dynamics within the Mexican palimpsest. While this is not to say that the quality of life of Black peoples in Mexico was guaranteed to be better there, miscegenation and slavery carried a different moral weight in each country, which reflects each country's co-constitutive outlook on race and citizenship. This is also makes plain the fact that Black people incorporated with the TGH were not allowed to claim any land in New Mexico or Texas (Menchaca 236). While White Mexicans were given full citizenship, mestizos, "Christianized Indians," and "afromestizos" were denied that privilege outright (Menchaca 217).

As will be shown shortly, the TGH did not protect Mexicans who would be incorporated into the U.S. as citizens—Mexicans who would migrate to the U.S. or Mexicans already living in US territory in 1848. Instead, it became a document that would be at odds with the racial imaginaries of the U.S., meaning that property and lives were not respected for Mexicans who were racialized. While in her study of New Mexico post-1848, Gómez has disclosed that there were "uncontroversial instances of the court's naturalization of Mexican nationals as American citizens," formal restrictions likely prevented "certain classes" of Mexicans from becoming naturalized (Gómez 147). Even when naturalized though, the TGH led to a contradiction that still vexes the U.S. public: while Mexicans had been assumed to be *legally* white, the *social* definition of Mexicans as non-white was glaring. This has led scholars to theorize this racial

ambiguity in various ways. Gómez terms the position as “off-white,” not to say that they are “more white than non-white” but to signal their “in between status” (87-8). This social understanding of the Mexicanness and racial makeup had taken hold in the contemporary U.S. Southwest before the TGH as Mexico had been allowing Anglo Americans to settle in Texas.

Those within ceded Mexican territory were motivated to dissociate from Indigeneity because the settler nationalism of the U.S. perceived “Mexican Indians” as not eligible for citizenship. Because U.S. Congress could interpret Article 8 of the TGH, they denied “Mexican Indians” U.S. citizenship under the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 and, later, with the Indian Intercourse Acts and other Federal Supreme Court rulings (Menchaca 234). The power was a sweeping one: “after the Mexican American War, Congress held full authority to validate or extinguish all land grant agreements that Spain and Mexico had made with Mexican Indians, including the mission Indians” (Menchaca 234). This was carried out later under the Homestead Act of 1862, which held that to claim 162 acres of public lands, the person had to be a U.S. citizen or “an immigrant eligible for naturalization,” which was, again, predicated on Whiteness (Menchaca 235). The Homestead Act, which functioned to populate the expansion of U.S. land, clearly made it more difficult for grantees (who had been bestowed land by either the Spanish crown or Mexico) to preserve any land claims (Montoya).

The TGH is an important moment because of how it was legally negated time and time again, revealing the differing “racial geographies” of the U.S. and Mexico. To illustrate the clash of these racial geographies, one could also point to key land disputes and decisions between the U.S. government and previously Mexican Indigenous peoples. For instance, the Pueblo peoples were often foiled against “uncivilized” Indigenous groups like the Apache by the U.S. government in such disputes. Contradicting legal disputes regarding land and citizenship in the

U.S. with Pueblo peoples made clear the different racialized view of Indigeneity between Mexico and the U.S., but also "differentiated Mexicans from Indians, for although the decisions repeatedly made clear that Mexico had fully enfranchised the Pueblo as equals, they also made it clear that 'Mexican' and 'Indian' were not one and the same" (Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo 561).

This fail-safe test of complicity to a settler state is evident in the manner in which indigenous people were considered tribalized in Texas. Indigenous people who were detribalized received some political rights in the U.S., but to be detribalized

> Indians must prove that they and their ancestors: (1) held no tribal affiliation, (2) had been Spanish subjects or practicing Mexican citizens (e.g., voted, ran for office, practiced the holy Catholic sacraments), (3) spoke Spanish, and (4) (if they were former mission Indians) had passed a two-year secularization probationary period where they were observed to have practiced Mexican traditions (Menchaca 229).

That potential citizenship rested on not taking part in historically "Mexican" practices aligns with the settler colonial aim of extinguishment (through genocide or cultural assimilation) of Indigeneity. The dissonance of racial hierarchies and conceptions of Indigeneity are clear across these settler nations came into clearer view in moments of legal contestation, such as *In re Rodriguez* (1897), to which I now turn. Although this case won Mexicans naturalization rights, public opinion would remain perplexed trying to racially categorize Mexicanness.

In Re Ricardo Rodríguez: A Pure-blooded Mexican

In 1890, there were over 77853 Mexican immigrants in the U.S. (U.S. Census 1894; Menchaca 281). In May of 1896, Ricardo Rodríguez stood before Judge Thomas S. Maxey for final approval of his citizenship application. He had lived in San Antonio for ten years before beginning this process, and Judge Maxey took a year to rule on this case that affirmed the voting rights of Texas Mexicans: "Native citizens of Mexico, *whatever may be their status from the standpoint of the ethnologist*, are eligible to American citizenship, and may be individually

naturalized by complying with the provisions of the naturalization laws." (Palomo Acosta; In re Rodriguez, 337, emphasis mine). This is made abundantly clear at multiple points: for instance, the "main question" of the case was framed not in terms of the TGH's validity or intention but about "the eligibility of the applicant for naturalization, because of the ethnological feature involved in the case, or, in other words, because he is not a 'white' man, and apparently belongs to the Indian or red race (nations of North and South America)…." (340). It should go without saying, but the logic of this case emphasized the powerful role that visual rhetoric plays in organizing arguments about race. When this aspect of race interacts with the law, systemic problems of racism rear their head for groups of people who overlap in the public's eye.

Rodríguez was initially challenged by two attorneys, Mr. A.J. Evans and Mr. T.J. McMinn. They argued: "…Ricardo Rodriguez, is ineligible to citizenship, for this, to wit: that he is not a white person, nor an African, nor of African descent, and is therefore not capable of becoming an American citizen…" (In re Rodríguez 337). The identification of Mexicanness, Rodríguez in this case, utilized phenotypical details but also implicated an inherent feeble-mindedness, which marked Mexicanness outside the able-bodied body politic of Americanness: "He is a very ignorant and illiterate man, not being able to read or write either English or Spanish. He speaks the latter tongue as it is spoken by others of his class and humble condition in life" (337). The fear of non-assimilation was therefore not just rooted in phenotype, in other words but racialized characteristics and capacities identifiably at odds with Americanness.

Yet, the case also demonstrates an assumption regarding non-white racialization in the context between phenotype and the ancestral histories that underly the racial taxonomies in which it is given meaning. I turn here to the phenotypical description provided in the case: "As to color, he may be classed with the copper-colored or red men. He has dark eyes, straight black

hair, and high cheek bones. *He knows nothing of the Aztecs or Toltecs.* He is not an Indian, and his parents informed him that he was a Mexican, and he claims to be 'a pure-blooded Mexican' (337-8). Here we see an assumption that (non-White racialized) peoples know of their history (e.g. "of the Aztecs of Toltecs") through a kind of biological default. However such histories are not necessarily ingrained in a psyche (although the study of epigenetics may complicate this discussion). These histories are passed on through stories of community and kinship, strife and flourishing, and everyday practice.

Within the case, a rhetorical link between history and phenotype surfaces. Specifically, the logic of Rodríguez *looking* like he belongs with a "tribe" or community of Indigenous peoples, suggested he should know of their history. The assumption that non-White people, even if they are mixed or racially ambiguous, might know of their people's story can therefore be assumed as a threat to the settler state. This is the context of citizenship—of who is American and included within the polity—and who is a "mongrel" perceived to be too close with another "state" or people. I say this because what follows are a series of questions asked to clarify "what knowledge he possessed concerning himself:"

> Q. Do you not believe that you belong to the original Aztec race in Mexico? A. No, sir. Q. Do you belong to the aborigines or original races of Mexico? A. No, sir. Q. Where did your race come from? Spain? A. No, sir. Q. Where did your race come from? A. I do not know where they came from. Q. Does your family claim any religion? What religion do they profess? A. Catholic religion. (338)

Rodríguez, who testified to be a "pure-blooded Mexican," said in court that he had no relevant knowledge about his genealogy to contribute.t: "I do not know where they came from." With cases such as 1880 case *In re Camille*, "'half-breed' Indians were [argued to] not [be] White and therefore not eligible for naturalization" (Menchaca 283). Therefore the U.S. government not

only incentivized the distancing of Mexicans from Indigeneity through naturalization processes but questioned whether Mexicans were armed with another threat: communal histories.

3. Indigenismo and Mestizaje of Mexican nationalism post-Revolution (1920)

Mestizaje and Indigenismo, key concepts part of Mexican nationalism, go hand in hand. While the U.S. has specific connotations of these terms that are related to its own racial ideologies of miscegenation and indigenism, this moment centers back on the settler logics of Mexico that affect practices of identification for Mexicanness. Indigenism refers to the reification and appropriation of Indigenous culture and traditions by non-Indigenous peoples who have "ancestral and cultural ties—however weakened by the passage of time—to Indigenous people" (Contreras 24). Lourdes Alberto makes clear the allure of hybridity that mestizaje and indigenismo romanticize: "The logic of mestizaje transformed Latin America as it birthed the idea of modernity and a new kind of citizenship in the postindependence and revolutionary periods" (Alberto, "Mestizaje Desde Abajo" 239). In *Indigeneity in the Mexican Cultural Imagination* Analisa Taylor bolds that the place of Indigenous peoples within this schema was as "objects rather than protagonists of national renewal" (A. Taylor 2). Seeing "indigenismo as an anthropological paradigm wedded to a government policy of ethnic assimilation," the government policies that the government of Mexico "championed national cohesion and modernization through mestizaje, understood not as a mixture of two parts in equal measure, but as a genetic and cultural absorption and attenuation of indigenous into Hispanic traits"(A. Taylor 7). Theories and policies associated with indigenismo of post-revolutionary Mexico included Indigeneity, but "it was constructed as a hinderance to that progress;" akin to the connotations of the idea of "killing the Indian and saving the Man" that powered U.S. genocidal policy (Alberto, "Mestizaje Desde Abajo" 239). The large breadth of policy and theory

that falls under this moment is outside of the scope of this dissertation; for the sake of clarity, I focus here on the understanding of the "bodily residues" invoked when discussing Mexicanness, hybridity, and racial hierarchy to highlight their settler resonances. Therefore, in this section I focus on the impact of a text published in 1925 by Mexican writer and politician José Vasconcelos, *La Raza Cósmica: Mision de La Raza Iberoamericana*, translated as *The Cosmic Race: Mission of the Ibero-American Race*.

José Vasconcelos was a Mexican intellectual and served as the Minister of Education from 1919 to 1925. While *La Raza Cósmica* understood "Latin American identity that was continental as well as national, and that superseded conditions of race," which could sound "race-neutral," it generally argued that through racial mixture Indigenous and Black people would eventually disappear through the emergence of the superior mixed race (Miller 27). Mestizaje has an indescribably strong influence on how many identify Mexicanness. This is a necessary consideration of practices of identification because it positions heritage or lineage within specific power dynamics. Namely, it positions racialized hybridity as dependent on and having moved past the Indigenous people of the settler national past while also supposedly showcasing Indigeneity through the bodies of the people of the present.

The political context of *La Raza Cósmica* is important to note because it is different from that of Chicanos' in the U.S. when they later took up ideas from *La Raza.* Yet, this does not mean that the ideas in *La Raza* were then sterilized of the harm they produce, as these ideas are poised *to keep* producing harms into the future. Vasconcelos had European ancestry ("of Spanish, Italian, and perhaps Sephardic blood") and was born in 1882 in Oaxaca (Vasconcelos xx). His politics were clear in the book. According to Didier T. Jaén in the introduction to *La Raza Cósmica*: "He was firm…in his antagonism towards the United States and the Anglo-Saxon

world in general for the materialism and utilitarianism they represented" (Vasconcelos xxiv). A brand of patriotism had taken hold in Mexico. This is because it was invaded four times in the nineteenth century by foreign powers: Spain in 1829, France in 1838 and 1861, and the United States in 1846, which resulted in the U.S.-Mexican War and the loss of more than 50% of their territory (Alberto, "Nations, Nationalisms, and Indígenas" 111). Therefore, wanting to "create a common denominator that would unite Mexico and other Latin American nations under an all-encompassing Latinidad based on Spanish culture" was appealing to Vasconcelos (Palacios 419). Therefore, the ideologies implicated by this book should be seen for their implications of contestation between two settler countries.

Second, it is important to keep in mind that *La Raza* can also be seen as a response to the eugenic thinking of the time to temper any framing of hybridity as inherently liberatory. The ideology "blamed Latin America's social problems on racial heterogeneity and race mixing and, especially, on the existence of indigenous and African people, whom European thinkers considered incapable of self-government" (Palacios 421). Vasconcelos therefore was arguing against this brand of biological determinism because it specifically condemned mixed-race peoples. Ironically, *La Raza* still fell into the pitfalls of racial science by placing Whiteness at an esteemed place in the hierarchy of the future.

Third to consider is that this movement was led by non-Indigenous intellectuals, which included José Vasconcelos, who crafted policy and commissioned art that sustained the indigenismo movement. This historical detail is necessary to consider within the context of identification of Mexicanness because the rhetoric of such identification shares space with historically genocidal ends. In *Indigeneity in the Mexican Cultural Imagination,* Analisa Taylor paints a picture of the Indigenous person as figured by Indigenismo's trajectory through time in

literary genres. She defines Indigenismo as "a social scientific paradigm wedded to a set of government institutions and polices as well as an aesthetic sensibility that has shaped a great deal of twentieth century Mexican art and literature" (A. Taylor 1–2). While indigenismo in Mexico used by mestizos and indigenism in the U.S. used by Chicanxs emerge from different contexts and thus are not identical, those identifying with Mexicanness through this indigenismo at times are not aware of the history of indigenismo rooted even as recently as the early decades of the twentieth century.

In Latin America, indigenismo refers to public policy and artistic appropriation crafted by mestizo intellectuals to de-Indianize and eradicate the Indigenous and Black populations while the intellectuals themselves laid claim to the space. While indigenismo was present before the Mexican Revolution, as an artistic trend, in Mexico it peaked right after the Revolution (Contreras 25). Take the famous paintings of Diego Rivera, for example, which represented Indigenous populations as part of Mexico's *history*, i.e., its past. It was essentially a direct address to Mexico's "Indian problem," which was "an exercise in subjugation through which the dominant white/mestizo population was able to solidify and extend its control over Indigenous communities" (Contreras 26). Of the *La Raza Cósmica*, it has been said it was "obviously not scientific, it is divinatory and inspirational, and thus should it be read;" but it cannot be denied that its position in that artistic canon emerged at a time when scientific racism was flourishing across the globe (Vasconcelos xi).

The racial hierarchy that surfaced from this antagonism meant that racial mixtures were deemed to be "productive" in so far as they signaled moral and spiritual progress: "…the decline of Asiatic peoples can be attributed to their isolation, but also, and without doubt, primarily, to the fact that they have not been Christianized….Christianity made the American Indians

advance, in a few centuries, from cannibalism to a relative degree of civilization" (Vasconcelos 5). Throughout *La Raza*, Vasconcelos disparages Indigenous cultures and civilization, such as "the lesser Aztec and Inca empires, [which were] totally unworthy of the ancient and superior culture" (9). While the work begins by discussing mestizaje, this does not mean that the White race is put on an even level with the other non-white races. Instead, according to Vasconcelos, mestizaje is possible because of Whiteness:

> The white race has brought the world to a state in which all human types and cultures will be able to fuse with each other. The civilization developed and organized in our times by the whites has set the moral and material basis for the union of all men into a fifth universal race, the fruit of all the previous ones and amelioration of everything past. (9)

The National Council of La Raza would later claim that their name "derives from the term la raza cósmica, meaning the cosmic people, which was coined … to reflect the fact that the people of Latin America are a mixture of all of the world's races, cultures, and religions" (UnidosUS). Scholars like Augstín Palacios claim that this definition indicates a misreading of Vasconcelos and is symptomatic of the malleability of mestizaje and raza cósmica in general (417). He also warns Latino political theorists that they should acknowledge the Eurocentrism and racism that are embedded in "Latin American elite conceptions of mestizaje" because these ideologies have "at times been complicit with racism and the erasure of indigenous peoples and Afromestizos." (418). Therefore, mestizaje and indigenimso as made manifest in La Raza Cósmica should be contextualized for the Mexican settler state's benefit through the policies and aesthetics it endorsed. Just as the casta system was reproductive technology empowering the colonizer's presence and domination, mestizaje is also ultimately harnessed for its identificatory power to justify genocidal extinguishment through indigenismo's "progress."

4. 1910-1920: La Mantanza (The Massacre/Slaughter)

Due in large part to the way those identified as Mexican had been racialized in the United States, there are periods of heightened violence against Mexicans in the U.S. that include extra-legal violence such as lynching, obliquely involving oversight of the legal system across settler states. This includes a period that will forever be lost to documentation, like the increase of mob violence in the 1850s against Mexicans in the U.S., to notorious moments streaked with death, such as La Mantanza or Hora de Sangre (Hour of Blood), which took place after "El Plan de San Diego," which argued for Mexican and Tejano succession of the Southwest, which was discovered by Anglos in Texas 1915. One note of interest when contextualizing these violences has been made by Carrigan and Webb in *Forgotten Dead*: while violence marked the American South for Black people in the mid-nineteenth century, White people and Black people shared "a common cultural connection in their language, religion, folkways, and food" (Carrigan and Webb 2). While that was tempered with the extreme violence white people have exercised to keep their social and political leverage in U.S. society, Mexicans often practiced a different religion, ate different foods, and spoke a different language than Anglos in the West, marking them as "alien."

According to research by Carrigan and Webb, from 1848 to 1928, 547 Mexicans were victim of mob violence (19). Yet, because lynching studies usually focus on the time between the end of the Reconstruction and World War II, mob violence when it was most frequent in the U.S. against Mexicans, which was "during the 1850s, then again in the 1870s, and once again in the second decade of the twentieth century," has received little attention (Carrigan and Webb 20).

As for why there was an increase in violence in the 1850s, the gold rush, specifically the hordes of Anglos entering the gold fields, explains this peak. Gold seekers were validated by the end of the U.S.-Mexican war and what that meant for manifest destiny (Carrigan and Webb 21).

They used violence to send this message. In the 1870s, the violence escalated because "bands of raiders" staged their raids along the border to attack and safely retreat to Mexico. In the early 1900s though, the railroad affected racial tensions and the economy within south Texas, bringing thousands of Anglos into the area and upsetting many Tejanos (Carrigan and Webb 22).

Another crescendo of violence also happened when El Plan de San Diego was discovered in 1915. The plan aimed to free the Southwest from U.S. control, which at first did not intimidate Anglos in the Southwest, but once they believed a rebellion would take place, thousands of Mexicans were slaughtered (Carrigan and Webb 22-3).

One of the most well-known and documented lynchings of a Mexican national in the U.S. happened on November 2, 1910, after a forty-year-old woman, Effie Greer Henderson, was found on her porch, shot in the back and back of her head. Succinctly put by Monica Muñoz Martinez, it was "The murder of a well-known Anglo woman with this social status, allegedly killed by a Mexican national laborer, [which] transgressed race and class" (45). Newspapers turned to stereotypes of Black male figures as rapists and refashioned this stereotype for Mexicans, specifically, Antonio Rodríguez, who was charged with the crime (Muñoz Martinez 36). This borrowing of a widely circulated stereotype of the time (which prefigures *The Birth of a Nation* by 5 years), smacks of obvious anti-Blackness made in the name of saving a potentially violented White woman. According to Muñoz Matinez, one Texas Ranger described Mexicans as "black as niggers . . . and ten times as treacherous" (11). There seems to be an almost literal 'slippery' quality to the Mexican in this description, resonant with Molina's theorization of racial scripts (Molina).

The events that happened before Rodríguez was lynched were routine: he was arrested the day after the murder, put into Edwards County Jail, and then eventually taken by a mob that

afternoon to the edge of town where they bound him to a barbed mesquite tree to burn him alive (Muñoz Martinez 31). This lynching stands out against other lynchings because it took place during the day and thousands of people attended.

While English-language newspapers felt that the mob was "justified as the lives of the ranchers' wives had been unsafe because of the attempted ravages of Mexican settlers along the Rio Grande," Spanish-language newspapers incited protests across Mexico because of the incident" (Muñoz Martinez 43). While Taft permitted Mexican consuls to pursue an investigation, there was confusion as to where Rodríguez was born. This meant that "As an American citizen, Rodriguez's relatives would effectively be denied the support of Mexican diplomats" (Muñoz Martinez 43). What remains clear though is that, to the mob, it must have not mattered where he was from, only that he was identified through racialized means.

The lynching of Antonio Rodríguez was part of a period known by many names: La Matanza, the Bandit Wars (a conflict between Texas Rangers[1], U.S. soldiers, and vigilantes against "Mexican seditionists"), a race war. This was a period in which those who were identified as Mexican, specifically "ethnic Mexicans," were indiscriminately murdered. Some historians estimate that "100 to 300 ethnic Mexicans were murdered between August 1915 and June 1916" (Muñoz Martinez 78).

The murders of Jesus Bazán and his son-in-law, Antonio Longoria, in September 1915 showcase another incident of public violence. A group of armed people had stolen supplies and horses from their ranch, but the men were conflicted as to whether they should report the theft, in

[1] The Texas Rangers, a group focused on racial agitation and terror, did not just focus their violence on those identified with Mexicanness but were also obviously anti-Black. This extra-legal violence has the systemic tie to capitalism and enslavement. Texas Rangers set their sights on Mexicans that were helping people flee enslavement because they were doing "their part to help preserve a slave-based agriculture." (Muñoz Martinez 11; Carrigan and Webb 48). Even though they were tasked with honoring neutrality laws that forbade them to cross the border, they would often break these laws when chasing people running away from enslavement.

case the bandits returned for retribution. However, they knew that if they did not inform the local authorities, then they would be accused of being on the side of the bandits. Therefore, on September 17, they reported the robbery to the Texas Rangers (Muñoz Martinez 78). Bazán and Longoria reported the theft to Texas Ranger captain, Henry Ransom, who was known to be violent. According to witnesses, after the seemingly innocuous conversation, "Captain Ransom and two civilians, William Sterling and Paul West, climbed into a Model T Ford" to follow the men (Muñoz Martinez 78). When they pulled up on the men riding horseback, shots were fired from the passenger window. The men fell from their horses after being shot in the back and were left in the hot Texas sun. It wasn't until October that their friends were able to retrieve the bodies so the men could be buried (Muñoz Martinez 78). No investigation took place, even though the story spread throughout the region. This story surviving over 100 years hints at the racial dynamics of the area for Mexicans, especially for two local Tejano men who were "pillars of the community, both from prominent Tejano landowning families, and one an elected official" (Muñoz Martinez 80).

One explanation for the widespread lynching of Mexicans in the U.S. was that the "local authorities" and courts were weak and inadequate along the frontier, which of course absolved lynch mobs of their culpability: "According to this perspective, vigilantes were civic-minded individuals forced by circumstances to abandon their traditional regard for the legal process" (Carrigan and Webb 24). Yet, certain aspects of frontier life made it more difficult to carry out due process: It was difficult to locate witnesses, who at times feared retribution; apprehending the accused was also made more difficult by the fact that jails in, for instance, California, were "nonexistent or poorly constructed;" and professionals with the law in California could be swayed with gold (Carrigan and Webb 25).

Yet through further contextualization, it is also obvious that none of these factors were untouched by racial animus. For instance, as Carrigan and Webb make clear, if ineffective courts were bettered with time, it would seem logical that mob violence against Mexicans would also decline, yet, as with most cases, it is not that straightforward. Tensions were already heightened because Anglos were unfamiliar with the legal system adopted into the area of the Southwest that was incorporated with the TGH. Not only did Anglos feel outnumbered by the Mexicans of the Southwest (like as in California where Captain James Carleton, a veteran of the US-Mexican War, said the ratio was 4:1). Anglos thought these familiar structures gave Mexicans too much influence (Carrigan and Webb 31).

As can be seen, the identification of Mexicanness within colonial contexts has a range of violence and expression. From the structural violence of New Spain's inception to the indigenismo of post-revolutionary Mexico, which venerated and fossilized Indigenous peoples for the sake of crafting an intelligible body politic of mestizaje, histories are implicated in the constitutive dynamics that keep settler states moving forward. And such histories are anything but ideologically neat in the ways they travel to different contexts, such as that seen in this moment of La Matanza within the U.S. As seen within this moment, the structural violence of the courts, which includes oversight of extralegal violence, worked through identifying Mexicanness to mark a population for widespread violence that is not documented well in institutional history. Yet as will be seen in the case studies to follow in this dissertation, such histories are implicated in practices of identification whether or not they are explicitly known or shared.

Conclusion

By showcasing these four moments as they move across time, I have crafted a palimpsest of Mexicanness relevant to (settler) colonial histories. Such a trajectory has included a survey of

technologies of racialization, reproduction, and violence within New Spain, Mexico, and the United States. The histories of such ideologies and systems have included the casta system, settler indigenismo of Mexico, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and extra-legal violence in the U.S. following the Treaty. These moments make up a palimpsest of Mexicanness to reference moving through this project as an examination of practices of identification contextualized for their settler histories. Yet, before continuing to the next chapter, it is necessary to also acknowledge a large gap at the end of this pan-historiography: El Movimento, the Chicano movement rooted in the late 1960s.

In appreciation of the polysemous ways Mexicanness has been identified by colonial states, the rhetorics of the Chicano movement should be bolded for their specific import on a study on identification contextualized for settler rhetorics. This movement was a direct confrontation with the colonial experience for those of Mexican descent in the U.S. As such, its influence on the rhetorical negotiation of identification with Mexicanness, especially for Chicanos, cannot be overstated. The tenor of pride through identification and active confrontation of historical colonial trauma still influences practices of identification today, and still, the influence of colonial histories should be acknowledged for their potential to perpetuate colonial harm through ideologies of mestizaje and indigenismo.

To briefly point to these themes, I turn to a key event in the movement, during which the term of Aztlán was forwarded. On March 31, 1969 in Denver, Colorado, the Chicano Youth Liberation Conference was held. At this conference "El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán" was presented. While the taking of indigenist ideologies surfaces throughout the movement, Sheila Contreras notes in *Blood Lines* that, "We might locate the 'official' emergence of indigenism" within these first lines (Contreras 31). In Denver, Alberto Baltazar Urista (Alurista), a poet and intellectual

versed in Pre-Columbian history, read “Epic Poem of Aztlán,” which proselytized indigenist visions for the future of Mexican-Americans (Menchaca 19). He was one of the first poets to establish Aztlán as a concept through his poetry. The aforementioned poem became the preamble to the manifesto for the Chicano Movement, El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán.

The term Aztlán came “from Aztec codices and sixteenth-century Spanish accounts of the Conquest…Aztlán places Chicanas/os at the origins of the Mexican nation, in a pre-national moment that is distinctly and inarguably indigenous” (Contreras 31). Importantly, Alurista’s reference of Chicanos’ migration back to Aztlán (the geographic space often argued to roughly be the U.S. Southwest), casts Mexicans as Indigenous dwellers of the Americas. This idea inherently challenges that Mexican Americans were foreign to these lands as a response to historical violence. From then on, to acknowledge oneself as Chicano was to make a political statement, ranging from tacitly underscoring non-whiteness to claiming one was Indigenous and a rightful dweller of Aztlán, which also has a muddy definition.

El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán takes note of a type of internal colonialism happening in U.S. politics and the economy, echoing many of the observations made of systemic aggressions against Black people in the U.S. through work by Kwame Ture and other Black activists. For the focus of complicity with settler rhetorics though, this expression of indigenismo, while within a different context, and albeit a hegemonic one for the purposes of this project, complicates the history in which practices of identification happen currently. As Laura Pulido notes in “Geographies of Race and Ethnicity III,” “As far as I know, Chicanas/os never collaborated or consulted with American Indians on Aztlán. As such, Aztlán is simultaneously a decolonial and colonizing gesture” (Pulido 7). While these judgments are sweeping and cannot account for the polysemous activity within these practices of identifying with Mexicanness, there is worth in

flagging settler rhetorics for their potential harm through endorsing ideologies of indigenismo that fossilize Indigenous peoples as ancestors and not as those agentic within the current political landscape.

To examine the dynamics of identification with Mexicanness, the next chapter of this project turns to over 50 YouTube videos in which self-identified “Mexicans” share their genetic ancestry results. The videos, which primarily focus on reactions to the percentage results, implicate histories from this chapter, adding complexity to the factors mentioned above. To acknowledge the colonial trauma and settler complicity both present in this colonial situation, the detail of “mestizo mourning” is centered along with affective details falling across the ideological lines typical of mestizaje: Blackness, Whiteness, and Indigeneity

Chapter 2: Settler Complicity, Affect, Identification with Mexicanness in Genetic Ancestry Test Reveal Videos

> "I could see that all these strange aspirations and identifications which my parents had projected onto us, their children, destroyed my sister. She was the victim, the bearer of the contradictory ambitions of my parents in this colonial situation. From then on, I could never understand why people thought these structural questions were not connected with the psychic—with emotions and identifications and feelings because, for me, those structures are things you live. I don't just mean they are personal, they are, but they are also institutional, they have real structural properties, they break you, destroy you."
> Stuart Hall in an interview (Chen and Morley 490)

In the schema popularized by settler colonial studies, the settler–native–slave triad maps out the uneven relationships created through this colonial system. The triad is sometimes misunderstood as ascribing certain labels to peoples according to their specific (often racialized) identities; yet it actually "describes what power wants, not who you are," explicating the domination regarding identifiable categories conveniently ascribed to peoples to assure settler colonialism's future (paperson). This avenue of discussion focused on racial identity in the United States makes those identifying with Mexicanness hard to place in the triad because of the "Mexican's" racial ambiguity within the U.S. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the hybrid mestizo body has been the representative of the nationalistic settler body politic in post-revolutionary Mexico and yet has been differently racialized, criminalized, and otherized within the borderlands of the modern-day U.S. Measures to understand "exogenous others,"[2] like racialized Mexicans in the U.S., can be complicated by misunderstanding this triad or stretching it past its usefulness (Veracini 103). Therefore, this chapter keeps its attention on settler

[2] In "Settler Colonialism as Structure: A Framework for Comparative Studies of U.S. Race and Gender Formation," Evelyn Nakano Glenn states the following regarding exogenous others—a category in which those racialized with Mexicanness fall into within my transnational context of settler colonial structure: "In contrast to virtuous or potentially virtuous exogenous others (typically European immigrants) who may be selected for gradual inclusion, undesirable exogenous others (typically racialized immigrants) were considered morally degraded, sometimes irredeemably so. Settler colonialism's response to undesirable exogenous others has often swung (and still does) between the poles of "elimination" and coercive "exploitation."" (Glenn 62)

colonialism as a structure and the power of history in informing practices of identification with Mexicanness. To this end, I turn to an archive of fifty YouTube videos with their comments, in which self-described "Mexicans" reveal their genetic ancestry (i.e., DNA) test results.

The archive for this chapter consists of YouTube videos published between 2014 and 2022, along with comments I recorded between 2022-2023. I selected videos in which the creators self-identified as "Mexican." In terms of their applicability to this project as a study of identification with Mexicanness, they are categorically representative of such identification through their say-so. This was reflected in the way I was able to flag the videos—in searching through "Mexican DNA" results across YouTube, many of which were also provided via algorithmic suggestion at the end of videos. Such videos featured creator-ascribed titles such as: e.g., "My Mexican Ancestry DNA Results;" "A Latina's (Mexican) Ancestry DNA Results!! *NOT WHAT SHE EXPECTED*;" "MY ANCESTRY DNA RESULTS | MEXICAN-AMERICAN". Through reading affective details in conjunction with allusions to race, this chapter provides a view of settler rhetorics present in the praxis of identification of and with Mexicanness. This archive includes both the videos, with specific creators identifying with Mexicanness, and their comments, in which an audience judges if creators are Mexican, suggesting metrics tied to identifying Mexicanness. Rooted in these practices of identification is the assumption of being able to identify Mexicanness genetically and racially, often concerning scientific claims about the body.

My approach to analysis therefore centers on appreciating the historical context of "mestizo mourning" referenced in the previous chapter. That Mexicans are racialized within the U.S. as a settler state in a way not identical to that in Mexico is integral to the historical context of Mexican racialization in the U.S. As Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo note: Chicana/o indigenism

cannot be reduced to a settler fantasy. To do so would be to recapitulate the 'colonizing trick' that exiled U.S. mestizos from their familial, cultural, and epistemological links to indigeneity; links that, under Spanish colonialism and Mexican independence, had contributed to the survival of indigenous cultural expression amongst mestizos (Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo 563).

To analyze the discourse of genetic ancestry while focusing on the praxis of repeatedly identifying Mexicanness requires consideration of overlapping imperial projects that have translated the Mexican 'body' as Indigenous. Considering these empires' differing tactics of racialization, which belie structures tending toward "premature death," I also am aware of Mexico's brand of indigenismo; appropriation of Indigeneity in the U.S. and Mexico by an elite; and varying logics of mestizaje and miscegenation in the U.S., Mexico, and New Spain. Rhetorical analysis is equipped to highlight such webs. As such, this analysis points to the productive overlaps about the rhetorical workings of White supremacy, Anti-Blackness (including colorism), and varying tactics of Indigenous extermination.

With a list of considerations spanning so many categories for a rhetorical analysis, my approach to these videos and their comments focuses on the productive overlap between race and affect. Similar to Kelly E. Happe's focus in "The Body of Race: Toward a Rhetorical Understanding of Racial Ideology," this chapter's case study employs attention to "a rhetorical enactment essential to maintaining a racialized—and racist—social and economic order" in genomics discourse. Happe argues for the direct importance of history in her analysis as do I.

I turn to Sara Ahmed to argue to bold history's importance for my analysis. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed highlights that a politics of emotion involves individual and collective identification and can reveal unconfronted histories: "Emotions tell us a lot about time; emotions are the very 'flesh' of time…. Through emotions, the past persists on

the surface of bodies. Emotions show us how histories stay alive, even when they are not consciously remembered; how histories of colonialism, slavery, and violence shape lives and worlds in the present" (Ahmed 202). In simultaneously highlighting the interwoven details of history, affect, and racialization within settler contexts, this chapter aims to tease apart the complicity that could stifle decolonial possibilities in practices of identification in the context of genomics discourse.

To this end, I will first situate readers within the literature of affect, racialization, and visuality as they relate to mestizo mourning and settler complicity. This section also includes a description of the language I use to discuss complicity, such as "investment." In the analysis that follows, I first trace practices of identification across patterns of affect and racial categories common to the Americas (Black, White, Indigenous). Throughout, I emphasize the implications of complicity for practices of identification with and of Mexicanness. I will conclude with remarks on the praxis of identification in this settler context.

Affect, Complicity, and Mestizo Mourning

The averted structural histories within this archive showcase how "identities are tied up with their intellectual positioning" (*Cultural Studies and the Politics of Internationalization: An Interview with Stuart Hall by Kuan-Hsing Chen* 401). These details are telling in what they reveal about settler complicity. Regarding complicity, I do not aim to pinpoint a particular person within the settler triad per se, but instead, I read for details regarding affect and settler complicity, as opposed to privilege, happening within these practices of identification. Such work is possible because of Beenash Jafri's essay in the Equity Matters blog, "Privilege vs. Complicity: People of Colour and Settler Colonialism." In this piece, Jafri stresses the

importance of acknowledging the role of "complicity" within settler structures for people of color:

> Complicity is a messy, complicated and entangled concept to think about; it is not as easy to grasp and, because of this, it requires a much deeper *investment* on our part. This would demand, for example, that we think about settlerhood not as an object that we possess, but as a field of operations into which we become socially positioned and implicated. (Jafri, emphasis mine)

Jarfi uses the wording of "investment" when discussing "recognition of oneself as a settler" to bold the difficulties for people, even people of color, to invest in dismantling settler colonial structures.

Correcting this investment is not accomplished by focusing on settler status, though. Jafri writes that "over-investment in the settler subject risks re-centering the subject rather than destabilizing the settler/native binary through which the settler's social power is constituted in the first place" (Jafri). An analysis that takes complicity into account must work against a tendency to over-invest in settler subjecthood. Therefore, while details of affect, racialization, and history might superficially appear diffuse when applied to an analysis of identification, such details allow me to locate the investments that reveal settler complicity without condemning particular subjects.

Analyzing complicity can be complex due to the challenge of the broader structural and historical implications, such as those I described in the previous chapter. The details I consider within this archive are also affective, often voiced as surprise, dissatisfaction, or anxiety regarding the ancestry results, speaking to identification with "Mexicanness" and a lived experience. However, as I explained in the previous chapter, our understanding of Mexicanness is also shaped by factors like borders and policies. For instance, as a structural determination regarding a national body politic, that "any Mexicans entering the U.S. after 1845 would have to

prove they were white to become citizens" must be considered along with affective details, which can illustrate "strategies and relations that reproduce social and institutional hierarchies" (Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo 560; Jafri). While the affective details I select are at the scale of the individual in this archive, such dynamics are not sterilized from communal and long-term structures such as policy and national governance. Noting these overlapping details in practices of identification reflects on complicity to shift "attention away from the self" and onto the structures and rhetorical processes that sustain settler futures (Jafri).

While not the only historical thread that needs attention, a chief historical contingency for this chapter's analysis is mestizo mourning, which can be said to be both collective and affective. In "Indigenous but not Indian?" María Eugenia Cotera and María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo define mestizo mourning as the result of the disavowal of indigeneity that Mexicans were motivated to make for the sake of being eligible for American citizenship and becoming legible within that framework. As shown in the pan-historiography's moment on the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the policies and violences are illustrative of the racial hierarchization manifest in U.S. citizenship discourse. Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo view mestizo mourning as speaking to Mexicans' "colonized condition as subjects of overlapping imperial projects," which also speaks to themes of collective identification and division. I take affective details in this archive to speak to the divisions that Burke bolds are part of identification.

The affects of surprise or shock surface at a high frequency in the analysis, and I now turn to Sara Ahmed to consider what they suggest about history. Ahmed locates surprise as an affect initiated through wonder with an object. Drawing upon Descartes' *The Passions of the Soul*, Ahmed highlights that in an "encounter with an object that one does not recognise...wonder works to transform the ordinary, which is already recognised, into the extraordinary" (Ahmed,

The Cultural Politics of Emotion 170). Ahmed states this to pivot away from the claim that surprise would pull one *away* from reflection on historicity through a type of subjective zoom; instead, she suggests that "wonder allows us to see the surfaces of the world as made, and as such *wonder opens up rather than suspends historicity*" (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 170). Therefore, my analysis will bold points regarding what is implicated within these repeated affective details and the history to which they refer to, vaguely or not.

I analyze affect in conjunction with historical details because they are telling of creators' experiences but also because they point to the long-standing racial categories that I discussed in the previous chapter that also impose themselves on bodies in the present. I appreciate the details of the visual body in this archive in the same context. I take the creators' description of the visual body and "recognition" of racialized bodies as repeated signs associated with colonial systems, including settler colonialism. Those that I deem rhetorically salient for this project's analysis are those most "sticky" due to their settler histories, as Ahmed would say. In short, the visual signs and affective evidence analyzed in this chapter reflect Ahmed's explanation of why some signs are "sticky:" "The fact that some signs are repeated is precisely not because the signs themselves contain [an emotion], but because they are effects of histories that have stayed open" (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 59). This analysis should not be taken to be focused on any "real" representation of Mexicanness but rather on what the imprint of power on bodies looks like played out in the world from a lens critical of settler colonial ideologies. The evidence of histories that "have stayed open" is not just found in allusions to bodily evidence but also in the affective and historical details linked to settler colonialism and the racial hybridity that a subject's "Mexicanness" brings to the fore.

While there are nuances globally regarding the processes of racialization and otherizing, a crucial aspect of Mexicanness is hybridity and its connection to the visibility of race, as I discussed in the previous chapter. That the mestizos in this archive are "mestizos" and specifically not "afro-mestizos" speaks directly to the false claims to hybridity, and also of the rhetorical influence of colonial ideologies such as mestizaje. This ambiguity is part and parcel of the existential crisis for Mexicans in the U.S.—and corporations selling these genetic ancestry tests are likely to understand this affective situation for their consumers. Even further, it is necessary to be explicit in confronting globalized Anti-Blackness as race is constructed relationally and scripts are continually amended (Molina).

My analysis of affective evidence within this archive also keeps in view the history of Western science colluding with (settler) nationalism in reifying what race is within the Americas, structuring the imagination and possibilities of identification. What is not "obvious" and what is necessary for science to then "prove" relates to the visibility and recognizability of race. Considering the anxiety part of mestizo mourning, that corporations offer genetic certainty to a "hybrid" population means such persuasion should not be overlooked for its rhetorical workings.

In rhetorical lingo, the "imperfection" of certain peoples' fit within U.S. racial categorization (i.e., the U.S. body politic) could be viewed as an exigency that the DNA test results ostensibly seek to address. Work is already being done to acknowledge how the confluence of capitalism and Western science provide meaning-making assistance for racially ambiguous peoples and therefore "play into a neoliberal-multiculturalist discourse that equates racial mixture with racial transcendence" (Jacobs 17). As Emma Jacobs poignantly writes, this trend runs counter to the power of history and other structural forces that are key to understanding identificatory processes: "in the hands of mainstream DNA ancestry advertising,

collective racialized histories (which we know to be deeply political, contextual, and constitutive of today's world order) are reinscribed as individual genetic ancestries (personal, market-oriented, autologically empowering, apolitical)" (Jacobs 19). Again, as Ahmed has demonstrated, affect that surfaces in communication is historically informed and therefore telling of structural power, and by extension, I argue, complicity.

The focus on complicity with settler structures keeps within view affect and the transnational histories of identifying (with) Mexicanness, which implicate mestizaje, indigenismo, racialized collective trauma, and colorism/anti-Blackness. Not all creators and commenters in these videos are guaranteed to have a common racialized experience, whether it be non-Whiteness or any other racialized category. That is not what I am indexing in this analysis. Instead, in rhetorically siting settler complicity within the affective patterns in practices of identification of and with Mexicanness, this analysis demonstrates rhetorics sustaining settler systems. I trace these details both in comments containing details of diasporic trauma and comments with White supremacist ideas. I practice this balance in the hope of respecting the voices of these creators and commenters for their rhetorical work, and seek to center how their discourse reflects complicity with (settler) colonial systems when identifying (with and of) Mexicanness while also reflecting the unproductive tendencies that Alondra Nelson terms "historical amnesia" (Nelson).

Analysis

> "Borders materialize as an effect of intensifications of feeling. The skin is, after all, a border that feels. To discuss the collective as 'having' a skin is not to posit the collective body as being 'like' the individual body. Rather, it is to suggest that individual and collective bodies surface through the very orientations we take to objects and others… it is here, on the skin surface, that histories are made."
>
> (Ahmed, "Collective Feelings: Or, the Impressions Left by Others" 39)

While I aim for as much nuance as rhetorical criticism can accomplish in terms of illustrating settler tensions within practices of identification within the bounds of this case study, I divide my analysis within the "razas" of Whiteness, Blackness, and Indigeneity. As the pan-historiography of this project emphasized, the racialization of Mexicanness has been sustained across many systems and colonial nations; therefore, I bold the structural implications of identification with Mexicanness by using the lines of mestizaje to read for what paperson terms as "what power wants" (*A Third University Is Possible*). Throughout the analysis, I identify racial and historical patterns that can be said to create, recreate, and legitimize communities. These dynamics echo and benefit from the insights of much rhetorical scholarship, such as Charland's "Constitutive rhetoric: The case of the *peuple québécois.*"

Genetic Blackness: A Shock, Prize, and Ancient Truth

If the panhistoriography that opened this project looked diachronically at the identification of and with Mexicanness transnationally, this analysis looks at how affect and racialized categories typify and structure practices of identification of/with Mexicanness in a more focused view. Conceptions of Blackness are in play when discussing African ancestry in genetic test results for Mexicans in ways that implicate discussions of present racism and the past of colonial history. The ways Blackness surfaces with affective details averts reflection on the systemic violences in the present and past; creators often narrow the rhetorical frame of discussion to the individual past discussing percentage results.

Science often supports circular reasoning that maintains racialized logic, such as equating Blackness with physical traits like skin tone. In contrast, more everyday understandings of Blackness attribute it to an ineffable essence, such as a distinct "coolness" or a noticeable difference in the individual. Many individuals and commenters stress they had already *known*

that Blackness would be present in the results, the results of which then solidify these ways of having *known* Blackness's presence before receiving the test results. In such instances, Blackness is couched within ancient history (namely, in the origin, and migration of humans out, of Africa) and thus only relevant to the present when it is physically discernable in the stereotypical ways race is read (such as through deepness of skin tone) in each individual. This is seen in the comments that suggest that should a Mexican's skin tone be so dark as to be linked to Blackness, then an ancestor must have been closer to the present for this specific individual. When evidence of African ancestry is present in the test results and then identified racially as Blackness by the creators, the genetic test results proved what was already apparently known to the creators and commenters.

To take up the first set of how Blackness was made of import about the present, we can turn to how Blackness was bolded as physically evident, especially should there be a relative within recent history who was "dark." For instance, one creator explains her motivation to seek these genetic ancestry results by speaking of herself as decidedly not "dark." In terms of identification, Burke would locate this as a part necessary to the process of division. Because this person identifies with Mexicanness, there is a division alluded to with the results that would "prove" Blackness. This link between visuality and racialization within the probability of genetic results of Blackness is decidedly divorced from an understanding of Blackness as rooted in culture, socialization, or kinship. Yet, this creator did reference current family members to qualify their own physical presentation: "I'm quite yellowish so I think that my results are going to be that I am Spanish maybe even Native-American, a little bit of African because my mom and her family are very dark" (*Mexican Girl Takes DNA Test (MyHeritage DNA)*). This instance implies that "darkness" is synonymous with Blackness in that her phenotypically "yellowish"

skin tone is a trait she sources in both her Spanish and Native American ancestry; therefore, should a Mexican person's skin tone be dark, the strategies of identifying with Mexicanness are joined with other association that were not "blended" through an ideology of mestizaje. Division across racial lines holds.

The discursive details of ancestry through readings of familial phenotypes are read at the individualized scale of the consumer and disregard that differences between genetically close family members can vary widely or that the heritability of phenotypical/racialized markers is not exact or clear-cut in visual readings. Blackness is assumed to not have a longer history in these individuals' ancestry according to the logics of visuality in these results—creators relay the logics of phenotype center discussion on only the most recent ancestors. Thus, considerations of ancestry further back in time and farther away from the consumer, which link to the history of colonialism within Mexico, are also made less likely.

One pattern regarding Blackness and affective reactions of surprise at such results, irrespective of the percentage listed, suggests a link both to the U.S.'s White nationalist history, with its "one-drop rule," as well as Mexico's erasure of Blackness within the national body politic. The way companies present results encourages creators and commenters to interpret and identify with them as "percentages of" certain ancestries, as creators often mention. This structure suggests a sense of personal ownership of genetic information within their bodies. The identification with percentages, which is a rhetorical constraint of the results themselves, provides ground with which creators and commentators can point to numerical values to then tie to geographic regions, such as Africa, without the context of movement and violence over time.

"High" percentages do not necessarily create a hierarchy of how intensely these results affect creators, especially considering there are multiple values and many times the gaps between

percentages results are large. For instance, in one result category under "Africa" (labeled in the description under both "North" and "Southeastern") commenter Jose Gonzalez's percentage was at 4%, generally a smaller number compared to other percentage categories (e.g., "Native American 58%" which was listed on the video's description caption in mid-2023) (*My AncestryDNA Results (Mexican)*). And it is the mere number under these categories, not how "high" a percentage is, that seemed to provoke a reaction. As previously noted, many creators were notedly emotional, as KPXII illustrated in reacting to his percentage with "I'm so in fucking shock. What?" (*Mexican-American 23andMe DNA Results (SHOCKING) KPXII*). In line with Aristotle's view of emotions as evaluations, Oatley, Keith, et al. argue that "if we know what emotion is currently being experienced, we can infer what appraisals have probably been made" (Oatley et al.)x. When KPXII, identifying as a "Mexican-American" at a genetic level, is "proved" to have Black ancestry, it likely butts against a division in terms of identification. The previously mentioned reaction opens KPXII's video. Its intensity, likely chosen for its pull of engagement in the digital attention economy, is present in the details he shares. He notes he is "overwhelmed," "trying not to cry," and "not knowing how to feel about it," before ending to say that seeing these varied percentages (from categories of "Middle East," "African," "Native American," and European") speak to "what humanity is all about." This point, which is suggestive of a liberal, universal humanism, stops any investigation regarding familial history or ancestry for individuals. Ahmed notes that wonder, which is triggered by something surprising and allows for an examination of history, "seems premised on 'first-ness': the object that appears before the subject is encountered for the first time, or as if for the first time" (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 179). Yet creators repeat the pattern of expressing shock over these results and continue to react with the same fresh surprise. If "we wonder when we are moved by

that which we face," this continued shock suggests that it is symptomatic of facing this history for the "first" time (*Cultural Politics* 170).

While (video) evidence regularly surfaces within the U.S. media regarding state-sanctioned and extralegal anti-Black White nationalist violence, Mexican nationalism has differing rhetorical and material methods of erasure. As research by Sue and Golash-Boza bolds, "blackness [sic] is stigmatized and elites have consistently portrayed Mexico's population as being of Spanish and Indigenous (not African) origins. Moreover, it would explain why some Afro-Mexicans are asked by Mexican immigration officials to sing the national anthem as 'proof' of their Mexicanness" (Sue and Golash-Boza 77). An unambiguous Blackness, according to the logic provided by results and the affect involved in identification with results, signals how "far away" genetic Blackness is from the person identifying their DNA results—as in physical signs are more worth consideration for discussion. In these cases, the results are couched as proving the creators' inklings that they were aware in some way they were "genetically" Black when also considering the results were centered around their Mexicanness.

The affect surrounding the affect speaks to the allure of genetic ancestry test results to those who are racially ambiguous in settler contexts and also the importance of social location and anti-Blackness in light of the racial ambiguity for some racialized Mexican "mestizos." This ambiguity is also compounded by the diasporic complexities for U.S.-born Mexicans, the history of which I discussed in the previous chapter. For instance, KPXII, whose shock was referenced earlier, was born in California to Mexican-born parents. In his video, he notes how the disconnection from a land that is "home" affects how one can see one's community or identity: "I think it's hard for Mexicans or I'm gonna say like people from Latin America in general because it's like we don't really have like a place where you know we share like a connection

with the land, and who we are as identity"(*Mexican-American 23andMe DNA Results (SHOCKING) KPXII*).

Within the context of struggling with identification as a practice, the affect linked to results of Blackness is, by contrast, clear, suggesting a knowable division for those identifying with Mexicanness. Blackness within results is therefore treated as unexpected. Reactions include surprise, such as with "I don't know who in my family is African…that's kind of funny" by Gonzalez in "My AncestryDNA Results (Mexican)" or the creator Dancing With B E L L A, who remarked that "A lot" of "Mexican people" have "this in their chart" but she was "surprised" with the following results: "2% Cameroon, Congo, and Southern Bantu people" (Dancing With B E L L A). Take the extended reaction here from KPXII that was previously noted as shock. Here the creator expresses that such is affecting their ability to "know" how to feel:

> What the fuck! I'm literally… Look! I'm literally from everywhere around the world. Like, I'm a mutt, which is awesome and so cool. Like, you know I think like I'm so shocked I'm Black and you know what that means, that means that I have, like, then, that must mean that I have some type of like, like, ancestor that was probably, like, Black. I know 4.5% isn't a lot but like that's crazy, you guys. I never ever thought in my life [sic], so I think that's crazy….I don't even know how to feel right now. (*Mexican-American 23andMe DNA Results (SHOCKING) KPXII*).

And some aspects of this affect must be read in conjunction with the ever-present colorist/anti-Black rhetorics against dark-skinned Black peoples common to settler colonialism mentioned above. For instance, Cherunabogu responds with the following when encountering his results: "I'll be honest, it's a lot more African than I'm expecting it…Cameroonian…that's where…that's where that's like *Black,* like *Black* African…" This repetition of Black, with the specification of "African" Black, is perhaps an allusion to the ancient migratory history modern humans have from Africa. After Cherunabogu reads over the geographic area's description, he seems to quell

his surprise by making connections to the Spanish empire: “Well equatorial Guinea was owned by the Spanish during the Spanish empire so that does make sense” (*Mexican Takes DNA Test*). Shock when prompted with the idea of identifying with Blackness is therefore made more manageable when contextualized in terms of White colonization of a space within the context of identifying with Mexicanness broadly.

In addition to the affect of surprise or shock, creators often had a positive reaction to the percentage, which is seen in their pride and boasting over higher percentages. In a recording with two creators, one of them loudly exclaims, “No!” in reaction to his results of “1.7% sub-saharan African,” to which the other creator retorted with, “Look who’s got more sub-saharan African!” while pointing to herself. In response to the costar “flaunting” their result, the lower-percentage creator remarks: “Well, I still have better flavor,” which is something his costar affirms and confirms by noting she has “seen him dancing at the club.” Although the genetic results are interpreted within a raw numeric value, there surfaces in these reactions auxiliary evidence to compensate for the lower percentage in bodily performance/ability, along with lived experience/socialization: he “grew up like with so many black people,” so he will “rep that 1.7%.,” even though he and he is “sure many people[,] thought it'd be more too” because of his “dark ass” (*Our Hispanic ANCESTRY DNA Results!!! 23andMe*).

Coinciding with elation in receiving a discernable percentage in this category was that such results seemed to confirm what creators knew of themselves already. Take the creator Dancing With B E L L A, who reacts with: **“**What what what? I always thought I had Black in my blood but, don’t make fun of me, I did! And that just confirms it right now? Am I the only one who gets excited that they’re from Cameroon?” Afterward, she clarified she does not know how to pronounce geographic locations or where they are located. One commenter, Ayanna

Janae, says, “Your reaction to the African dna [sic] was so cute,” highlighting the affect as a positive one (*My Chicana Ancestry DNA Test Results!*). bboygoofyninja, when reading his results, excitedly responds: “That's pretty cool, 5 percent. I knew it! I knew it I was black!” (bboygoofyninja “Mexican boy (Goofy) finds out what race he is!!! Shocking dna results”). In another recording with two costars, one yells, “I told you! I told you! I told you! I'm Black! I told you! I always told you! It's only 1% but—” before the other cuts them off, dropping their smile, saying, “I'm Blacker than you” (*SHOCKING Ancestry DNA Results Revealed!!*). According to the shock and wonder present when creators who identify with Mexicanness consider the presence of Blackness these results, such Blackness was not expected but a performance of pride occurs following shock for many of these individuals.

While the discursive logics of this trend of racialization seem at odds with race as self-evidently visible, in *Technology and the Logic of American Racism* Chinn bolds the process of racial (re)inscription through rhetorical means: “The visibility of the body does not determine its meanings, but is determined by them; it's only after we learn to read them that they become visible, something out of which we can see, something we can use to prove that they are workable as evidence after all” (Chinn 8). The body as evidence, Chinn notes, provides an opportunity to read “difference,” which Chinn observes is actually “a system of valuation in which the dominant is rendered invisible and the subordinate hypervisible for the purposes of control, and the reverse for the purposes of normalization” (8). Rephased for the purposes of this case study as one focused on practices of identification, such “difference” I take to be synonymous with enacting and performing identificatory division. One way to read Blackness within this context, then, especially in contrast to what will surface in discussions of European (i.e., White) percentages, is that non-Whiteness, here Blackness, is rhetorically couched as

positive because it is "cool," a marker with a history of being associated with a subculture in the U.S. Nancarrow et al in "An analysis of the concept of cool and its marketing implications," note the racialized and capitalistic histories of being cool by pointing to "the post-war Beats" for their "absorb[tion] of black culture." (Nancarrow et al. 314). If genetic ancestry tests reveal a "system of valuation," enacted through practices of identification here, it can be read for its complicity. Specifically, by leaving unacknowledged the commodification of Blackness as cultural currency in the context of its systemic creation and history, the superficiality of excitement over ancestry percentages expresses a value for cultural markers relevant in the present—devoid of history. In other words, the identification with Blackness while identifying with Mexicanness signals it is desired for its current connotations culturally and racially. These affective details narrow the historical frame to focus on "cool" ancestry and creators are unlikely to engage in larger systemic questions that link the past to the present.

In turning to Blackness's situatedness in the past, I now turn to patterns in the videos that reference what can be considered common knowledge about human genetic history, namely the point that "the major migration of anatomically modern humans—people like us—out of Africa [happened] about 100,000 years ago" (Raff 184). Allusions to Blackness do reference this scientific history, specifically the perspectives of genetic test results concerning this "past" as rationale against racism (yet not explicitly anti-Black racism). This discourse can be seen in Chito's Chispa's video, "A Latina's (Mexican) Ancestry DNA Results!! *NOT WHAT SHE EXPECTED*.". The recording, which was published on YouTube in 2021, stars two creators, one of whom, Augustin, situates the context of their results by remarking, "I'm pretty sure everyone's DNA originates from some sort of an African state…or country, digo ["I'm saying"]….It doesn't make any sense— [to] judge people off their color" (*A Latina's (Mexican)*

*Ancestry DNA Results!! *NOT WHAT SHE EXPECTED**). While there is not substantial engagement with the African percentages themselves, they return to this point at the recording's close. Augustin says in summation: "But we all come from the same thing. That's one thing I noticed that kind of throws me off a little bit. Like, we're all from Africa. Everybody's got a percentage of African [sic]." The creator accompanying him agrees, saying: "Todos tenemos un poquito de colorsito, [We all have a little bit of color]," a small giggle coming at the end of the sentence. What we see in this exchange suggests that when considering the category through which one is divided from identificatory practices with Mexicanness, African ancestry is relevant in historical terms so general that it involves "everybody." In other words, the complicity is kept a point of non-discussion.

This blanket inclusion is important because, with Jafri's "messy, complicated and entangled" conception of settler "complicity" in mind, such a simplification of meaning-making for anyone with a percentage reflected under a category signaling Black ancestry (e.g., "Africa") stands out for its homogenization, irrespective of the differences that are rhetorically enacted through identificatory practices according to Burke. Not acknowledging this division has political ramifications. In *The Post-Racial Mystique: Media and Race in the Twenty-First Century*, Catherine Squires notes that "This…multicultural nation draws upon neoliberal ideologies of market individualism, whereby race/ethnicity presents us with specific choices to navigate: *whether to or not to join groups founded by people of our race*; whether to consume cultural products that reflect the customs or tastes of racial Others" (Squires 6, emphasis mine). In a world in which race is unimaginably discursively inert or unnecessary, the politics of identification are affected. Discussing race is passé.

In addition, the kinds of "universal" arguments typical of liberal humanism that

overstress commonality have import to these practices of identification as they can also cancel the necessity to have such discussions. While, in Burke's theorization of identification, commonality is part of identification, it does not mean that the two entities are not distinct. Specifically, in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke writes: "Similarly, two persons may be identified in terms of some principle they share in common, an 'identification' that does not deny their distinctness" (Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* 21). Yet, across his work, he speaks on the universality of motives and also writes that such gestures to human-wide inclusion should be questioned as well, writing that "It would certainly be no new thing to rhetoric if highly *discriminatory* claims were here being protected in the name of *universal* rights" (Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* 33, emphasis in original). In fact, Burke's thoughts on universalism are salient for their political implications when they speak in the name of justice and against discrimination. I quote him here at length critiquing the tendency for psychoanalysis to focus too closely on subjective motives and not on structural or social issues in a given context:

> The sheer dialectics of 'justice' strongly invites this error [of "concealing the nature of exclusive social relations behind inclusive terms for sexual relations"]. For justice is the *universalization* of a standard. Hence, if one is made neurotic by *social* discriminations (by the hierarchy of class), translation of the disorders into terms of the universally sexual and the universally familial may, by such speciously universal terms, appeal by speaking in the accents of 'truth' and 'justice.' Instead of saying, "My *class* is the victim of a *social* problem," one can say, in terms of the universalizing required by justice, 'We are *all* victims of a *sexual* problem.' Since the social problem will have its counterpart in sexual disorders, much "evidence" will be found for such deflection. And the deflected universalization has a 'charity' that would be lacking in the social version. (Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* 280)

Therefore, in these practices of identification, a commonality is universalized so that the distinctiveness between those who identify with Mexicanness and any others with Black ancestry in their results is blurred. Commonality is signaled in "Todos tenemos" ["we all have"] and "we're all the same," but the neologism of the diminutive "colorsito" suggests that my

translation of “Todos tenemos un poquito de colorsito” could not only be “We all have a little bit of color” but “We all have a little bit of a little bit of Blackness.” Across languages, for mestizos, the inclusion of Blackness when identifying with Mexicanness in one’s genetic test results situates Blackness’s relevance in the context of an ancient migratory past. This universalized commonality then illustrates a pathway that would not require reflection on colorism/anti-Blackness, without social triangulation in the present.

Following her questioning of the politics involved in “avoid[ing] the mere discussion of reparations,” Alondra Nelson alludes to the importance of history to this context (i.e., “our collective [American] biography and its consequences”)—or rather the forgetting of what our collective biography has wrought: “Historical amnesia is a lynchpin of today’s “post-racial” politics—out of sight, out of mind—and bringing the history of racial discrimination into view has become one of the principle jobs of genetic ancestry testing” (Nelson 166). In the context of this archive of YouTube videos and comments, Blackness is situated scientifically, specifically within the idea that Western science shows that all humans have African origins. Armed with empirical evidence, creators and commenters make a supposedly objective argument following from this shared ancestry that racism is illogical. This scientifically grounded "truth" can then remain unchanged by the social and structural realities of the present, as shared with creators on screen, as empirical evidence signals that discussions of racism are unnecessary.

Genetic Whiteness: Affective Aversion in Confronting Settler Empires

When Whiteness surfaced across this archive, practices of identification with Mexicanness signaled it as separateness from the cultural identity. Commonly, Whiteness is historically referenced through details on the settler empire of New Spain. The settler nationalism of Mexico is at times critiqued elsewhere in the comment section. Affective reactions to Whiteness consist

of shock similar to the last section, but *dismay* at results corresponding to categories such as "European" as "White" or "American" foil against the affect I analyzed in the previous section.

Within patterns of creators identifying with Mexicanness or commenters identifying what Mexicanness is, the affect of pride or dismay lines up with phenotypical assumptions of the identifiably "Mexican" body: vaguely brown and sometimes "Asian." For example, creator Alexandria Matthews, who was born in the U.S., posted a video of her own results but also another of her mother's (who is from Mexico) because she was interested in comparing her ancestry considering her father is "white American." Many commenters seemed to respond in light of this. One comment from Ángel García de la Reina reads, "Your mother looks more Spaniard than a lot of Spaniards hahaha" (*My Mexican Mom's DNA Results | 23andMe*). Another from LemonDrop states: "Yet, you both look just European. There are many different types of Europeans, many different type of looks". In some cases, especially within the comments, phenotypical Whiteness is suggested to nullify claims to Indigenous ancestry and prompts an affective response, a type of peacocking of results thought to signal "more" Indigenous ancestry. For instance, in Alexandria Matthews's video, sea pearl got 11 replies and wrote: "All these Mexican ancestry results are mostly 50%-60%+ European. Mine says 70%+ Native American. 😀" (*My Mexican Mom's DNA Results | 23andMe*). sea pearl received an affirmation with a reply from @roycereano3996 that got 3 likes simply stating: "Your [sic] native [yellow thumbs-up emoji]" (*My Mexican Mom's DNA Results | 23andMe*). In this context, @Realii177 joined to add, "you just [sic] tell it when people have that caucasian features even though it's half, can clearly tell like between mestizo and really native/indigenous." Similarly to the previous section, the genetic test results provide empirical grounding to a visual common sense in identifying Mexicanness.

In discussions of Whiteness, commenters utilize the empirical proof of the tests alongside colonial histories and phenotype to qualify identifying Mexicanness. With jchv88's remark, phenotype as visual common-sense lines up with history and scientific proof: "I knew from the start of the video that your mom was going to come mostly Spanish/European with some Native American. The almost 7% North African she got on her results came from the Moorish invasion that the Iberian Peninsula had many years ago" (Alexandria Matthews). Commenters chimed in to repeatedly state that the genetic results were common visual knowledge that could be *seen* before such results were scientifically "known," giving this practice of identification communal validity. In a similar recording, in which the creator thought "66% European" was "… way more than I thought I would be" and "crazy," Ahora ya writes in a comment: "Logical results. Basically mestizo from Spanish colonists and indigenous peoples in Mexico. Spain was part of the Roman Empire and there were Roman and Greek colonies in Spain, so that is where the Italian-Greek side comes. So nothing strange. You are more descendant from Spanish colonists than from Natives" (*My Mexican Ancestry DNA RESULTS I'M WHAT!*). These practices of identifying Mexicanness do utilize history and science to essentially argue against certain creators' practices of identification with Mexicanness as a non-Whiteness.

The results surrounding Whiteness provoke jokes or such remarks between some. In Chitos Chispa's "A Latina's (Mexican) Ancestry DNA Results!! *NOT WHAT SHE EXPECTED*," one of two creators reacts to "11%" under "France" by covering her mouth in shock as the other creator in the video jokes, "Dang! She said, 'Bonjour!' She said, 'Bonjour, Bon appetite,' dijo!" (*A Latina's (Mexican) Ancestry DNA Results!! *NOT WHAT SHE EXPECTED**). The hand-over-mouth shock coupled with the joke suggests that Whiteness, at the level of 11% is a contrast to the same creator's excitement at receiving 3% under the African ancestry result. Whiteness is

also deemed "weird" later in this same recording: looking down at a phone, Augustín says, "I had a bunch of weird things." To which the cocreator reacts by looking at the phone and agreeing, "Yeah… Norway… Ireland … Southern Italy, that's true" ("Latina's (Mexican) Ancestry DNA Results!! *NOT WHAT SHE EXPECTED*"). Many, like the creator Dancing With B E L L A, rhetorically asked if anyone would have ever guessed their genetic makeup before this: "Who would have thought I was Irish or Scottish?" (*My Chicana Ancestry DNA Test Results!*). Many were taken aback specifically because the number was too high: "Second biggest"…. "I wasn't surprised at all about getting Spain. I just for some reason didn't think it would be up to 33%. Maybe like 20 or something. [laughs]" The same creator was also "surprised" at "how high" "14%" was for "Portugal" even though she said, "I kind of already seen that coming" (Dancing With B E L L A). The creator remarks that the results were "not surprising at all" as "a lot of Mexicans have some type of European in them" because "back in the day, the Europeans…settled in Mexico." She adds the following when reflecting on her own surprise and colonial history: "Maybe I should have learned this but…yeah, let's move on." This is an instance in which a creator, identifying consistently with a Mexican cultural identity, reflects on colonial history in the presence of shock, but those details are left unexamined.

In these videos, European ancestry, which is definitionally part of mestizo history, is painted negatively at times and insinuates a type of genetic White victimhood. For example, consider Kal El's discussion of being categorically White: "most Mexicans are 50/50 spanish *unfortunately*, got to go a bit more south in Guatemala to get the 95% or more pure indigenous people that werent [sic] colonized in the deep jungle" (*My Mexican Mom's DNA Results | 23andMe*). Here, the genetic results of Whiteness are read as "unfortunate." This victimization of Whiteness, though referencing a colonial past, discusses only the present through the effects such genetic

results have on the consumer/individual posting their video. In this way, practices of identification with Mexicanness do not break but bend to fold in Whiteness in light of colonial histories further back and not yet affecting a present reality outside phenotype.

In light of not discussing present systemic realities around Whiteness, practices of identification with Mexicanness that disparage White ancestry stand out for their framing as "reverse racism." For instance, in Ancestry with Andrea's comment section, aptand left the following comment, "I've watched like 50 of these now and I have never heard anyone say 'I'm X amount European, that's so awesome.' Why do people hate Europeans so much?" This theme of white victimization is one that rarely considers historical circumstances and geographical contingencies. For example, in the comment section to "[MEXICAN AMERICAN GIRL TAKES ANCESTRY DNA TEST...THESE ARE THE RESULTS]....NOT NATIVE AMERICAN?," Noodly Appendage's comment illustrates that "reverse racism" can occur when simultaneously understanding identification and racialization ahistorically:

> Hello Celi, the reason why your Mexico result doesn't come under "Indigenous American" is because the term has been highly politicised. So basically if your heritage were from the USA or Canada you would be called "Indigenous American". This is because the indigenous people there are now the vast minority of the population. In Mexico, the indigenous people are still the majority. It's the same with the UK. I'm indigenous to the UK however it doesn't come under the term "Native British" or even "Indigenous British" because we're still the majority. It's silly political correctness but hey ho.. it's very similar to the whole racism thing going on nowadays. Where African Americans can't be called racist or held accountable for their racism because they are a minority. They say "You can only be racist if you are a European American/white". 🙄 Anyway great vid✌ (*[MEXICAN AMERICAN GIRL TAKES ANCESTRY DNA TEST...THESE ARE THE RESULTS]....NOT NATIVE AMERICAN?*)

Mike King writes that the argument of white victimhood "fundamentally erodes the political and discursive space upon which actual, materialist claims about racial inequality can even be coherently expressed" (King 92). This historical cacophony rides high in the comment above, which cannot be said to be an adequate contextualization for any "race," non-White or White.

Such a simplification or misunderstanding of context for Whiteness, even in the U.S., should be noted in these practices. Wailoo makes clear that as a term, Whiteness has a political history of strategic simplification, a rhetorical tactic made useful through practices of identification: "The term white collapsed a wide range of groups with diverse heritages—from Irish to Italians, from Jews to Northern and Southern Europeans, from English to Germans and Eastern Europeans—into a single category, encouraging them to identify with one another. White operated in much the same way that people of color or black did: to create a unified perspective and set of cultural investments" (Wailoo et al. 114).

While the shock and aversion to Whiteness in these videos is not "reverse racism," it does suggest a necessity to grapple with rhetorical implications of history past the inception of New Spain. The surprise with which people react to Whiteness can mean much for practices of identification. To return to Ahmed's points regarding the political possibilities that shock can have when linked to wonder, she bolds that "wonder allows us to see the surfaces of the world as made, and as such wonder opens up rather than suspends historicity. Historicity is what is concealed by the transformation of the world into 'the ordinary', into something that is already familiar, or recognisable." (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 170). In short, the affect of wonder, and shock by relation, *could* prompt a reckoning, but such work is deferred. As says Dancing With B E L L A, "yeah, let's move on."

Genetic Mexicanness and Unsurprising Histories

This bodily logic that all Mexicans are Indigenous is reflective of nationalisms illustrated in this project's first chapter. The pattern of identifying Mexicanness through a body's mixedness or non-whiteness through Indigenous ancestry was common in these videos. This is likely due to Mexico's settler nationalism's influence on Mexican-American cultural identity as well, which

"fossilizes" the Indigenous figure for the cohesion of its body politic (Alberto, "Nations, Nationalisms, and Indígenas").

Creators emphasize their expectation of Indigenous ancestry being present in their results. In contrast to the other sections, in which the affective details of shock and surprise surfaced regularly, this section was typified by less shock, due perhaps to the racialized politics stressing pride in Indigenous ancestry from the Chicano movement. As Augustin mentions regarding his cocreator in "A Latina's (Mexican) Ancestry DNA Results!!," he "was not surprised to be honest. I knew her major [sic] was going to be Indigenous Mexico." (Chitos Chispa "A Latina's (Mexican) Ancestry DNA Results!! *NOT WHAT SHE EXPECTED*"). La Karencita notes her results, which relay to a percentage of "96% Mesoamerican and Andean," with the following: "A lot of people are mixed in Mexico obviously and it's very common to think that a lot of people's DNA, they're with Spain, but it wasn't my case." ("Why do I look Asian? Mexican DNA test results reveal").

The repetition of lacking surprise suggests an identification that is rote historically, as suggested by the detail of "the Aztecs" repeated throughout this category's results, and therefore unopened for investigation or troubling for its settler complicity from the past and continuing into the future. If shock and surprise suggest that "wonder, as an affective relation to the world, is about seeing the world that one faces and is faced with 'as if ' for the first time," which can prompt a fresh inspection of one's specific location in history, this expectation also can rhetorically suggest a closing off of identification (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 170).

Many commenters align with creators in interpreting these results, seeing themselves as part of the same community. However, political identifications can be unclear; some commenters are unaware that indigenous populations exist currently. For these creators, they identify

Mexicanness with Indigeneity of the past, as rooted in ancestors. Others do emphasize the distinction between mestizaje's inclusion of Indigenity and how they identify with the Indigenous ancestry suggested in the results. Despite this, the emotional tone remains positive when Indigeneity is included on the part of creators and commenters, possibly reflecting the "identity difficulty" associated with mestizo mourning.

Yet, even affective reactions that focus on the body "brown pride" and couched as positive should be investigated (*My Chicana Ancestry DNA Test Results!*) At one point in "A Latina's (Mexican) Ancestry DNA Results!! *NOT WHAT SHE EXPECTED*," one of the two creators looks up to the camera from her results below, smiling before providing the results for the viewers: "I'm more Indigenous American than Augustin! I'm two percent more!" she says, index and middle finger punctuating the space in front of her with a quick number-two signal. She giggles before saying, "Oooo, get on my level!" with a smile (Chitos Chispa). The results are treated as valuable to this creator. This dehumanizing tendency to focus on the social and cultural clout of Indigenous DNA is symptomatic of mestizo nationalism but is also encouraged by the ancestry tests themselves. When Araceli Keli Rodríguez is engaging with her results, she reads information from the company's website that the region associated with her genetic ancestry was home to the Aztec capital, before remarking, "Basically the Aztecs" and editing a shocked emoji to flash on screen quickly. The results situate the evidence of this creator's body in the context of a region in the past, populated by a people, Aztecs, whose language is still spoken yet whose largest group of descendants, Nahuas, have evolved culturally in other ways.

The affective reactions are also coupled with conceptions that there is a way to "be" authentically Indigenous. While this positive emotional reaction could be seen as having liberatory political implications—enhanced by the rhetorical support of referencing a hybrid

body—the practices of identifying with Mexicanness in this archive still rely on the traditional logics of mestizaje. These logics mistakenly claim a "blending" of "razas" but in truth enforce ideas of purity that continue to exoticize and affect populations across the U.S. and Mexico. Within this archive, this can occur through language of purity or authenticity, which is a rhetoric of racialization and mestizo nationalism that stations Indigenous communities within economies demanding them to perform Indigenous culture and embodiment for profit (Rico-Spears 44, Hellier-Tinoco *Embodying Mexico*). For instance, Antonio Garcia congratulates the creator Dancing With B E L L A by saying: "72% Native Mexican! That's awesome! My stepmother is from Guerrero. I've been there before when I was little. I feel like our culture is very pure there and the food is amazing. Awesome results!" In another video, maca attack comments on A Paquiliztli's results, "love my Aztec blood. ❤️ soy mestizo cx Mexico 👍"

This "purity" and cultural integrity that is translated as part of the genetic results is contrasted specifically against Whiteness that is not Spanish; for instance, take the details of the intellectual and cultural achievements of "Aztecs" that are identified with and then contrasted against Whiteness in a reference to Shakespeare or "modern Europe" by James Torres:

> I'll tell you what my Aztec loving (worshippng) [sic] college educated,, [sic] computer programming, genius tio [sic] told me when I was lost spiritually, figuratively, and mentally. I was maybe fifteen or sixteen at the time. He told me, "Don't you know who you came from? Your ancestors knew things, the gringos had absolutely no concept of. They discovered zero, they knew the heavens and had a calendar more acurate [sic] than the one we use today, they were the fiercest warriors the world had known, and not only that but to be a warrior didn't mean you were an absolute barbaric neanderthal, warriors were also poets and artists, they composed sonnets that rivaled poor old Willie Shakespeare's, they devised a way to engineer and build a city so large as to rival ANY city in what was modern Europe, AND they did it in the MIDDLE of a lake. YES BE PROUD, for YOU are AZTECA!! (*[MEXICAN AMERICAN GIRL TAKES ANCESTRY DNA TEST...THESE ARE THE RESULTS]....NOT NATIVE AMERICAN?*)

The affective details working within a context of alluding to an Indigenous group, to which Aztlán was a homeland, are identified and contrasted with the contemporary place of Europe.

The pride here in identifying culturally with the Indigenous ancestors specifically sets up an argument of temporal identification in which the symbols of the past are meant to propel us forward communally. Taking this fossilization of the Indigenous ancestor foremost for its settler complicity, I also hold this affective evidence as indicative of the lived experience and collective memory of Mexicans within the colonized Americas, but more so for those detribalized and offered the "white approval, and…rewards and privileges of whiteness for themselves at the expense of other racialized populations" (Lipsitz 3).

Although phenotype is often alluded to with pride, it also incites reactions of anxiety or insecurity. In the comments of Ancestry with Andrea's results, for example, Sandra Velazquez miller emphasizes the foundation of "admixture" stressed within her expectations about her test results, specifically because of Mexico's past. This creator links herself with "Aztecs," yet perhaps "wondering" considering she is "light-skinned," a complication of the present, a present perhaps not distinguished enough by a genetic "origin:" "This is really cool I'm from Mexico City and always wondered what I was mixed with I love yo think Aztec of course but I'm light skinned :(lol not sure I'm [sic]." In A Paquiliztli's comment section, CallMe AJ says "Thank you for this! I'm currently dealing with this identity difficulty right now as a proud Mexican. For the longest, I didn't know that there were indigenous populations so I started researching because I wanna get close to my roots. I want to see if I have strong indigenous roots or if I'm more Mestizo. I can't afford the results, so I'm living through you :) Edit: my family is from Puebla!"

Even experiences surrounding phenotype that suggest non-Whiteness introduce themes of anxiety around practices of identification with Mexicanness for some creators. A specific affective experience connected to identification with Mexicanness surfaced repeatedly for creators that should be noted is being identified by others as "Asian." Namely, anecdotes of

being mistaken for being Asian surfaced in the archive, their own vein of identification. For instance, La Karencita writes the following in the caption of her published recording: "Everybody has been guessing my ethnicity. But what secrets does my latino [sic] DNA hold. [sic] People say I'm Philipina, Vietnamese, Indigenous, and everything else.… What do you think?… I just knew that I was Mexican…However, when I was living in Vietnam, everyone thought I was Vietnamese! They couldn't believe that I was a Latina" (*Why Do I Look Asian?*). In this case, the creator describes lived experience abroad in the videos, marking it as an exigence for seeking these results. The creator A Paquiliztli, who goes by Diego, includes an anecdote that highlights the confusion in these experiences with "Asian" people:

> People, when they meet me, they kind of get confused. They think that like I'm mixed then I was explain I am Mexican, but it turns out they're kind of right. I even remember one time or I always get you know people always think that…I have some other background they think that I'm Asian or they they add one time, my landlord when I moved into San Francisco. his first question to me was so what part of the Philippines is your family from and then I was like I'm Mexican it was so awkward. It was awkward, Anyways… (*My Mexican Ancestry DNA Results*)

A comment in Diego's comment section by Animal crackers sympathizes with the anecdote of racial confusion, especially being mistaken as Asian: "I'm part Mexican and people always think I'm from the Philippines too xD i [sic] think it's because lots of people in Mexico and Phillipines are both technically asian (native american/filipino) [sic] and spanish mixed. I get italian, asian, and "Mediterranean" a lot. Thanks for sharing this :)" (*My Mexican Ancestry DNA Results*). While there are worthwhile discussions the discipline of rhetorical studies could have regarding the scientific migratory histories/theories and racialization of Asians and peoples descended from Indigenous populations, this repetitive embodied experience of racialized confusion, which springs from the logic that race is visible in particular phenotypical features, should be examined for the elements of mestizo mourning influencing these identificatory patterns as well as their

rhetorical force. Discussing the range of polysemy possible in a sign's physicality in "Persuasion's Physique," José G. Izaguirre III says: "Coming to grips with the ways in which a physical world is or is not persuasive… is the work of no other art except rhetoric" (Izaguirre III 357).

The history of legal confusion surrounding Mexicanness and settler conceptions of Indigeneity, specifically "Pueblo exceptionalism," has been discussed by scholars such as Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo. The scholars illustrate how "U.S. law opportunistically enabled the project of rendering savage all other natives. The decisions also differentiated Mexicans from Indians, for although the decisions repeatedly made clear that Mexico had fully enfranchised the Pueblo as equals, they also made it clear that "Mexican" and "Indian" were not one and the same" (Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo 561; Saldaña-Portillo *Indian Given x*). Therefore, other comments from creators and viewers expressing confusion reflect the influence of settler colonial structures on the practices of identifying (with) Mexicanness. Those identifying with Mexicanness read their DNA results and embodied experiences across this complicated historical backdrop.

Therefore, the confusion surrounding how to identify on multiple levels, but namely racially, for creators surfaces not only as a motivation to take these genetic ancestry tests but also in identifying with specific provided categories of the results. While there are many ways to read this, I take this confusion around identification to concern the categorizations imposed upon the body and bodily evidence through DNA to subscribe to contemporary settler realities of naming peoples by settled places/conquered space. This is reflective of United States identity politics for those identified as Mexican specifically. While it is clear many Mexicans across the archive are racialized in varying ways and possibly through various means of evidence, "those physical differences which register in the consciousness as 'difference' are keyed to particular social and

historical circumstances" (Jacobson 174). Therefore, the histories of mestizo mourning and Pueblo exceptionalism can be taken into account when DulceCandyTV struggles identifying with her results. Specifically, the creator echos arguments that are structured through U.S. conceptions of Indigeneity, one in which "Native American" and "Mexican" are mutually exclusive of one another to the creator: "You can see here this is the Native American blood it doesn't give me a specific location as to where it comes from so I am assuming that is where my Mexican blood comes from because I am full-on Mexican and I don't know that I never knew that I had anything else in my blood which makes it really cool so that's the 35 percent" (*MY SHOCKING MEXICAN DNA RESULTS!*).

I agree that despite claims of acculturation, in the face of continued settler colonial structures and the powers of racialized capitalism, which exacerbate migration globally and structures daily lives, "most Latinos/as who are immigrants or their descendants have not so easily become 'white' and 'American.' Americans of color must struggle constantly with great Anglo-conformity pressures to adapt to white normative and socioeconomic structures, and thus to hoary white racial framing" (Feagin and Cobas 52). Yet the aversion to discussing Blackness or Whiteness in ways that are rigorously relational or structural means that many identifying with Mexicanness are ignoring the settler colonial experience in which we find ourselves—both past and present—and signals a missed opportunity for rich engagement toward decolonization through identification.

Conclusion

In a project dedicated to investigating the practices of identification with Mexicanness across settler nations, this chapter has functioned as a case study identifying patterns of affect and averted histories within genetic ancestry results for those with "Mexican DNA." This chapter

adds further detail to the concept of "mestizo mourning" that surfaced in this project's pan-historiography. The practices of identification, even at the scale of the individual body, I argue, are affected by the settler histories, such as anti-Blackness, White supremacy, mestizo supremacy, and mestizo mourning. These histories are evidenced in the analysis's illustrations of avoiding the structural present of anti-Blackness by fetishization of Blackness and situating it as relevant in the distant past of ancient human migration; in the aversion to confronting uncomfortable affects associated with White genetic ancestry; and the fossilization of Indigenous peoples that erases surviving peoples actively resisting border imperialism and settler policies within the Americas who do not exclusively identify with Mexicanness. The intertwined connections in this analysis between affect, history, and racialization highlight the crucial role rhetoric plays in identifying these patterns of identification. This is essential for exposing their complicity with settler colonialism and for intervening in the perpetuation of settler futures and the violent realities they impose on everyone.

This violence, which connects us all, is not a topic that all confront, but, as illustrated in the videos of this archive, some "Mexicans" do. Take this comment from Araceli Keli Rodríguez's video posted by Rafael Torres that speaks to assimilability and futures: "Yup sounds Mexican to me we are bunch of mixed race taco eating tequila drinking 🥳 party loving mostly Catholics that speak Spanish and English and hard working too. My results that I can remember because it's been a while is 42% Native American 42% Spaniard, 8% Portuguese 1% England 1% Moroccan and the rest Northern Africa. So this *makes me perfect Mexican I get along with everyone*🥰" (*[MEXICAN AMERICAN GIRL TAKES ANCESTRY DNA TEST...THESE ARE THE RESULTS]....NOT NATIVE AMERICAN?*). The "perfect Mexican" this comment suggests is not only one who is mixed, but possesses an inherent flexibility in temperament or racial

makeup as a predicator of social, political, and economic agreeableness for those around them. Assimilation has been an undercurrent that has marked an expectation for racialized Mexicans within the U.S. body politic explicitly. Such expectations for inclusion in the U.S. body politic have set up the affective conditions of mestizo mourning, a mark of colonial trauma that also, as shown in this chapter's case study, can allow a side-stepping of the ramifications of aspiring to complicity for privileges within settler states. In scoring the affective, historical, and racialized details of these YouTube videos and their comments centered around genetic ancestry results for those with "Mexican DNA," this chapter's case study bolds the necessity to acknowledge the messiness and layered rhetorics that locate politics of specific racialized group more dynamically than the standard settler colonial triad.

Lastly, while this chapter's case study might strike the chord of pessimism, I hope rhetoric's ability to track the praxis of identification might provide visions of alternative futures, as I will explore in the conclusion. The next chapter will take us from this digitally bound context toward the geographically bound site of the settler state of Mexico. While the influence of indigenismo on this chapter's practices of identification was made manifest through genetic ancestry test results, this last chapter will explicate the country's current instantiation of settler nationalism through examination of a megadevelopment project recently made operational in 2023: Tren Maya.

Chapter 3: "¡Súbete Al Tren!": Settler Identification in the Mexican Megadevelopment Project of Tren Maya

On December 16, 2018, the 65th president of the United Mexican States, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), spoke specifically to Indigenous people about their role in the Mexican national narrative during a ceremony commemorating the construction start of a megadevelopment railway project, El Tren Maya. This train had been announced during AMLO's presidential campaign and at least one section of the train was successful by December 15, 2023, before AMLO saw the end of his term as President. This railway project is named after the ancient Mayan civilization, for the territory that compromises its route was also the area in which the civilization spanned during its "classical" period. The route's area in the Yucatan Peninsula is also home to a portion of the Mayan Rainforest, the 15 million hectare rainforest that is the second largest, after the Amazon Rainforest, in what is known today as the Americas. This moment in history, namely the period of Tren Maya's initial promotion in 2018 and its construction until it first started operation on December 15, 2023, is the context of this chapter's case study on identification and historical complicities with the settler state of Mexico. These complicities are mapped out in this chapter's analysis by rhetorically explicating some practices of contemporary Mexican identification at the level of the nation. The first chapter's panhistoriography included a branding of Mexico's social and aesthetic paradigm that "fossilized" Indigenous others through indigenismo, which AMLO pointedly refers to at the start of the construction ceremony (Alberto). This chapter focuses on illustrating contemporary settler identification in an analysis of a moment in Mexican national development.

The ceremony above celebrated a train named after an Indigenous group whose descendants were highlighted as present—although, many such peoples do not self-refer as "Mayans." At this ceremony, AMLO stated that he was "very pleased that the indigenous peoples

are here," referring to them as "the most intimate truth of Mexico," and presumably guarding against claims of indigenismo, adding that Mexico's

> modernity is a modernity that emerged from below, from our cultures and for everyone. ….We can all participate in the development of Mexico. We all have the right to a better life. You have the right to well-being. It is a right that must be fulfilled. Everyone will participate in this project. If we analyze it carefully, the construction of these 1,500 kilometers will generate many jobs, there will be a lot of work. ("Versión estenográfica | Ceremonia de Pueblos Originarios para construcción del #TrenMaya")

Here national identification is assisted through mestizaje, an ideology expounded in the project's first chapter, that superficially folds in Indigenous populations for the sake of national cohesion on a biological or ancestral level. National identification can also be seen in what the Mexican state argues the public should identify with regarding the environment, economy, and cultural heritage of Mexico. These three areas are the focus of this chapter's case study.

While nationalist rhetoric updates across time, as Christa Olson argues with regard to Ecuadorian nationalism in *Constitutive Visions*, nation-state identification benefits from being unchanging, often linking with claims that benefit settler states in which land and people are seen as resources. This can be perceived in what is defined as a social good in the November 15, 2023 decree from AMLO, which pushed train construction forward, despite successful litigation from the public ordering otherwise in the name of national interest ("Mexico Groups Say Maya Train Construction Has Caused Significant Deforestation"). The decree draws parallels for the nation between the contemporary moment and one 150 years ago: "…it will be 150 years since the installation of the first passenger railway in Mexico, started by President Benito Juárez García and completed by President Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada from Mexico to Veracruz. Later, the railway network connected Mexico with international markets, mainly with the United States of America, which increased trade and foreign investment." Coding settler development as good outside of time and across time grants for more expansion of national territory, the taking of land

to cast it as a resource from which to profit and own. As Taylor has emphasized in the context of Argentina, "SCT [settler colonial theory] assumes that terra nullius is a concept deployed on or around the moment of arrival in the 'new land'. However, the use of terra nullius logics in Latin America suggests something very different: that such logics could be appropriated in the period after formal independence (that is, 300 years after arrival) to be used as a tool of nation-building" (L. Taylor 351).

As work on Palestine illustrates, settler development rhetoric aims to make "policies more palatable to the general public while helping to facilitate their implementation by discursively reconfiguring the role of the state within the development process… the championing of empowerment…places the emphasis of development on the choices of the individual engaged in the market" (Hanieh 34). Keeping in mind the objective of promotional discourse, what is rhetorically productive for this chapter's case study is how the state moves the public to identify with, and ultimately support, an infrastructural project like Tren Maya. The contemporary Mexican settler state hopes these commonalities bind the public to their causes. In elucidating her own concept of *bioidentification*, Jenell Johnson clarifies that identification does not suggest commonality in identical experiences but indicates instead that "we share something fundamental in common" (Johnson 10).

To study identificatory discourse in the context of a Mexican development project, this chapter examines common motivations for identification in the arguments of this moment while including the larger context in which the project was contested. This analysis, like the analysis of the previous chapter, also highlights how identifying with the Mexican state often avoids engagement with its history, both social history and the history of the land, through arguments about what is environmentally and economically good for the nation. Ahistoricity of the locale

known today as the Yucatán Peninsula sanitizes settler history and erases the ongoing settler structure from the space, making it palatable for El Tren Maya to facilitate tourism and other capitalist gains on behalf of the state and at the expense of Indigenous land, people, and life.

The chapter will proceed toward the case study of Tren Maya by first explaining the method that guides my reading of this moment's practices of identification. Then I provide a brief timeline of the train's construction and major updates in terms of construction and public opinion. I then move toward the case study, which examines national settler identification centered on the environment and economy, both of which implicate a national cultural heritage. The practices of identification surface simultaneously in government communication such as promotional material and press conferences, messages often in response to and therefore inextricable from the public at large.

Directly after referring to "Spanish-speaking mestizo Mexicans [who] trace their ancestries, not to Castilian conquistadors, but to half-obliterated Aztecs, Mayans, Toltecs and Zapotees," Benedict Anderson bolds a mechanism that assists the "fond imagining" that patriotism as an "affection" necessitates: language. Anderson states that "whatever language history has made his or her mother-tongue …. *Through that language*, encountered at mother's knee and parted with only at the grave, *pasts are restored, fellowships are imagined, and futures dreamed*" (Anderson 154). Therefore, the language found in the promotional materials and press conferences that propose Tren Maya as a public good has a lineage, making it a prime moment to examine in this project. For this analysis of a Mexican settler development project, this chapter's case study includes over thirty items of promotional material for the train including Presidential press conferences during which the railway project is referenced. Other sources of context

include experiences, voices, and historical textures that at times foil that "fond imagining," such as lawsuits that attempted to suspended train construction.

This analysis, with a close eye to history, aims to illustrate how practices of identification in settler national contexts illustrate rhetoric *in situ*, "the history of rhetoric as richly embodied and emplaced, intertextual, dynamic in methodology, and importantly, *engaged with discourses of power to recover diverse voices, memories, and experiences* (Lamp 120). In a Burkean view of identification, this analysis provides a more expansive view of this process by not only examining the "us," but the "them" alongside the state across time. This is illustrative of the "division" inherent in the process of identification per Burke that, in this case study, authorizes the continued settler exploitation of land and people.

The voices outside of promotional material for Tren Maya function to illustrate how the Mexican state is obliquely responding to a contesting public but also remind the public that resistance persists against the settler state regardless of the successful construction of Tren Maya. The other texts I examine in this chapter are from legal entities and environmental organizations, like CEMA, or Zapatista leaders. These voices also include suits and actions against the construction of El Tren Maya, and news coverage or statements from groups such as scientists, Indigenous groups/coalitions, and other communities regarding the development project. Such a case study allows me to illustrate the parallel settler anxiety that DeLoria Jr. and Olson speak of when discussing American nationalism's necessity to assert its "magnitude" for the contemporary state of Mexico (Deloria; Olson, *American Magnitude*). For instance, publishing videos of tree transport—for trees that were technically not "felled" but transplanted elsewhere during the development of the train in the Mayan Rainforest—speaks of what environmental good is for the Mexican settler state but also speaks back to those who resisted and questioned

the train's existence on these grounds. These members of the public, those who do not wish the settler structure to persist, exist whether or not the train continues to run. Their voices surface in the case study, which allows me to draw the contours of settler identity and also serve as a testament to their continued survival and resistance.

Public Support, Environmental Impact, and Border Imperialism Surrounding the Tren Maya on the Road to Construction

Before continuing to the case study, it is first necessary to provide a brief context of Tren Maya's promotion and construction. This will include a summary of the advertised aim of the development project; details regarding the Mexican public's voting process on the train; discourse surrounding the environmental impact of the project; and factors surrounding migration at the southeast border of Mexico, the locale from which the train has and will continue to pull sources of labor and cultural capital.

The train, according to its own site, "aims to connect tourist destinations in the Caribbean with lesser-known sites inland, including historic sites from which it derives its name" (*¿Qué Es El Tren Maya?*). While not all the routes were operational when the railway first ran in December 2023, when finished it will be 932 miles of railroad divided into three routes. The first is a Gulf route running from Palenque, stopping in Tenosique, Chiapas, Escárcega, and Campeche, continuing north with stops in Maxcanú, Mérida, Izamal, Valladolid, and Cancún. From there, the Caribbean route will proceed "down to the Mayan Riviera, with stops in Puerto Morelos, Playa del Carmen, Tulum, Felipe Carrillo Puerto, and Bacalar." A "Jungle route" will run "from Bacalar to Xpujil and Calakmul, in Campeche, continuing towards the Gulf route in Escárcega, Tenosique, and Palenque. Within the circuit, the so-called "crown jewel," according to Jiménez Pons, is Calakmul, a municipality located in Campeche that possesses an

archaeological zone and an extremely important biosphere reserve (Adriana Varillas). By November 2020, members of the Regional Indigenous Council of Xpujil (CRIPX) delivered a letter with more than 268,000 signatures to Mexico's Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (Semarnat), arguing that the project ought to be permanently suspended because it "was presented in a fragmented manner, which prevents it from being evaluated integrally, and that the communities have not been given timely and sufficient information to give their consent" (*Mayan Communities of Campeche Deliver 268 Thousand Signatures against the Mayan Train. - The Yucatan Times*).

The Mexican government did poll the Mexican public for their approval of the project, but controversy also surrounds this civic process. The voting process's rationale is outlined by The Mexican government in their "Call for an Indigenous Consultation Process and Citizen Participatory Exercise," in which the priorities of territory acquisition and national economy are key. In outlining the importance of the polling process, the document lists the areas of commonalities that are the focus of the analysis that follows:

> the creation and implementation of the "El Tren Maya" is conceived as a project whose main objective is to achieve the comprehensive development of southeastern Mexico and the Yucatan Peninsula based on the following axes: territorial planning, preservation of the environment, inclusive economic development, social well-being and the protection of the tangible and intangible heritage and historical identity of the people of the region." (Mexican Federal Government).

While my analysis will focus on the environment and economy, concepts covered in this project's pan-historiography, such as indigenismo, *terra nullis*, and the notion of land or person as property, are also implicated because of Tren Maya's function as a tourist shuttle for the Yucatan Peninsula, and transport for capital goods (Harris).

According to a vote in December 2019, Tren Maya was endorsed by 92.3% of the Mexican public. The rationale listed in the announcement for the voting process claimed the train

could help with "achieving the well-being of indigenous peoples and the development of the nation based on unrestricted respect for their fundamental rights and a fair distribution of benefits" (Mexican Federal Government). This vote was criticized by the Mexican Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which bolded many points made by the public regarding the vote:

> voters were provided with only the positive effects of the project (improved attention to water supplies, health, education, employment, housing, environmental protection, and culture) but were not informed of the negative effects…[;] translations of the material used, the short period of time for the election, and low turnout, particularly among indigenous women. They noted that many potential voters did not have the financial resources to travel to the voting locations, and that the majority of voters were municipal employees. (Alexis Ortiz)

The Mexican government argued that the vote met national standards, and also that through the train's construction, basic public needs, such as access to "water, health, education, work, housing, a healthy environment and culture" were being provided (*El Gobierno de AMLO Reprocha Críticas de La ONU-DH Sobre Consulta Por Tren Maya - Proceso*). The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights felt that the basic needs provided in light of the vote affected the character of such a process.

That the voting process is criticized should also be viewed in light of the discussion on the environmental impact surrounding Tren Maya, for AMLO's administration clearly is responding to public criticism. Before construction had begun in December 2018, AMLO was proactively engaging those who challenged the train for environmental reasons, promising that "Not a single tree is going to be felled" ("Versión estenográfica | Ceremonia de Pueblos Originarios para construcción del #TrenMaya"). In addition to this promise, promotional materials frame the project not only as avoiding negative environmental impact but also mitigating the environmental harms the project might create. For example, Tren Maya's website

highlights that the project will have "a beneficial effect on the environment, as it helps reduce traffic jams and improve air quality" through its transport of tourists and other commuters (Tren Maya). At the time these benefits were published, two suspensions of the train's construction had already been successfully ruled on in favor of those contesting the train.

In addition to Indigenous objections to the validity of the voting process, their resistance has been markedly vocal and caused inter-communal contestation on local levels across the region. Much of the political action was successful in the traditional sense that legal action halted construction temporarily. For instance, the Regional Indigenous and Popular Council of Xpujil (CRIPX) filed a successful "amparo, or constitutional protection, against the government's consultation process" in January of 2021 (S. Jensen). Xpujil importantly lies on the edge of the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve, which is "in the heart of the second-largest expanse of tropical forests in the Americas" through which the second section of Tren Maya would run (S. Jensen). In the town of approximately 4000 people, most are "non-Indigenous migrants and descendants of wood and gum merchants who settled in the 20th century," which is an informing detail of the aggression Indigenous resistance has been facing there (S. Jensen). A founding member of CRIPX and Q'anjob'al Maya leader Romel González Díaz[3] voices knowing such violence personally and communally: "I have been subject to personal attacks and victimization…Our opponents have been to the houses of our colleagues and tried to pressure them into desisting"(S. Jensen; Morris). Indigenous communities, such as "members of the communities of Bacalar, Calakmul, Puerto Morelos, and Carrillo Puerto," have been clear that the train is not only misnamed as "Mayan" but that its construction implies "ecocide" (Magali Alvarez). Nicolás

[3] Both sources referencing Maya leader Romel spell last names differently; González Díaz and simply Gonzales. I am including the one with the most detail that Morris utilizes in her article for *The Guardian* "'A megaproject of death': fury as Maya train nears completion in Mexico."

Moreno, from the Calakmul Popular Indigenous Council, has made clear that the state's interests in the development of land are directly imbricated with Indigenous life and politics, saying, "Where there are indigenous peoples, nature exists, that is what we are defending. We are not against a party, my policy is life and the development of us as original peoples"(Magali Alvarez).

A response to the Mexican public contesting Tren Maya on environmental grounds can be seen through a national decree in November of 2021, which gave automatic approval for any public project the government deemed to be "in the national interest" or to "involve national security." Importantly, this decree "sidestep[ped] all environmental, accountability and feasibility review processes, and …[gave] regulatory agencies five days to grant a year-long 'temporary' approval for anything the government wants to build" ("Mexican President Decrees Automatic Approval for Projects"). In August of 2022, the First District Judge in the state of Yucatán, Adrián Fernando Novelo Pérez, granted a second suspension to the train's construction through appeal 923/2022, which aimed concern within section 5 of the train's route (CEMDA, "Otorgan suspensión definitiva para tramos 3, 4, 5 Norte y 6 del 'Tren Maya'/ Definitive suspension granted for sections 3, 4, 5 North and 6 of the 'Mayan Train'"). Despite these suspensions, in 2022 the Mexican government continued construction within section 5. Notably, this section contained many cenotes connected through underwater cave systems; these systems are liable to collapse, which may also affect the viability of drinking water (Jorge Monroy and Jesús Vázquez). Therefore, within the context of the environmental impact of Tren Maya's construction, the nation state faced an exigency: a necessity to address potential harms to both the people and the environment.

This exigency to respond to Indigenous and other public resistance was exemplified through “El Sur Resiste,” “a ten-day resistance caravan organized by [El Congreso Nacional Indígena (CNI)” (Bachhuber). Translated into English as The National Indigenous Congress, they were representative of the following peoples, including “mestizos:” “pueblos binnizá, Ayuuk, Nahua, Nuntajiyi (Nuntajuyi), Maya, Chol, Zoque, Tzeltal, Tojolabal, Tsotsil y mestizos” (“¿Qué es el CNI?”). Over 1000 activists joined together the weekend of May 6, 2023 for the culmination of the caravan in Chiapas for an international meeting titled “Global Corporate Capitalism, Planetary Patriarchy, and Autonomies in Rebellion”(Bachhuber). The title of such a meeting signals directly the understanding of settler interests colluding around the exploitation of people and place for capitalistic profit, and CNI’s website outlines such interests as an identifiable motivation around their social cohesion: “We are the people who continue to be despite the 5 centuries of extermination, violence, domination, dispossession of capitalism and its allies, the owners of money, the representatives of death. Capitalism was born from the blood of our people and continues to feed on it”(“¿Qué es el CNI?”). While the violence of antagonization of which Indigenous leaders speak makes clear lines of identification and division at work within the context of this settler development, Maya leader González Díaz bolded what the development says in being linked to Indigeneity in name when speaking at the caravan’s culminating event: “What is being done with the Maya train megaproject is not Mayan in any way. It is a decision from above” (Morris).

In a resounding response to community action in May 2023, AMLO declared Tren Maya exempt from public action and scrutiny of an environmental impact survey until a year after construction by declaring the project protected in the interest of national security (Reuters). This came despite the efforts of multiple agencies, including those working under the Mexican

government, which filed suit for mainly environmental reasons. The official decree published on November 15, 2023, framed national railway systems as necessary to the expansion and legitimacy of the state's historical "progress," "fostering the integration of the national territory, reducing distances and facilitating the movement of people and goods….[allowing] the use of resources in remote areas, stimulat[ing] agriculture and mining, and favor[ing] the establishment of new towns and economic growth" (*DECRETO Por El Que Se Declara Área Prioritaria Para El Desarrollo Nacionahhl, La Prestación Del Servicio Público de Transporte Ferroviario de Pasajeros En El Sistema Ferroviario Mexicano.*). Yet, the immediate environmental effects in the area of construction showcased dramatic change. For example, in August 2023 the Mexican environmental organization CartoCrítica "released satellite data showing that almost 16,500 acres had been deforested, much of it reportedly in violation of Mexican federal regulations" (Margherita Bassi). Therefore, the Mexican state framing economic growth or profit as a justification for the tangible effects on the area and potential harm to the people becomes a persuasive pattern aligning with the common themes observed in this chapter's case study.

A last note regarding the context of Tren Maya's construction and the posturing of its importance to national interests, and therefore national identification, must keep in view the international context of migration. Mexico's relationship with the U.S., its settler neighbor to the north, comes into view within the case study not only through the tourist industry but through the stopping of migrants and making laborers of them. As Olson illustrates in *American Magnitude,* power asserted by a nation is done so relationally, and on an international stage (Olson, *American Magnitude* 64). The moves of power on a national front can be seen in the environmental context so central to Tren Maya's controversies. For instance, by 2020 AMLO had already investigated nine non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that opposed Tren Maya's

construction; “López Obrador’s spokesman, Jesus Ramírez, …[remarked] the non-profit groups had ‘curiously’ all received grants from U.S. foundations” (Mark Stevenson, “Mexico President Attacks Environmentalists’ Foreign Funding”) (Michael Layton).

The tensions between both settler states as they enforce imperialism on their respective borders are clear. From a Zapatista blog, Enlace Zapatista, Insurgent Subcommander Moisés said the following in November 2023:

> Federal, state, and local military and police forces are not in Chiapas to protect the civilian population. They have the sole purpose of stopping migration. That is the order that came from the North American government. As is their way, they have turned migration into a business. Human trafficking is a business of the authorities who, through extortion, kidnapping and buying and selling of migrants, shamelessly enrich themselves (Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés).

The Mexican military increased its presence within the southeast of Mexico through Tren Maya’s construction. This presence also extended into the future as the military was permanently charged with the train’s operation.

That the U.S. surfaces as an opponent to the project that became linked to national security is linked to a long history between the nations but also an acute context that includes U.S. public health law, Title 42. From March 2020 until May 2023, Title 42 meant migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border “were returned over the border [into Mexico] and denied the right to seek asylum. U.S. officials turned away migrants more than 2.8 million times” (Colleen Long). A U.S. Congressional Research Service report in 2023 explained that this public health law “shifted some of the burden of handling migrants from the United States to Mexico” (Seelke). Mexico, similarly to the U.S., operates in line with a settler suspicion of migrants: “Senior INM officials said they do not believe most people seeking refugee status in Mexico have legitimate claims, either because they do not believe they are truly fleeing violence and persecution or because they believe most would prefer to seek asylum in the US” (“Mexico”).

Therefore, before Title 42's expiration in May of 2023, Mexico's moves within a transnational stage of migration highlight the economic utility of Tren Maya for the local populations at the southeast border of Mexico. In 2018, AMLO stressed that through the programs the train would bring to the region, "Young people will no longer have to go and make a living elsewhere. Migration will now be optional, it will not be mandatory, because there will be work in the communities, there will be work in the towns" ("Versión estenográfica | Ceremonia de Pueblos Originarios para construcción del #TrenMaya"). In the Tren Maya YouTube video "El Tren Maya apoya la economía de las familias," published December 29, 2022, the economic benefit of the train is framed as a help to families within the region, rhetorically asking the public: "Did you know that Tren Maya is the main source of employment in the southeast…and generated more than 100,000 jobs …supporting the economy of families and inhabitants of the region who will not have than going out to work far from home?" (*El Tren Maya Apoya La Economía de Las Familias/The Mayan Train Supports the Economy of Families*). This last excerpt should be noted for its inclusion of not only citizens of the southeast of Mexico but its *inhabitants* as well, such as migrants who have been frozen geographically by the politics of border imperialism across the settler nations of the US and Mexico. With this context in mind, I will now proceed to outline the environmental and economic commonalities that the Mexican state argues the public should identify with to support Tren Maya.

Environment, Economy, and Cultural Heritage

AMLO argues that Tren Maya illustrates progress through justice, "progresso con justicia" (*Why Mexico's $29B Train Megaproject Is So Controversial | WSJ Breaking Ground*). This undertone of public empowerment in development rhetoric has been noted by Adam Hanieh, speaking on the Israeli settler context in "Development as Struggle: Confronting the

Reality of Power in Palestine," stressing that a discursive shift favoring language of empowerment in development projects "makes those policies more palatable to the general public while helping to facilitate their implementation by discursively reconfiguring the role of the state within the development process" (Hanieh 34). This settler tendency interacts with Mexico's specific history with social welfare: "Since the early 1980s, a wave of debt crisis and subsequent socioeconomic austerity policies have led the state to withdraw from its previous role as social benefactor and guardian of national cultural patrimony" (A. Taylor 109). Such work has also been noted by rhetorical scholars such as Rebecca Dingo with an eye to global stakeholders like those Hanieh also has in mind, such as the World Bank (Dingo).

How Tren Maya has been presented as an environmental and economic good with which to identify should be examined for important structural, historical, and communal realities. In his November 2023 decree establishing the train as a project of national security and development, AMLO's argument was delineated thusly:

> That it is in the interest of the Government of Mexico to promote the implementation of passenger railways that improve the quality of life, well -being and mobility of people by virtue of the fact that it represents: (I) economical public transportation; (II) less polluting public transport (especially considering that it can be modernized to become electric transport) ; (III) safer public transportation; and (IV) the best alternative to increase the mobility of the population in the main cities. (*DECRETO Por El Que Se Declara Área Prioritaria Para El Desarrollo Nacional, La Prestación Del Servicio Público de Transporte Ferroviario de Pasajeros En El Sistema Ferroviario Mexicano.*)

Yet, through viewing the promotion, whether through the Tren Maya YouTube channel, AMLO's press conferences, and governmental events such as the Mayan ritual performed at the start of the train's construction, I argue that this settler rhetoric aims to make identification with the nation-state of Mexico palatable by naturalizing the material, irreversible, and interconnected effects to the environment and public for the sake of economic progress. This entails the rhetorical treatment of the environment and the people of the Yucatan peninsula as tourist goods

sanitized of their historical context, pointedly welcoming to foreign investors and international and domestic tourists. When appreciative of the context, especially of Indigenous resistance and communal legal suits, the framing of environmental good relies on the language of mitigation when discussing harm done. Therefore, the analysis will proceed by contextualizing the commonalities of contemporary Mexican settler identification for Tren Maya, focusing on those persuasive for their environmental and economic commonalities.

Environmental Good as Commonality for the Mexican Settler State

In arguments regarding the environment, the commonality is rhetorically positioned as offsetting the negative impact necessary for settler development and appreciation of Mexican cultural heritage. This strategy, through appreciation of public contestation, including Indigenous resistance, can be understood as mitigation. This of course does not include the impact and violence of conceiving of the land as a resource in a non-relational way that is endemic to a settler worldview of land and resources as property. These commonalities that make up environmental good for the nation happen both within a present context as well as one further back in time. The first is of public concern to this specific locale of rainforest and the "longer" is a history of contestation, persistence, and survival that is sterilized for the national good of (re)discovering cultural heritage. These intentional ahistorical engagements are also advantageous for international tourism, making the locale appealing despite welfare and safety concerns for the people of the Yucatán Peninsula. Ahistoricity ultimately supports the Mexican settler state's insistence of its own authority to make the land productive and displace land and life much like the Spanish empire's Requerimiento of 1513. This text, "a sixteenth-century Spanish text used to formalize conquests in the Americas" was read by representatives of the Spanish crown to besieged Indigenous populations "to license myriad acts of war against the

Americas' indigenous peoples by providing an incontestable legal basis for military action…for just conquest laid out in the papal bulls" (Faudree 182-3,185).

The location of Tren Maya's route and construction are notable for their biodiversity and environmental particularities, to the public as well as the government. Tren Maya's environmental context stands out already in its geographic association with a Maya civilization of the past and in overlapping with the Mayan Rainforest, specifically with tramway 5, which runs close to cenotes, underwater cave systems sometimes accessible through dry conditions; in other conditions, underwater divers take to the water in excavation. These cenotes are notable for their sacred association with the "classic Mayan civilization," who still are considered stewards of the land. Tren Maya's construction and its environmental impacts are also notable for a second reason, their potential to become sinkholes. In 2019, CONAHCYT (abbreviated Spanish for el Consejo Nacional de Humanidades, Ciencias y Tecnologías—The National Council of Humanities, Sciences and Technologies) stated sink holes are possible because of the structuring of the water table involved within the peninsula and the "the ring of cenotes…in the jungles of the Calakmul region." These cenotes, which again are (currently) underwater cave systems, are some of the largest in the world. Their potential to become sinkholes is compounded by another aspect of Tren Maya's construction, interference with the forest ecosystems's usual conditions of photosynthesis. In their plans for Tren Maya's construction, the government promised they would not fell a tree, but transplantation still equates to an absence of an original tree, grown in its original environment. Despite the government's agency providing research on these effects and attempting to mitigate environmental impact by transplanting trees, the settler logic of mitigation from AMLO's administration suggests a view of an environment as dislocatable and removable and not meaningfully and deeply interconnected (CONAHCyT).

At the root of the commonality of environmental good the public can potentially identify with is the action of mitigation. On the Tren Maya homepage in 2019, the following was said of the project's environmental impact—which was before AMLO issued a decree deferring the submission of any environmental impact statement:

> In accordance with the environmental impact studies, containment, mitigation and compensation measures will be established. The idea is to minimize the negative impact of the work on the environment….where it is not possible to completely contain the effects, they will be counteracted with programs aimed at recovering these resources…. will help contain urban expansion, stop environmental predation, improve connectivity between communities and improve people's quality of life. (*¿Qué Es El Tren Maya?*)

Considering that mitigation is promised "where it is not possible to completely contain the [negative] effects," the efforts afterward are painted as laudable and consolatory goals within the context of settler expansion and development. This mitigation therefore primes discussion of environmental impact to begin after development, making it an inevitability.

A notable place where mitigation comes to life is through the publicity of governmental measures to offset environmental impact. Such a promise became a literal image issue when 2023 footage revealed hectares of forest that had already been affected by the construction of Tren Maya ("Mexico Groups Say Maya Train Construction Has Caused Significant Deforestation"). In the promotional YouTube video "El Tren Maya siembra vida," translating to "El Tren Maya sows life": the narration in Spanish boasts, "Tren Maya sows life throughout the southeast," explaining at "the beginning of its construction, 500 million trees" would be planted, the "equivalent to 416,000 football fields" (*El Tren Maya siembra vida*). The video added that "175 spaces" would be designated to protect wildlife and animals or plants, one of which is part of a program with the acronym spelling out "cat" in Spanish, GATO (Grupo de Atención Técnica Operativa). Project GATO was promoted in March 2021 to address concerns about the environmental impact of the rainforest, dedicating a space for the rehabilitation of at least two

jaguars within a section of the developed train section on Tramway 5. The small scale of such a gesture stands out in noticing the local effects of construction on biodiversity and the viability of drinking water for people and other life around the construction area.

Ignoring that this practice of identification works by creating a commonality hinging on mitigation is important politically. Mitigation is cast an adequate redress to settler development of land and people as resources. The logic of mitigation is one I identify as synonymous with reformist logic. Reformist logic runs counter to abolitionist logic explicated by Ruth Wilson Gilmore in her 2007 *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Gilmore). Superficial and misunderstanding gestures such as project GATO and the transplanting of trees are representative of the ways mitigation and reformist logic keep structures preying on the land as a resource to be manipulated.

As previously stated, a notable place where mitigation comes to life is through the publicity of the promise to not fell one tree. The YouTube video,"En carretera Cancún-Tulum hubo rescate y trasplante de árboles; no tala/On the Cancún-Tulum highway there was rescue and transplantation of trees; no felling," showcases damage control after and amidst Tren Maya's development (*En Carretera Cancún-Tulum Hubo Rescate y Trasplante de Árboles; No Tala/On the Cancún-Tulum Highway There Was Rescue and Transplantation of Trees; No Felling*). The caption on the video, which emphasizes the footage was originally recorded in August 2021, includes information on the "relocation" of the "around 22,000 trees:" They went to "public spaces, like avenues and parks, in Playa del Carmen and Puerto Morelos and Cancún" (*En Carretera Cancún-Tulum Hubo Rescate y Trasplante de Árboles; No Tala/On the Cancún-Tulum Highway There Was Rescue and Transplantation of Trees; No Felling*). Yet two years later in August 2023, aerial footage released by CartoCrítica shows deforestation of "6,6,59 hectares of

jungle," of which "87% [occurred] without authorization to change the use of forest land" (CEMDA, "6 mil 659 hectáreas de selva deforestadas por la construcción del Tren Maya, 87% sin autorización de cambio de uso de suelo forestal/6,659 hectares of jungle deforested by the construction of the Mayan Train, 87% without authorization to change the use of forest land"). Manuel Llano, the Director of CartoCrítica, underscored that this footage of deforestation should compel the Mexican state to stop considering it showcased illegal action on behalf of the Mexican government (CEMDA, "6 mil 659 hectáreas de selva deforestadas por la construcción del Tren Maya, 87% sin autorización de cambio de uso de suelo forestal/6,659 hectares of jungle deforested by the construction of the Mayan Train, 87% without authorization to change the use of forest land").

The earlier research CEMDA carried out that spoke on cenote sinkholes also speaks of the way that ecosystems are not individualized parts that can be split up because of capitalistic or national interests; perspectives from both Indigenous and ecological thought often suggest more interdependence across (eco)systems. The rainforest is not a collection of individual trees to be moved and repurposed. The mitigation and relocation strategy, in contrast, is a perspective on nature that forefronts dominion, manipulation, and anthropocentric use. It also stresses a short view of ecological history and processes. But construction *will* affect lifeways: "…among the most common effects of railway infrastructure are wildlife collisions and the barrier effect, whereby ecosystems lose connectivity. In particular, the project could interrupt the connectivity of the aquifer, putting the mangroves of the Yucatan Peninsula at serious risk, a species that enjoys special protection in Mexican law" (CEMDA, "Postura Del Centro Mexicano de Derecho Ambiental Respecto al Proyecto Tren Maya"). The effect construction will have on life and people for time to come is an acceptance of a settler perspective and therefore, the commonality

of environmental good equates to mitigation caused by destruction deemed necessary by the settler state. This is accomplished by arguing that not only will environmental impact be offset through the good of job creation, through programs like the Sembrando Vida program, but also service industry jobs, in addition to the good of allowing the world to appreciate the local environmental wealth of the nation through tourism. As Olson illustrates of America in the Peruvian context of Machu Picchu, if nations can argue their actions have positive "consequence," the actions mean "authorizat[ion of] their actions" (Olson, *American Magnitude* 111).

Apart from mitigation, the nation also responds to the public's concern for consequences in terms of environmental impact by casting the natural landscape and markers and connections of civilizations as goods discovered through development. These "discoveries" arguably would have then remained "lost." AMLO is pointed in expressing that Tren Maya takes into account that tourists visiting the Caribbean Sea do not visit the southeastern states of Mexico, and thus miss the "riqueza cultural ecológica de los estados del sureste," which I translate as, "the ecologically cultural wealth of the southeastern Mexican states." AMLO backs this claim of importance by stating, "The archaeological zones of this region are the most beautiful archaeological zones in the world" ("Versión estenográfica | Ceremonia de Pueblos Originarios para construcción del #TrenMaya"). Therefore, that commonality of environmental good for the state includes the impact of the environment alongside discussion of cultural heritage or "ecologically cultural wealth" built into government entities. AMLO thus builds on longstanding rhetoric rooted in indigenismo, an ideology with a history of government endorsement and instrumentalizing of cultural heritage.

One way in which cultural heritage is made relevant to environmental concerns cultural artifacts found in surveying the area in which Tren Maya was to be constructed. Elena Barba Meinecke, an INAH (National Institute of Anthropology and History) underwater archaeologist, argues that the "discoveries," such as a canoe dated from 950 AD, would never have been discovered "if we had not done this prospecting around the construction of the train" (*Arqueóloga Subacuática Del INAH, Elena Barba Meinecke, y La Salvaguarda Del Patrimonio En Tren Maya./INAH Underwater Archaeologist, Elena Barba Meinecke, and the Safeguarding of Heritage in Tren Maya.*). Within the context of vouching for the nation-state's environmental good in this development project, the archeologist bolds her understanding of the public's concern and pivots to stress the national interest of promoting heritage: "… we are doing the job as we should. We are the experts in the field. It is not an improvised job. We are going to continue…applying all our knowledge for the safeguarding of this heritage…as a personal opinion being a resident of the Yucatan Peninsula…" (*Arqueóloga Subacuática Del INAH, Elena Barba Meinecke, y La Salvaguarda Del Patrimonio En Tren Maya./INAH Underwater Archaeologist, Elena Barba Meinecke, and the Safeguarding of Heritage in Tren Maya.*). According to the 1986 law creating the entity, the INAH's outlined purposes among other government bodies is, "The investigation, protection, conservation, restoration and recovery of archaeological, artistic and historical monuments and monument areas," which the law states "is of public utility." By the law, the entity is also tasked with "prevent[ing] archaeological looting and preserv[ing] the cultural heritage of the Nation," which could also include establishing "regional museums" (Secretariat of Public Education).

Because of the lexicon through which dynamics of power are expressed in Mexico, which includes discussions of indigenismo, Anti-Blackness, and those filed under "racism does not

happen in Mexico," cultural heritage is a politically significant subject. That environmental good surfaces as synonymous with wealth that can attract tourists and also symbolizes who Mexicans were, are, and will be as a people is not a slight rhetorical detail to note in this settlerscape. AMLO, in discussing the artifacts made public through a survey of the train's construction area, references these themes while thanking Diego Prieto, the general director of the National Institute of Anthropology and History: "Diego is responsible for the very important, transcendent work of rescuing our memory and the archaeological zones of the country; and in a special way, of the Mayan nation. And it is really a very important work, of great cultural, historical, and social significance; It is what gives us our identity" ("Salvamento arqueológico en ruta del Tren Maya trascenderá en lo cultural, histórico y social: presidente – Presidente de México") (*Salvamento Arqueológico En Ruta Del Tren Maya Trascenderá En Lo Cultural, Histórico y Social*).

Before moving to the arguments regarding the Mexican economic good, I want to focus on two promotional videos from Tren Maya's YouTube channel that frame the value of the environment for the settler state. One 28-second promotional video entitled "En Playa del Carmen todo se conjunta./In Playa del Carmen everything comes together," does not include any information or narration. Rather, the recording simply provides aerial views of the waters of the Caribbean Sea with instrumental music. Another from what the channel describes as a "Surestre"(Southeast) playlist, "Así se ve el río Usumacinta y sus lagunas aledañas/This is what the Usumacinta River and its surrounding lagoons look like," provides a scenic view but, again, does not include any sound or narration (*Así Se ve El Río Usumacinta y Sus Lagunas Aledañas/This Is What the Usumacinta River and Its Surrounding Lagoons Look Like*). Understood as promotional materials, these videos visually argue to tourists why they should

visit this area, and to citizens they showcase an "identity" of which they ought to be proud. If this video provides only a visual engagement without any cultural, social, or historical context, the argument is that the land is appealing enough for it to be optically alluring and therefore persuasive.

This area is widely known to be visible on contemporary maps because it visibly separates the peninsula from Mexico, and is globally distinguished as "one of the top 15 wetlands (by size) in the world," according to UNESCO in 2011. The river is part of a large basin, a very important ecological feature of the area. According to a 2018 article on the importance of the biodiversity of this basin, the "Usumacinta basin is one of the main hydrological systems in Mexico, it has a high diversity of flora and fauna, and constitutes the last living river in the country, therefore the generation of information that helps its sustainable use is urgent" (Mendoza-Carranza et al. 131). The area of the Yucatan Peninsula has specific environmental realities, some of which are touted by the government for their visual appeal to gain support for the train, but other aspects, like the presence of water and the biodiversity it supports, are not discussed.

That the space in which the train will run is not examined for the ways people cohabit with the resources turned to profit is notable in its absence in the arguments regarding environmental good as a commonality for Mexican identification. For instance, the construction and operation of Tren Maya bring up discussions of infrastructure. The Yucatan Peninsula, according to CEMDA, "does not have an efficient and functioning sewage system in all municipalities, with wastewater discharges being one of the main groundwater contamination problems." These preexisting infrastructures and the environment of the area mean that when waste increases with the hoped-for tourists and workers, "the fragility of municipal systems will be exacerbated" (CEMDA, "Postura Del Centro Mexicano de Derecho Ambiental Respecto al Proyecto Tren

Maya"). This infrastructure will be tested as the rest of the route of Tren Maya becomes fully operational because, in the hopes of the state, an influx of domestic and international tourists will be transported to the area.

For persuasion's sake, the promotion of the train advertises its positive effects, but whom and where these beneficiaries are located amongst the identificatory noise is crucial to note. The viability of drinking water necessary for all living creatures and people will be threatened because of tourism traffic to this area. As Phaedra Pezzullo has underscored for globalized landscapes of toxic tourism, the possibilities of political subjectivity and agency rest on an investment in some sense of 'being there,' not necessarily physically, but in imagined alliances with communities around the globe" (Pezzullo 170). Yet though they may "be there" for a short time, tourists will not have to worry about the long-term effects of cohabitating with affected resources that are necessary for life or contend with living in a home and people wracked for cultural capital. As the government continues, in its arguments, to present economic and cultural commonalties between the state and the Mexican public, it is evident there is no sector or living creature that will not be affected by continued settler development; the positive effects of economic flow will benefit those "afar" and continue to negatively impact the daily life of people, life, and land in the peninsula.

Economic Good as Commonality for the Mexican Settler State

Economic good as a commonality is a necessary component for proponents of Tren Maya. AMLO and Mexican officials routinely list economic stimulation as a benefit of Tren Maya in their promotional materials and events. As the previous section illustrates, a moment can delineate rhetorical commonalities within identificatory practices of an argument by surveying the historical and structural contexts involved. In their chapter on pan-historiography, Hawhee

and Olson bold that “synchronic studies…examine structures at a particular moment in time (with time)” (Hawhee and Olson 94). This section will outline the economic commonality of identification within the span of Tren Maya’s construction to its beginning run in December 2023, through continuing to identify elisions and trends within this context and alluding to “longer” histories for rhetorical leverage. The analysis explicates how economic good is presented as a commonality, a settler logic operating through racialized capitalism and border imperialism, necessitating a focus on individualized capitalistic success for inhabitants of Tren Maya’s locale.

Tren Maya’s promotional videos and AMLO’s speeches stress the community benefit that will happen because of the train. In a 2018 YouTube video entitled “¿Qué es el Tren Maya?” the Mexican states’ aspirations are “to reorganize the peninsula and encourage economic development in regions not integrated into the circuits tourist and economic so we will improve the quality of life of the inhabitants” (*¿Qué Es El Tren Maya?*). At the ceremony of Native Peoples I referenced in the introduction, AMLO highlights how he identifies with the southeast of Mexico when referencing the material attention that area will receive from the train: “And this is not a whim, an imposition or because the president of Mexico is from here, from the southeast. It is, above all, an act of justice, because it has been the most abandoned region of the country and the southeast's time has now come, its time” (“Versión estenográfica | Ceremonia de Pueblos Originarios para construcción del #TrenMaya”). Here, AMLO draws a parallel between himself, who understands development as a positive change upon the space, and the peoples Indigenous to this place and the way they structured society: “It is also a program of urban reorganization.…just like our ancestors, the ancient Mayans made their cities with a lot of planning, with architecture, with hydraulic systems... the archaeological zone of Palenque has an

aqueduct, they diverted the streams so that they would not lack water. They had a lot of technical, scientific knowledge…. we can build the new cities" ("Versión estenográfica | Ceremonia de Pueblos Originarios para construcción del #TrenMaya").

This infrastructure, tied historically to the (what might be understood now as) multidisciplinary achievements of Mayan infrastructure, also targets the national southeast as it is contemporarily known through its "disparity." Notably, no one is marked as culpable for this "disparate" condition: "This project is called to revolutionize the economic growth of the area, helping to reduce the disparities between tourist paradises and disadvantaged areas, and contributing to a more equitable development in general" (Tren Maya). The project links equity to new infrastructure in rallying public support around mores of economic commonality. Thus, the rhetorical creation of this commonality involves discussions of job creation: during the train's construction, maintenance, and operation, and transitively in the area in which those who could market cultural goods can now create individual capitalist gain (Tren Maya).

The jobs created during development are part of the promotional materials, ultimately attracting international tourists in the name of national economic good. According to a Tren Maya site in English, whose authors are "made up of journalists and professionals from various areas who have in common their passion for quality journalism and their interest in the sustainable development of the southeastern region of Mexico," the train will bring "indirect economic benefits, such as increased investment in the region and the attraction of new companies" (Tren Maya). "Indirect" suggests economic consequences for the state and private interests are perhaps happenstance. The public is implied to be the "direct" beneficiary from infrasture and development, supported by the promotional materials' focus on the creation of jobs, and discourse positioning local and Indigenous individuals within a national and

transnational economy of tourism. During the December 2018 ceremony to acknowledge nationalistic Indigeneity, or rather fold in Indigenous representation during the kickoff of construction, AMLO devotes time to highlighting tourism's role in this development of landscape: "…I am pleased that we are accompanied in this ceremony…Daniel Chávez…, his father worked in the construction of this southeastern railroad…. Daniel Chávez is a businessman in the most important tourism sector in Mexico,…who most promotes foreigners coming to our country and it is the foreign tourists who leave the most foreign currency and income to our country" ("Versión estenográfica | Ceremonia de Pueblos Originarios para construcción del #TrenMaya"). Tourism in Mexico accounted for "8.0% of national GDP and 5.8% of the total workforce in 2019." I quote the 2022 "OECD Tourism Trends and Policies" report at length to stress the economic pressure Mexico confronted after announcing the project and having not yet completed after more than a year of construction:

> tourism's contribution to GDP fell to 6.3% in 2020 or MXN 1.5 billion. Tourism employment fell by 12.3% to 2.0 million employees, or 5.3% of the workforce. Travel exports represented 77.5% of total service exports in 2019, which fell to 64.5% in 2020. International tourism expenditure accounted for 17.9% of total tourism expenditure in 2019. This fell to 13.4% in 2020, driven by a 46.1% decline in international overnight visitors (down to 24.3 million). A rebound was recorded in 2021 but remained 29.2% below 2019 numbers despite Mexico's top market, the United States (32% of the total market), almost returning to pre-pandemic levels. (OECD)

Being able to create jobs out of the train's development could not be understated for its value to economic stability for the Mexican state post-2020.

In this discourse on job creation, I also want to draw attention to the positions in the national economy created through construction and positions to be occupied by those already in the region in which Tren Maya will circulate tourists and railway passengers or cargo. These jobs are in addition to Mexico's employment of their military for the operation of the railway, as I mentioned earlier, a decision publicized early in the promotion. The second set of jobs also

serves tourists, by providing them with culture, place, and peoples "foreign" to them with goods and experiences to buy. The creation of these jobs necessarily demands a focus on nationalist culture for direct economic benefit.

Of the new positions created through construction, the nation-state makes special note of those occupied by women, as a playlist, "Testimonios," on Tren Maya's YouTube channel showcases. In the videos centered on women workers, another slogan for the project is pitched: the notion that women are the "engine" of the train ("las mujeres somos el motor del tren"), which bolds the economic opportunity provided to women as well as marking their fundamental contributions to the project. In one video, Veronica Gomez, a safety and environment supervisor, points out that the project has allowed women to take up career opportunities to illustrate that they are more than just wives, sisters, and homemakers: Tren Maya has provided the opportunity for women to leave the home ("últimamente las mujeres han salido de casa") (*Veronica Gomez. Safety and Environment Supervisor. Section 1 of the Mayan Train*). In another selection from the playlist, Verónica del Carmen, a civil engineer, bolds that these opportunities will advance gender equity in the country (*Verónica Del Carmen. Ingeniera Civil. Tramo 3 Del Tren Maya*). In another selection from the playlist, Elizabeth stresses the importance of this work for her progeny and the nation, work that has provided an opportunity to accomplish her professional dreams: "[This work] has allowed me to develop [skills] to the highest level, especially considering this work is emblematic of Mexico… I am contributing to making my country better now….I know that my work is going to pay off for millions of people who may not know me." (*Elizabeth Hernández. Maquinaria Pesada. Tramo 3 Del Tren Maya.*).

These positions, which supposedly support gender equity on a national level, feed into the second group of positions in the national economy to which I turn now, a "generation of new

jobs and the development of services for tourists, such as hotels, restaurants and tour guides" (Tren Maya). These positions in the economy, although made possible through a transnational flow of capital through tourism to the Mexican southeast, necessitate a culling of regional Indigenous culture and do not offer the prospect of mobility away from the context of the Yucatán as a tourist destination.

Across the promotional materials, positions within the tourist service industry are highlighted for the change they will provide. The video entitled "Tren Maya. Bienestar para las comunidades," which translates to "Wellbeing for communities," begins with a community member saying that the train will bring about happiness for people, that "The people are going to have a change, a productive change, a social change, an economic change." Also included in this playlist is a video entitled "Tren Maya. Beneficio para todos./Mayan Train. Benefit for everyone," which includes "testimony" from a handful of citizens and their locations and identified communal benefits: Magaly del Carmen Méndez Díaz, from Tenosique, Tabasco, states that the train will be a positive in that it will help small businesses. Carlos Moo Ventura, from Maxcanú, Yucatán, specifically highlights it will benefit "people who sell tacos, for people who work in food, for people who make crafts." (*Tren Maya. Beneficio Para Todos./Mayan Train. Benefit for Everyone.*). And considering construction had already started when this video had been recorded, these points appear to be true. María Esther Ardinez Demecio, from Palenque, Chiapas, states that she was able to open a restaurant because the project's activity brought an influx of customers to the area (*Tren Maya. Beneficio Para Todos./Mayan Train. Benefit for Everyone.*). Yet, these are not *communal* benefits. As the essay by Hanieh I cited at the start of this chapter argues, the settler state providing citizens empowerment through such

means is self-serving considering its dual function of necessitating infrastructural development on the part of the state.

Artisanal crafts, along with food and service, are regional cultural products the Mexican state advertises for the stake of touristic allure. Work such as Spears-Rico's dissertation, "Consuming the Native Other: Mestiza/o Melancholia and the Performance of Indigeneity in Michoacán," has illustrated how cultural and spiritual mores function in service of the Mexican settler economy: "The tourist industry is a critical site for the confrontation between the indigenous claim to cultural/spiritual autonomy and neo-colonial capitalism's desire to consume indigenous culture and spirituality" (Spears-Rico 2). This rhetorical practicality of Mexican settler nationalism was evidenced in a premise to the "agreement" published with the decree establishing the train as a project of national security, suggesting that democratization on a national level involves culture: "…article 26 of the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States establishes that the Mexican State will organize a system of democratic planning for national development that provides solidity, dynamism, competitiveness, permanence and equity to the growth of the economy and the political, social and cultural democratization of the Nation" (Mexico Federal Administration). A video from Tren Maya's YouTube channel, "En #Izamal, conoce el taller de joyería con la flor de Cocoyol. 🌾" showcases the making of cultural and artisanal goods for tourists through the figure of Estaban Aban Montejo, who crafts jewelry from the seeds of a cocoyol palm to sell. The caption for the recording states the seeds need thirty years of solidifying before being able to be fashioned into a "natural diamond." While both a traditional diamond and a seed from a cocoyol palm are both *naturally* occurring substances from the environment, the overlap of the two as part of colonial resource extraction would not be mentioned; yet, the extracted resources as cultural goods exist for an audience alluded at the end

of the caption, inviting them to experience “this tradition and more on your next trip aboard Tren Maya” (*En #Izamal, Conoce El Taller de Joyería Con La Flor de Cocoyol.* 🌾). While the state advertises individual freedoms provided through the flow of capital from international tourism, the benefits of such a “democratization” function to sustain modern indigenismo’s function in the globalized market.

That history and culture are interchangeably referenced as touristic products made available via Tren Maya applies not only to goods or cultural festivities but also to colonial architecture (*La Típica Jarana Yucateca Alegra Corazones En Las Tradicionales Vaquerías/The Typical Yucatecan Jarana Cheers Hearts in the Traditional Dairy Farms*); (*La Danza Del Pochó Marca El Inicio Del Carnaval En Tenosique, Tabasco.*). A 30-second recording sans audio from Tren Maya’s YouTube channel, “Campeche, una extraordinaria belleza llena de historia y cultura, en la ruta del Tren Maya” exemplifies the depth of this allusion to history. The title, translated as “Campeche, an extraordinary beauty full of history and culture, on the Mayan Train route,” provides viewers with different angles at night of a plaza with a prominent architectural focus, a fortress. What can be taken away from this is that the delivery of goods is easily accessible through vision and self-evident in value. Scholar in visual culture and the anthropocence, Nicholas Mirzoeff, has said that the “aesthetics of the Anthropocene emerged as an unintended supplement to imperial aesthetics—it comes to seem natural, right, then beautiful—and thereby anaesthetized…,” and “allows us to move on, to see nothing and keep circulating commodities, despite the destruction of the biosphere” (Mirzoeff 217). Yet Campeche is “a typical example of a harbour town from the Spanish colonial period” (UNESCO World Heritage Centre). According to its details as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the fortress is a “historic centre [which] has kept its outer walls and system of fortifications, designed to defend this Caribbean port against attacks

from the sea." Through recirculating the historicity of Campeche as a romantic harbor town, this video rhetorically solidifies "tourist destinations...[as] already…signify significant spaces in…personal and national imaginaries through secondary sources" (Pezzullo 174). As Pezzullo and Mirzoeff bold, the imperial and (settler) colonial histories of such contexts necessitate a political and rhetorical "anesthetization." I turn now to this site to excavate what has been rhetorically obscured.

During construction and targeted excavation, including within underwater cave systems, many artifacts and remains have surfaced, as I mentioned earlier. One notable artifact, uncovered in September 2020 is the remains of the ship identified by the INAH as *La Unión,* which was "used to carry [enslaved] Maya…from Yucatán to labor Cuban sugarcane fields during the Caste War," a rebellion for liberation stretching from 1847 to 1901 (Mark Stevenson, "Mexico Identifies Submerged Wreck of Mayan Slave Ship"). The AP article reports that during the Caste War, the Maya were "fighting against domination by white and mixed-race Mexicans who exploited them" (Mark Stevenson, "Mexico Identifies Submerged Wreck of Mayan Slave Ship"). The nineteenth-century political context in which this war is nested is called the time of slavery ("el tiempo de escalvitud"), which "fused agrarian change to Maya social identity" (Alexander ix–x). Among the political conflicts, the "[m]ost important for the rural Maya were the changes created by the growth of the haciendas and new legislation governing land tenure. Following independence, Spanish Creoles came to dominate the local ayuntamientos (town councils), effectively disenfranchising Maya from most political processes." The Creole population controlled dispossession of land and labor; "landlords contracted laborers through a number of arrangements, from salaries and sharecropping to debt peonage. The latter situation is a form of slavery" because debt was patrimonially passed even across sales of haciendas (Alexander ix–x).

A “revitalization movement,” the Caste war resulted in “the emergence of an organized priesthood and new cult practices,” “a degree of political and territorial autonomy for the rebel Maya,” “revision of the tax code and reduction of the most flagrant castelike social divisions between Indians and non-Indians; and… successful agrarian reform and reassertion of traditional patterns of Maya land use over most of the peninsula” (Alexander x).

The Caste War and the way identity markers function to illustrate racial capitalism exercised by the Mexican state echo into the present. In *Yaxcabá and the Caste War of Yucatán: An Archaeological Perspective*, Rani T. Alexander highlights that this war showcases “long-term processes that link tactics of accommodation, survival, and resistance to political-economic structure” (Alexander 152). Pointedly, the conflict [was not] a grassroots phenomenon supported by all Maya. In northwestern Yucatán, for example, workers on the henequen haciendas did not rise in rebellion. Similarly in southern Campeche, southern Quintana Roo, and Belize, some Maya negotiated uneasy truces with the Caste War rebels, Spanish Creoles, and the British. Even in the Yaxcabá region, the rebel advance probably owed more to the splintering of interests among Maya communities than to their wholehearted backing of the cause (Alexander 151). According to Alexander, the Maya were successful because they acted from an understanding of their position within Mexico’s racial capitalist system, meaning “Maya farmers retained control over the allocation of land, labor, and resources despite the heavy-handed efforts of the Yucatecan government to harness the region to an expanding market economy increasingly dominated by capitalist relations of production” (Alexander 152). Tren Maya therefore provides another chapter illustrative of racial capitalism’s exploitation of this region’s people and resources. Such a trajectory is obscured and averted in any tourism materials.

To return to the point made at the outset of this section, economic benefit for Mexico necessitates the use of culture and history on the settler's terms, which manifests within the identificatory work of Mexico's tourism industry. This rhetorical work is necessary for a common understanding of "wealth," "opportunity," or "the identity of local communities" in the following: "From showcasing the cultural and natural wealth of the area to promoting the development of local businesses and reinforcing the identity of local communities, the train will give the region's inhabitants the opportunity to share their history and heritage with the world" (Tren Maya). The fact that the Caste War has been "romanticized" by historians per Alexander in that it provides a quagmire of questions regarding political and identificatory confrontation illustrates that rhetorical studies can be instrumental in clarifying the purposefully obfuscated logics articulated every day through contestation, whether it be a "Caste War" or the development of a railway project.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the context from the announcement of Tren Maya as a railway development project for the Mexican southeast in September 2018 to the beginning of its run in December 2023 to examine how the state encouraged the Mexican public to identify with the project through various means. The analysis has illustrated a continuation of the slow violence settler colonialism has enacted across landscapes for the profit of the state and at the expense of "resources," be they people or land-deemed-property. The method of close textual analysis in this chapter was also informed by the scope of voices contesting Tren Maya. This allowed for the inclusion of what is usually obfuscated by the state, such as the unavoidable danger or negative impacts for those sharing the immediate environmental vicinity. The economic commonality for the state illustrates the Mexican state's continuation of fossilizing an Indigenous other, the Maya,

or performative inclusion of them and the contesting public in light of the critiques of the public voting on the train.

Through keeping the analysis accountable to settler histories, this chapter illustrates a way to chart practices of national identification such as through Christa Olson's latest work, *American Magnitude*, which illustrates a view of an international political landscape across borders. This chapter showcases a settler power on a globalized stage and how desires to entice a foreign market for a cultural experience via tourism play into racial capitalist and border imperial histories. While this case study focuses on settler identification as it takes shape in national commonalities, the analysis aims not to indict identification as a practice but to locate the systemic injustices and material harms taking place now and across history assisted through the rhetorical act of identification.

The chapters of this project have transitioned from showing how Mexican cultural identity was systemically formed from colonial roots to illustrating how it is used in contemporary contexts. Having moved from a transnational and digital context influenced by Mexican indigenismo through a YouTube archive to one illustrative of the current systemic expression of Mexican settler nationalism, these case studies illustrate opportunities for reflection on practices of identification with Mexicanness or Mexican cultural identity. In this project's conclusion, I move toward hope in discussing rasquachismo as a rhetorically relevant cultural method with settler structures and histories that can be confronted while moving toward relationality, decoloniality, and a lively praxis of identification.

Conclusion

> "[Cultural identity] is not some universal and transcendental spirit inside us on which history has made no fundamental mark. It is not once-and-for-all. It is not a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute Return. Of course, it is not a mere phantasm either. It is something - not a mere trick of the imagination. It has its histories - and histories have their real, material and symbolic effects. The past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple, factual 'past', since our relation to it, like the child's relation to the mother, is always-already 'after the break'. It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth" (Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 226).

At the start of this dissertation, I approached the problem of the settler triad and settler privilege for practices of identification of and with Mexicanness, or Mexican cultural identity. This project has undertaken rhetorical analysis in each chapter to extrapolate what "Mexican" rhetorically signifies to confront the questions that started this project: How do practices of Mexican cultural identification illustrate complicity with settler colonialism? How do practices of Mexican cultural identification for those not explicitly within Mexico show complicity to settler colonialism? Lastly, how do these practices of identification relate to a deeper discussion about colonial history?

Chapter one of this project was a pan-historiography of Mexicanness, a palimpsest referenced in the subsequent case studies of the dissertation. Through this rhetorical approach to history, I traced what Soto Vega and Chávez reference as a scope in which "rhetorical studies should account for race, racialization processes, and the rhetoricity of racialized bodies," which is rhetoric "both imposed and performed" (Soto Vega and Chávez 319). Through outlining four key moments that influenced the identifying or identifying with Mexicanness, I showed the systemic collaboration of hierarchies, like those straddling race or class, with capitalism across the empires of New Spain, the U.S., and Mexico through ideologies of mestizaje, White supremacy, and anti-Blackness. This chapter demonstrated the contingencies of clashing

nationalisms that manifest in the problematics of rhetorically analyzing cultural identification of and with Mexicanness. Ultimately, the chapter revealed structural patterns of power that favor racial capitalism, enforce borders, and perpetuate the genocide of Indigenous land and life. In doing so, I bolded histories to consider when rhetorically understanding contemporary identifications with Mexicanness. The chapter also highlighted aspects and ideologies, such as mestizaje, within colonial histories that influence how people identify with Mexicanness today.

In the second chapter of this dissertation, I turn my attention to over 50 YouTube videos in which those who identify as Mexican share their genetic ancestry test results. This chapter turns to "Mexicans" themselves to inspect the praxis of identification in the context of purportedly being able to identify and identify with the Mexican body genetically and racially. In consideration of the racial hierarchies outlined in the pan-historiography, the analysis of the videos and their corresponding comments were divided across racial lines of Black/White/Indigenous. The chapter also instrumentalizes affect theory to analyze reactions, statements, and assumptions from creators and commenters alongside historical saliences. The analysis is informed by the context of mestizo mourning to account for the different national histories manifest in U.S.-based/raised Mexicans who also make up the creators and commenters of this archive. These national histories are markedly present in the excitement and surprise with Black ancestry; discomfort associated with White genetic ancestry; and the continued fossilization of Indigenous peoples. This chapter highlights the nuances to consider within analysis of transnational identification with Mexicanness. Namely, it outlines the pitfalls of identification with a settler state for Mexicans by stressing the commonality of continued aversion to confronting settler colonialism within the U.S. and Mexican contexts.

The last chapter of this dissertation performed a rhetorical analysis of the Mexican development project Tren Maya to answer: What does the contemporary Mexican settler state argue to move a people to identify as Mexican? The chapter examined the context from the announcement of Tren Maya in September 2018 to the beginning of its run in December 2023. Through a method of close textual analysis, I outlined common areas of identification with which the settler state attempts to move a people to support a development project that takes land from the Mayan Rainforest and displaces indigenous people. Namely, the analysis focused on ways the Mexican state attempts to move the public according to points on the environment and the economy. The Mexican state responds to criticism regarding environmental harm by centering identification on mitigation, not avoiding such harm to people or place. Second, the state aims to incite identification with the project through economic arguments that address the harm done to the people and place by casting tourism as an economic good for the national body. Lastly, these practices of identification also illustrate how the Mexican state avoids confrontation with relevant resonances with colonial histories concerning tourism and intra-ethnic conflict with relevance to capitalistic exploitation. This chapter ultimately illustrates the most current view of Mexican state-sponsored *indigenismo*, a long-standing facet of Mexican settler nationalism seen in the project's pan-historiography.

My dissertation has forwarded several contributions. In studying identification with and of Mexicanness within its (settler) colonial context(s), my dissertation has added to scholarship at the nexus of Latinx racial rhetorical criticism and settler colonial theory. Through the pan-historiography, the rhetorical analysis of Tren Maya's construction and promotion, and the rhetorical analysis of responses to YouTube genetic ancestry videos, this project has illustrated what is "imposed and performed" in terms of identificatory practices for Mexicanness. Because

this project required coverage of multiple empires, this dissertation has also added to scholarship in rhetorical studies that considers transnational communication and power, such as that of Rebecca Dingo, Sara McKinnon, and Christa Olson. Working with systemic power in view as modeled by these scholars allowed me to illustrate ways Mexicans have come to be identifiable (or "recognizable" as Lisa Flores might term it) and how some have come to identify with a Mexican cultural identity in a Burkean sense (Flores, *Deportable and Disposable*). Because Mexican identification is a wide-ranging practice, my settler colonial focus with an eye to history also hopes to add to interdisciplinary scholarship that moves toward decolonial realities.

This dissertation at times engaged with discussions of visuality that came into play in identifying Mexicans and the history that made bodily markers part of a common sense, such as the casta system of New Spain alluded to in the pan-historiography. Such scholarship on figures of Mexican "migrants" across U.S. history is covered richly by Lisa Flores in *Deportable and Disposable: Public Rhetoric and the Making of the "Illegal" Immigrant*. In the case study of YouTube videos, I generally restricted my references to subjective bodily features to those mentioned within the video or in the comments. Although my analysis included these details that were coupled with affective detail, there would be future merit in scholarship that approaches the science of ancestry and the visual body more directly. Specifically, I think here of the ancient remains excavated in the construction of Tren Maya that have already been featured in scientific articles on ancient DNA and phenotypes of "Mexicans" and those of Southeast Asians. Analysis that does justice to the scientific context, which includes the history of anthropology and ancient human migration hypotheses, would expand scholarship and could provide insight into the rhetorical impact happening within the fields of health and medicine that reference the use of such DNA through paleogenomics to "elucidate the genetic basis of modern diseases, including

inborn errors of immunity that impair the response to infections, providing a tool for drug development" in 2023 (Kerner et al.). As *Making the Mexican Diabetic: Race, Science, and the Genetics of Inequality* by Michael Montoya, *The Material Gene* by Kelly, and work by others on environmental racism, including systems of power in an analysis of disease, illness, or impairment is a necessity. In this way, scholarship in this vein could elaborate on "the default body that haunts Mexican identification" to which I allude in the introduction to put it in conversation with science and technology studies.

The last point on which I want to end this dissertation returns to the practice of identification. During the summer of 2021, I attended the RSA workshop "The Question of Decoloniality" co-led by José M. Cortez, Romeo García, and Jenna Hanchey. In the workshop the themes of decoloniality and positionality, both of which are related to identification, were discussed by these workshop leaders. Relevant to these discussions is a piece included in the workshop coauthored by García and Cortez, "The Absolute Limit of Latinx Writing" in 2020, arguing

> Latinx writing—the name of a field of academic representations producing Latinx and Latin American writing as knowledge objects—has reached an impasse in its project to theorize alternatives to Western epistemologies of writing because (1) it grounds this epistemological resistance in an identity of exceptional racial hybridity; (2) presupposes that racial mixture is the very essence of resistance to Western power/knowledge by way of a tactical impurification; and (3) crystallizes this racial mixture into a topos of decolonial resistance that ultimately reproduces the very presuppositions of cultural and racial authenticity it charged Western power/knowledge with producing. (Cortez and García 582)

These patterns within practices of identification with Mexicanness have also surfaced across this dissertation's case studies. To confront these realities, the authors suggest implementing "a rhetoric of Latinx writing" "as a politics," "as a mode of rhetorical invention that serves as the absolute limit of the place where an epistemology of writing is narrativized into logic" (284). In recognizing the pitfalls that have been illustrated in this dissertation but also across wider scholarship there remains a need to think about how to address the quandaries of identification.

I therefore offer a culturally Chiancx concept that has been expounded on previously by rhetorician Kelly Medina-López, rasquache, to provide suggestions for future literature and communal relationality by stressing a making-do of our contextualized positioning in histories. In "Rasquache Rhetorics: a cultural rhetorics sensibility," Medina-López utilizes rasquache "as cultural rhetorics theory and practice," that permits "users to pull from the compendium of theories, ideas, experiences, tangible tools, and intangible epistemologies they can access" (Medina-López 3). I borrow from Medina-López the idea of utilizing rasquache as a sensibility yet diverge in her bolding its ability to produce or represent definitionally "Indigenous" knowledge: "As a chicanx aesthetic, rasquache reproduces Indigenous knowledges and calls attention to the meaning making practices of hybrid identities"(Medina-López 4). This is not explicitly in objection to Medina-López's theorizations but a reflection of the case studies examined across this dissertation that reflect on settler context and pitfalls of identification with Mexicanness.

Rasquache is a Chicanx "aesthetic framework," that stresses using material at hand, blurring "high" or "low" art, forefronting resourcefulness, and highlighting the resources naturally inhabiting one's life, a tangible connection to lived politics. The concept of rasquachismo, commonly known as rasquache, is a cultural aesthetic principle originating from Chicano/Mexican-American communities. It celebrates a resourceful, inventive, and often whimsical approach to art and daily life that maximizes the use of limited resources. Rasquache repurposes what may be deemed as lowbrow or undervalued into innovative and esteemed creations, showcasing resilience and creativity.

Rasquache in practice represents a fusion of functionality and aesthetics, which come together in how individuals maximize their resources to convey creative expression by turning

limitations into opportunities for creativity. Chicano artist Tomás Ybarra-Frausto says "While things might be created al *troche y moche* (slapdash) using whatever is at hand, attention is always given to nuances and details"(Ybarra-Frausto 86). The artistic process centers on the "selection and combination of materials—many of them found in the home and community—to create objects imbued with new meaning." The materials are key to this aesthetic sensibility because as "a visceral response to lived reality, not an intellectual cognition" (Ybarra-Frausto 86).

There is agency and constraint in this process of creation, just as with identification in a post-colonial world. I forward that practices of identification could engage in a rasquache sensibility as a making-do of our colonial locations and histories through rhetorical invention. While I encourage future literature to expand in this vein, this work is already being done in rhetorical studies. I therefore see two ways in which rasquache could be made a productive sensibility: First to build work that acknowledges the cacophony amongst multifaceted voices that have been "identified" as common (e.g., "Mexican" "Chicanx") and, second, in acknowledging the ways those in community already relate to the world without needing to commit to a "traditionalism of the past" by certifying such views as "Indigenous" per se.

First, I believe a sensibility of rasquache can already be seen in a making-do and appreciation of identificatory negotiation through literature in rhetorical studies. Specifically, rasquache, in amassing historical detail would jointly eschew assumptions of markers of identification, allowing for an expansion of commonalities and nuances. In meditating on representations that structure the way people identify with one another, Stuart Hall provides help in explicating how to move away from replicating oppressive in contexts in which hybridity is

valorized and Indigenous others are fossilized through "a traditionalism of the past." Hall helps us by inquiring as to what

> drives the new forms of visual and cinematic representation? Is it only a matter of unearthing that which the colonial experience buried and overlaid, bringing to light the hidden continuities it suppressed? Or is a quite different practice entailed - not the rediscovery but the *production* of identity? Not an identity grounded in the archaeology, but in the *re-telling* of the past? (Hall, "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation" 69, emphasis in original)

While rhetoricians and others, such as Saidiya Hartman, have taken to retelling history, certain recent work exemplifies this. Here I have in mind the 2023 *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* article by José G. Izaguirre, "Movidas after Nationalism: Enriqueta Longeaux y Vasquez and Chicana Aesthetics."

In "Movidas after Nationalism," Izaguirre adds to literature that expands the masculinist Chicano nationalism taken as hegemonic to "re-tell" history through the illustration of, primarily, Enriqueta Longeaux y Vasquez's "diverging" aesthetics. In outlining such strategies, Izaguirre gathers details, including the informing factor that "Nationalism…is always and already a gendered invention, constituted by multiple forms of violence" (Izaguirre III, "Movidas after Nationalism" 540). This gathering of historical detail respective of power allows for a community to surface through its rhetorical action, providing agency and nuance. I see this in his illustration of how "the use of English and Spanish language…evinces how this community exists" (Izaguirre III, "Movidas after Nationalism" 543). In allowing a community's expression to be taken in its complexity, Izaguirre's approach lines up well with a rasquache sensibility in stressing taking advantage of all materials available, carefully considering assumptions of

"mainstream" or "hegemonic" histories, and highlighting that "personal stories and memories are integral to Chicana historiography" (Izaguirre III, "Movidas after Nationalism" 545). Such insight allows him to trace how moments can be "recast," foregrounding actors' agency available through aesthetic means (Izaguirre III, "Movidas after Nationalism" 546). I believe that this work exemplifies a rasquache sensibility by utilizing historical details, even those not confined to the timeframe of the Chicano movement, to complicate the politics of belonging and its political potential. Artist Ybarra-Frausto says, rasquachismo is "about the back story as much as the artwork or object itself" (Smithsonian Institution). As work by Izaguirres shows, what is taken as "the artwork or object itself' is reflective of larger power dynamics and a shift in perspective can provide a useful shift in consideration of who and what "back stories" are part of our histories. In allowing references across time and sources, Izaguirre troubles the static nature at times read onto practices of identification as well, showing the dimensionality and change subjects practicing identification ultimately undergo.

While rasquache as a sensibility considers the multiplicity of histories and details across time, my second point takes into account the affective themes that surfaced across the YouTube archive of genetic ancestry test results. Here I speak of the affect surrounding mestizo mourning and wider colonial traumas of the Americas. As Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo bold in the piece originating the term, "it is not surprising that Mexican Americans turned to explorations of their submerged historical relationship to indigeneity in an effort to address their colonized condition as subjects of overlapping imperial projects—their mestizo mourning"(Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo 563). While this is undoubtedly a colonial trauma that does not touch all identifying with Mexicanness in identical ways, the affective charge motivating uptakes of indigenismo must be acknowledged. This acknowledgment of indigenismo's harm does not have to negate the

affective charge of harm done systemically to those identifying with Mexicanness—as was shown in the pan-historiography, this identification is also one imposed onto peoples through logics of racialization. Spears-Rico writing of "mestiza/o melancholia" in the context of mestizo tourism in Mexico notes that it "differs from imperialist nostalgia because mestizos themselves are racialized as a result of colonial miscegenation and, due to these circumstances, they do have a racial relationship to indigeneity and a desire to understand themselves as indigenous people" (Spears-Rico 32).

I do not aim to solve the problem of the triad by designating anyone or any practices as 'Indigenous.' Instead, a sensibility of rasquache within the practices of identification might turn to this trauma and understand its inconsolability in addition to practices already existing. Again, I do not want a rasquache sensibility to ignore such trauma, but to look for resonances with colonial histories gathered just the same. Through such constant gathering of materials, I would hope that strategies of identification would surface that do not perpetuate colonial harms and essentialization of cultural identities. To illustrate this point, I turn to Gloria Anzaldúa.

I hold that a rasquache sensibility can confront identificatory division and history through a retelling of gathered materials, but identifications with Mexicanness should also be troubled for any tendency to fossilize Indigenous others. While one can write a bulleted list of the themes of indigenismo to avoid their implication in practices of identification, I believe a sensibility as rasquache also suggests a re-consideration of what already exists within our practices. In the 2015 posthumously published book, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, Gloria Anzaldúa speaks regarding "Reimagining identities." While such a text illustrates the changing of positionings that one person can take in terms of identification across their life, the writing therein also suggests another way of appreciating how theorization does not always catalog how we identify

or relate to that around us. In the chapter "Geographies of Selves—Reimagining Identity" she writes

> For me, being Chicana is not enough—nor is being queer, a writer, or any other identity label I choose or others impose on me. Conventional, traditional identity labels are stuck in binaries, trapped in jaulas (cages) that limit the growth of our individual and collective lives. We need fresh terms and open-ended tags that portray us in all our complexities and potentialities. When I think of "moving" from a sexed, racialized body to a more expansive identity interconnected with its surroundings, I see in my mind's eye trees with interconnected roots (subterranean webs). When I was a child I felt a kinship to a large mesquite. (Anzaldúa 66)

The chapter continues to illustrate the action emanating from such a relationship, such as her talking with the tree. In reflecting on this relationality, I see her enacting a rasquache approach to identification in widening the view of traditional Burkean identification: "We're not just the individual or material árbol de la vida that is our life; we are also las cosas y gente que pasan a nuestros alrededores [the people and things happening around us], whether these be concrete metropolis or green environments" (Anzaldúa 68). This expressed relationality that figures as immanent in lived experience would be gathered for its import to identification through a rasquache sensibility.

Work such as that by Jenell Johnson in *Every Living Thing* comments on this expansion and work that lies outside traditional conceptions of identification, especially within a Western lens. There persist markers of Indigeneity essentialized as positive in and of themselves by Anzaldúa in this chapter, such as the following: "Los ranchos de mi tierra (Jesús María y Los Verjeles) cradled me and gave me strong Mexican indigenous roots embedded in preconquest tierra"(Anzaldúa 67). Yet in appreciating such insights as expressions of a lived investment and communal outlook, a relationality in how she saw her community, such strategies can be appreciated for what they offer outside of colonial impositions. Such an appreciation would

require tempering in light of oppressive histories of hybridity illustrated throughout this project that a rasquache sensibility would have encouraged one to gather.

Engaging this sensibility should remember that it is also an aesthetics and is informed by creativity. In this way, a rasquache sensibility can aid the rhetorical invention of cultural identity. Within this concept too there must be caution because the theme of valorizing hybridity for hybridity's sake falls in line with threads of mestizaje present in settler rhetorics of Mexicanness. Even Ybarra-Frausto remarks that rasquache's "constant making do, the grit and obstinacy of survival played out against a relish for surface display and flash, creates a florid milieu of admixtures and recombinations," which I read as valorizing hybridity for hybridity's sake (86). Because rasquache as a sensibility means one must inventory histories for rhetorical invention to keep producing cultural identity, decolonial moves in the arena of identification should at minimum begin by considering lived experiences alongside systemic histories for their resonances. While utilizing this sensibility safeguards against aspirations toward some ideal identity by confronting the division of oppressive ideologies, I hope to end this project on a note of hope.

I see "nuance" as a rhetorician. Therefore, I hope this dissertation is a work toward "preparation" on which Cortez and García end "Absolute Limit," writing: "Will it have been possible to think a politics of difference not from the assumed location of the West's constitutive exteriority (and therefore *from* within the West itself) but, instead, in preparation of an alterity to come?" (Cortez and García 585–86). I do not doubt the impulse to imagine otherwise is already being done by those identifying with Mexican cultural identity. I would hope that appreciation of these ways to identify and relate with the world around us are appreciated for their decolonial possibility and not for any designation of being "Indigenous" practices in and of themselves so

that the focus stays on collective liberation and abolition of oppressive structures coloniality has brought unto the world.

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