2013

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Abstract
In 2006, immigrant rights protests hit almost every major city in the United States. Propelled by a wave of anti-immigrant sentiment and proposed immigration legislation that developed out of the 2004 presidential election, Latino/a activists demanded an end to the biased, and often racist, immigration reform debate, a debate that characterized immigrants as violent criminals who wantonly broke American law. Individuals of all ethnicities and nationalities, but mainly Latinos, participated in massive demonstrations to oppose the legislation and debate. In the Southwest, in cities such as Los Angeles, Phoenix, Dallas, and El Paso, Mexican Americans showed by force of numbers that they opposed this debate. Activists waved Mexican flags, Catholic iconography, and American flags to show their militancy and to demand recognition as Americans. Somos americanos became the movement's catchphrase: "We are Americans."

Disciplines
Cultural History | Inequality and Stratification | Latin American History | United States History

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Chapter Three

Mexico’s American/America’s Mexican
Cross-border Flows of Nationalism and Culture between the United States and Mexico

Brian D. Behnken

In 2006, immigrant rights protests hit almost every major city in the United States. Propelled by a wave of anti-immigrant sentiment and proposed immigration legislation that developed out of the 2004 presidential election, Latino/a activists demanded an end to the biased, and often racist, immigration reform debate, a debate that characterized immigrants as violent criminals who wantonly broke American law. Individuals of all ethnicities and nationalities, but mainly Latinos, participated in massive demonstrations to oppose the legislation and debate. In the Southwest, in cities such as Los Angeles, Phoenix, Dallas, and El Paso, Mexican Americans showed by force of numbers that they opposed this debate. Activists waved Mexican flags, Catholic iconography, and American flags to show their militancy and to demand recognition as Americans. Somos americanos became the movement’s catchphrase: “We are Americans.”

While there is much to comment on about these protests, the use of the Mexican flag deserves special attention. La bandera de Mexico is a symbol of Mexican and Mexican American pride, but one that for many years remained discarded and hidden in the United States. All things “Mexican” in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century United States were considered inferior and circumspect, so Mexican Americans chose not to fly the flag. However, during the Chicano movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, militant Mexican Americans, who identified with their Mexican heritage and embraced a form of Chicano ethnic nationalism, flew the flag with relish, demanding a reframing of the image of the Mexican flag. For Chicanos, the flag represented patria—homeland—and was certainly not something to view with scorn and opprobrium. But while embracing the Mexican flag, many Chicanos reinterpreted (and for Mexicans abused) what for them was a
symbol of cultural pride. For example, to show nationalist pride some Chicanos tacked the flag to bedroom walls or the walls of movement headquarters, a breach of protocol and Mexican national law. Others sewed the flag onto clothing or decorated it with movement symbols, again breaches of protocol. Others saluted the flag incorrectly. In short, while Chicanos redefined the flag as a symbol in the United States, a symbol imbued with cultural pride and ethnic nationalism, their reinterpretation of the flag’s symbolism meant a consequent reimagining of Mexican nationalism, a reinterpretation that probably would have offended many citizens of Mexico.  

In this chapter, I examine the creation of a sense of hybrid national belonging among Mexicans and Mexican Americans by examining the borrowing of cultural symbols and cultural performances by Mexicans in Mexico and Mexican Americans in the United States from 1955 to 1975. During this period, American cultural products, especially clothing and music, crossed the border, became transnational phenomena, and were en vogue in Mexico. Mexicans created a sonic landscape that mirrored pioneering rock and rollers in the United States. Most importantly, Mexican youth developed a counterculture that they linked to Elvis Presley, creating what has come to be known as the “refried Elvis.” In the United States, young Chicanos adopted Mexican cultural elements as a way of reinforcing the Chicano movement. In addition to the flag, Mexican Americans embraced the consumption of tequila, menudo, and other foodstuffs; wore serapes and ponchos; and many learned to speak Spanish. I argue that in both instances mexicanos and Mexican Americans reinterpreted cultural symbols and in the process attempted to rearticulate both American and Mexican nationalism. That reinterpretation created a unique syncretic and hybrid form of culture and ethno-national identity that blended American and Mexican elements on both sides of the border. This transnational exchange was at once Mexican American in the United States, and American Mexican in Mexico. Moreover, I show that this transnational exchange and the concomitant evolution of national ideologies in both countries spawned a reaction of the majority Mexican and American population, a reaction that was often negative, violent, and ugly.

For Mexican and Mexican American identity formation in the border region of America’s Southwest, nationalism is an inaccurate if not inappropriate term. Given its long history of cross-border contact, many parts of Mexico’s Northwest and the American Southwest were sites of a distinct Mexican American and American Mexican nationalism: a peculiar, transnational kind of nationalism. As historian David Gutierrez has shown, the American Southwest and the Mexican Northwest remain in many ways nations within the nations. Further from the border region, Mexican and American senses of national identity tended to follow Anthony Smith’s definition of a nation as
a site with distinct territorial boundaries, a shared history and mythos, and a national economy. Smith’s definition of nationalism can be seen as too broad ranging, but he clearly shows how ethnicity reinforces notions of the nation. Smith notes that “a state’s ethnic core often shapes the characters and boundaries of the nation; for it is very often on the basis of such a core that states coalesce to form nations.” While he avers that this “ethnic core” is real and that it predates the modern nation-state, I argue that this process is far more dynamic and that the nation’s ethnic center is constantly evolving and that its modification continues until the dissolution of the nation. Such has been that case in the Mexico–United States borderlands, where national belonging has always been hybrid and where ethnic nationalism(s) and civic nationalism(s) are difficult to untangle.

Like nationalism, ethnicity is a complicated terminology with differing meanings on either side of the border. Ethnicity is a collection of group traits that include national origin, ancestral language, religious affiliation, a shared history and traditions, and shared culture and cultural symbols, all of which confer a sense of identity for a particular group. Race is also often an important marker of ethnic group affiliation, one that in many cases has meaning for those not in an ethnic community and one that is often meaningless for those in an ethnic group. Most white Americans, for instance, would regard Mexican Americans as not only having a shared identity, language, history, or culture, but also shared phenotypical traits. The fallacy of such an idea is that Mexicans and Mexican Americans as a group are ethno-racially diverse. Thus they share no phenotypology, and yet are regarded by many Americans as racially distinct.

Ethnicity contributes to nationalism and creates forms of ethnic nationalism primarily through the concept of culture. Cultural forms and cultural exchange have a direct impact on nationalist sentiments and ethnic group affiliation. As noted above, Smith argues that ethnicity’s impact on nationalism is foundational and present before the formation of a nation. I demonstrate below that it is culture that moderates nationalist ideals while simultaneously reinforcing ethnicity. More importantly, transnational culture—the physical exchange of culture across borders—adjusts a nation’s sense of itself over time. As such, transnational cultural forms have a direct impact on nationalism, ethnicity, and ethnic nationalism. Transnational ethnicity and culture helped to create syncretic, or what the postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha called “hybrid,” forms of culture and nationalism. Bhabha notes that in newly emerging postcolonial states hybridity serves as a model of nationalistic development. Nowhere in Mexico and the United States is hybridity, transnational cultural exchange, and their influence on nationalism and ethnicity more visible than in the U.S.-Mexico border region, and in major cities such
as Mexico City and Los Angeles. And at no time was the evolution of hybrid national identity more visible than in the civil rights era of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

**MEXICO AND AMERICAN TRANSNATIONAL CULTURE**

The physical exchange of cultures and people across the border between Mexico and the United States is a well-known phenomenon. Generally, scholars and laymen think of this process as one-way. Mexicans move to the United States bringing with them traditional, but quickly assimilated, Mexican culture. But the process certainly works in reverse. Particularly during the freedom struggles of the 1960s and early 1970s, the ideology of the New Left, along with hippie and rock and roll culture, flowed to Mexico City. These cultural transmissions from the United States gave Mexican youths an outlet to express their political and social frustrations. Unable to challenge the dominant party, the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional), the only political party in Mexico, through electoral politics, the Mexican students instead channeled their anger into rock and roll.

Mexican politics has, in theory, offered the vestiges of full democratic participation for its citizenry since the conclusion of the 1910 revolution. However, political dissent often found few avenues of expression. Historian Judith Hellman has shown that the PRI frequently coopted labor and peasant protests by containing them in several peasant and labor auxiliaries. These auxiliaries of the PRI worked “to modify or suppress the demands of members and to contain potential unrest among peasants and workers.” The most serious and repressive aspect of this cooptation process was the assassination of key dissenters, something Hellman notes was a common occurrence. When student protestors became dissenters, they exposed themselves to the process of cooptation and, regrettably, assassination.

The Mexican university played a prominent role in the political development of student radicalism. Mexico’s most famous academic institution, the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, or UNAM, in particular worked to incubate the Mexican left. Nevertheless, the UNAM constantly sparred with the state, and the PRI worked to contain the political radicalism of UNAM graduates by making token changes and by coopting university student groups. University students were deeply troubled by the political repression of the PRI. Additionally, students worried about the Mexican government’s failure to provide even a small portion of the population of Mexico City with an adequate standard of living. Mexico City expanded exponentially throughout the twentieth century, and the rural poor who moved to the
city simply formed into a new urban poor. Social programs did not follow the expansion of the population, and poor people congregated in shantytowns without basic social services like running water. While demanding greater social services for the poor from the government in the late 1960s, students also lashed out at the PRI’s undemocratic tendencies. In 1968 students drew up a list of six demands, most of which requested that the PRI follow the democratic principles enumerated by the Mexican constitution, in an effort to force the party to change. Students then attempted to unite with labor and peasant groups, as well as with the new urban poor, to form what historian Evelyn Stevens calls a “populist orientation.” However, much like labor and peasant protests, the PRI worked to coopt student radicalism. Unable to challenge the system effectively through traditional political mechanisms, students found an outlet for their frustrations in cultural imports from the United States.

In the 1950s and 1960s rock music became an international sensation. Youth in Mexico City adopted an American breed of what they called rock and roll culture as a distinctive counterculture known as La Onda (the wave). This counterculture emerged as one of the only viable forms of resistance to the institutional political culture engendered by the PRI. Mexican musicians lashed out at the overwhelming control of the PRI through music and print media, and by embracing American hippie culture. As a result of the adoption of hippie culture by Mexican students, American hippies crossed the Rio Grande in search of an idealized hippie oasis, adding fuel to the fire of Mexican radicals. Indeed, American hippies supplied another cultural element to the Mexican rock and roll counterculture. Mexican youths combined the counterculture with the newly arrived American hippie culture and accentuated La Onda. Many of the accoutrements of American hippie culture came with this combination, including long hair, drug use, and unusual clothing. Chicano “hippies” in particular came from the United States “in search of an indigenous experience, despite the fact that they did not generally speak Spanish, much less the indigenous . . . language spoken by most of the local people.” The development of Mexican rock and roll counterculture, the importation of American hippies and their ideals, and a progressive student movement led directly to violence in Mexico City.

With rock, the PRI met a formidable enemy. Rock music became “a wedge against traditional social values and a vehicle for free expression.” Rock, in short, “was a tool.” Mexican rockers adopted many of the distinctive aspects of American rock culture; flashy clothes, hairstyles, and hip swinging dance moves. But Mexican rockers moderated and adapted this culture to suit their own senses of ethnic nationalism by singing in Spanish, and by singing about themes important to Mexicans. They also adopted as their most potent
symbol the likeness of none other than Elvis Aaron Presley. These “refried” Elvises wore The King’s trademark early 1950s look of black shoes, white socks, black pants, white shirt, and black jacket (ala Jailhouse Rock fame). This caused much apprehension in Mexico City as worried parents fretted over the strange dress and behavior of their children. Beyond parents, the government began to fear the radical and subversive aspects of this youth culture.26

Mexican government officials had a hard time dealing with rock culture, an unwanted outside agitator. Unlike labor organizations or leftist student groups, La Onda was an amorphous, vague cultural ideology that proved difficult to coopt. The blend of rock and hippie culture was seemingly too much for Mexican officials. President Gustavo Diaz Ordaz sounded a cautious note in 1968 when he stated, “Everyone is free to let his beard, hair or sideburns grow . . . so long as he does not harm others’ rights or break the law.”27 Far from a tacit endorsement of Mexican counterculture, the president instead attempted to advocate government tolerance while simultaneously establishing that La Onda could be viewed as breaking the law. Diaz Ordaz and others worried about the countercultural influence on the Mexican state, especially in 1968 as the world prepared for the Olympic Games in Mexico City.

Student criticism of the Mexican government, in combination with the youth counterculture, climaxed in strikes and protests in 1968. Mexico City stood to host the Olympic Games, and governmental expenditures for the Olympics angered many within activist circles. The expansion of the city’s population without an expansion in necessary social programs, from garbage collection to running water, made the huge amounts of money spent on sports venues for the games smack of hypocrisy.28 But Diaz Ordaz would broach no dissent or protests; the Olympic Games were simply too important for Mexico’s national pride.29 For Diaz Ordaz, within the Mexican counterculture lay a very real threat to the success of the Mexican Olympics.

The PRI failed to coopt the countercultural movement. Only one strategy remained: to destroy La Onda. The government did exactly this at Tlatelolco in 1968. In a series of strikes beginning in July of 1968, students clashed with local police, and eventually with the army.30 In September of 1968 the army occupied the UNAM campus. In response, students organized a massive parade and held a planning meeting at the Tlatelolco Plaza. The army attacked this enormous meeting, killing and wounding men and women of all ages. Reports vary on the number of people killed at Tlatelolco. Army soldiers maintained a tight net of security during and after the massacre. Most Mexican newspapers reported that 20 people were killed, but after the massacre these figures constantly increased, from 20 to 29, then from 49 to around 200, with many finally settling on the number 325.31 Historian Don-
Mabry posits that "the Tlatelolco massacre made no sense except that it stopped the movement a few days before the Olympic Games opened." Eric Zolov agrees, while maintaining that the youth counterculture contributed significantly to the Mexican government’s fear and constituted an important reason for why the massacre occurred. Zolov also asserts that "one day after the massacre... blame for the ‘disturbances’ was quickly placed on communists and other foreign ‘agitators’" as well as *La Onda*. Although the countercultural movement lived on, much student activism died the night of the Tlatelolco massacre. The Mexican government bought off and coopted those activists who survived the massacre. It took billions of dollars to silence their protests, but in the end the PRI purchased the silence of radical dissenters. Other radicals not coopted by the PRI fled Mexico for other, more tolerant, countries. Still other student activists were simply left defeated, unwilling to continue a fight they knew no one could win.

The eradication of the student movement and its concomitant demands for an evolution of both the civic and ethnic nationalism of Mexico tells us a great deal about Mexico and its national history. The activists asserted themselves in new and unique ways; ways that to Mexican authorities seemed foreign and out of step with the Mexican nationalism that originally grew out of the revolutionary period. Mexicans had for generations cultivated a civic nationalism that hearkened back to the revolution, that insinuated the broader population with a shared history and national past, and that allegedly unified all Mexicans. The state could broach no dissent of this nationalism. For the activists, Mexico’s nationalism was not inclusive, and they rebelled by adopting outside cultural forms. *La Onda*, which they imbued with ethnic symbolism and their own sense of national pride, in particular, resonated with the activists and helped give them a sense of hybrid national belonging. While they certainly saw themselves as exercising their own rights, joining in the civic ideology of the Mexican nation, and in this way participating in Mexico’s civic duties and nationalism, their hybrid nationalism was primarily focused on ethno-cultural symbols that challenged the dominant civic nationalism of Mexico. For this reason, Mexican authorities could not tolerate their activism. As such, the activist’s ethnic nationalism demonstrates both the power and, for the state, the danger of ethno-nationalist ideologies and activism.

**MEXICAN CULTURE, ETHNIC NATIONALISM, AND THE CHICANO MOVEMENT**

In the United States, youthful Mexican American activism took the form of a militant Chicano movement. Student activists in the southwestern United
States utilized aspects of Mexican culture to inspire their own movement. Chicano activists in the American Southwest identified with what they perceived to be clearly Mexican cultural practices. These youths grew tired of the assimilationist and pro-American attitudes of their parents. Instead, Mexican American youths embraced a pro-Mexican ethnic nationalist ideology, which they summed up in the new philosophy of *chicanismo*. This new activism revealed the frustration of a generation of Chicano youths who were unwilling to endure racism and poverty. They attacked American values and institutions, and asserted that the U.S. government had too often acted as a tyrant toward Mexico and Mexicans. They protested the poverty level of Texas’s and California’s farmworkers and accused the United States of stealing Mexico’s land throughout the 1800s (and beyond) after the Mexican-American War. There are several areas where Chicanos utilized Mexican culture to bolster their own sense of ethnic nationalism and develop a sense of hybrid national belonging; in protest behavior, in cultural iconography, and in the adoption of a Mexican national identity during protests.

Chicano protests began in Texas among college-aged youths in the mid-1960s. In 1965, they formed the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO), an organization that proved extremely militant and proffered the ideologies of Chicano Power, which endorsed radical activism similar to that of the countercultural movement in Mexico City. Chicano Power activists advocated an antiwar, antiestablishment, and pro-leftist ideology. Like their Mexican counterparts, these youths wore what in the United States was considered strange clothing (ponchos, serapes, fatigues), let their hair grow long, and indulged in illicit drug use. MAYO students identified with their Mexican past and culture, although their views stereotypically idealized and romanticized Mexico as a utopia filled with sombrero-wearing peasants. At many MAYO rallies, speeches were given in Spanish, activists waved Mexican flags, and held aloft posters of Che Guevara. On several occasions, police cracked down on students, detaining and arresting hundreds.

In 1968, Houston-area high school students engaged in school walkouts. These students, identifying with their Mexican heritage, grew tired of being treated like second-class citizens in Texas schools. Teachers often made Mexican American students feel inferior if they did not grasp English or if they spoke Spanish. Indeed, teachers often punished students if they spoke Spanish. Students drafted a list of demands, similarly to Mexican student protestors, requesting the fair treatment of Chicano students, the adoption of Mexican American history courses and cultural programs, and the hiring of Chicano counselors who could identify with the specific needs of Mexican American students. In order to publicize their demands, students planned a general walkout to coincide with the September 16 Mexican holiday celebrat-
ing the end of Spanish colonialism. On September 16, 1969, over one hundred students walked out of Jefferson Davis Senior High School, had a rally where they vigorously waved Mexican flags, and then picketed the school for several hours. Nearly two hundred students also walked out of several other schools to show their support for the Jeff Davis activists. In response, police arrested numerous students and the district expelled many more.42

Chicano activists also engaged in a third party political movement to challenge the two-party system in the United States. Chicanos associated with MAYO and other groups founded La Raza Unida Party (RUP) in 1970. For the RUP activists, political participation would demonstrate the power of the minority vote and force broader integration in the Southwest. They had to demand integration and, if it proved unforthcoming, force integration. La Raza Unida Party intended to elect candidates who would respond to minority community’s needs. With this objective, they implicitly criticized the dominant parties’ neglect of Mexican American voters.43 RUP broadcast this message to voters across the Southwest.

While RUP’s leaders hoped to elect leaders to local, state, and national offices, their party could be seen as an ethno-national critique of American nationalism. While implicitly criticizing the civic nationalism of the United States, they also infused the party and their own activism with ethno-cultural symbols borrowed from Mexico. This included frequent use of Spanish, depictions of the Mexican flag, the use of foods and fiestas to attract voters, and a militant critique of the United States, especially its role in the war in Vietnam. Their efforts to elect political leaders represented their own recognition of the power of the democratic and civic nationalism of the United States. But they presented this understanding through distinctly ethno-national terms. As such, their nationalism was a fusion of civic and ethnic national forms—a hybrid national belonging. Some activists did desire an entirely new form of Chicano ethnic nationalism, and they sought territorial independence to make that nationalism a reality. This was most evident in the Chicano movement’s understanding of Aztlán, the mythical birthplace of the Aztecs that was geographically located in the border region, as well as in some facets of Chicano activism, especially the land grant movement pioneered by Reies López Tijerina. Most activists did not seriously consider the territorial acquisition of a Chicano homeland a reality, but the “mythohistorical interventions” that Aztlán represented was in keeping with the broader cultural borrowings that underpinned Chicano nationalist thinking.44

Leaders in the Democratic and Republican Parties reacted viscerally to RUP. They saw the party as not only a challenge to the two-party hegemony, but to the broader national identity of the United States. Some interpreted their challenge as nothing more than a pathetic attempt by unruly minorities
to usurp power from the dominant parties. Others saw RUP and its leaders as reverse racists who wanted nothing more than to punish the United States for past inequalities. Leaders in both parties countered RUP with aggressive campaigns to both run contenders against RUP candidates and to ridicule their efforts. The reaction of Democratic and Republican rivals also helped seal RUP’s fate. RUP’s militant ethnic nationalist focus and criticism of the U.S. civic culture ultimately provoked a counter response that helped destroy the fledgling party.  

In Los Angeles, California, Chicano youths also engaged in school walkouts, or blowouts, to dramatize problems in school, especially punishment for speaking Spanish. After a series of school walkouts, replete with Mexican flags and Che posters, Los Angeles police cracked down on the protestors, arresting hundreds and beating a number of young activists. This distinctly violent and negative reaction angered activists, but the students’ protests also angered local people not affiliated with the Chicano community. Many white Los Angelenos looked on in horror at the protests and rejoiced when police suppressed the gatherings. Spoken Spanish, hardly a sign of anti-American militancy today, was seen by many at the time as the cultural equivalent of armed insurrection against the state. Thus, police repression was not only warranted but needed to protect the body politic of the United States.  

Throughout 1968 and 1969, Chicano school protests materialized across the Southwest. Not only were these protests met with police suppression in Los Angeles, Dallas, Phoenix, Houston, and elsewhere, but the demonstrations also caught the attention of the federal government. Numerous Chicano civil rights groups, therefore, were soon infiltrated by the FBI’s counterintelligence program, or COINTELPRO. FBI agents surreptitiously infiltrated Chicano groups and succeeded in disrupting them. This disruption often consisted of agents goading Chicanos to commit unlawful acts such as the firebombing of the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles in 1969. The result was often the arrest and incarceration of important Chicano leaders, which worked to damage Chicano organizations by depriving them of leadership. In some cases, FBI infiltrators took over leadership once movement leaders were arrested, thereby coopting and eventually destroying these groups.  

In the summer of 1970, Chicano activists across the Southwest engaged in protests against the Vietnam War. Chicanos formed one of the only ethnic antiwar organizations, the National Chicano Antiwar Moratorium. Many Chicanos felt that U.S. actions in Vietnam did not differ from previous aggressions committed against Latin America (Mexico in particular) or other countries. Indeed, many engaging in the ideology of chicanismo felt a kinship with the Vietnamese, who represented another dark-skinned people subjected to an
American brand of imperialism. In July of 1970, one thousand demonstrators gathered in downtown Houston to condemn American actions in Vietnam and to call for an end to Chicano involvement in the conflict. Their protests were disrupted by police and a group of pro-war marines, who beat many of the antiwar protestors.\textsuperscript{47} The most famous Chicano antiwar protest occurred in Los Angeles in August of 1970. The Chicano Moratorium engineered this massive demonstration to protest unfair draft practices and to dramatize the disproportionate numbers of young Chicanos and blacks sent to and killed in Vietnam. At the protest, approximately thirty thousand protestors marched through East Los Angeles. They sang freedom songs in Spanish and English, carried Mexican flags, and many protestors dressed in ponchos and serapes. LAPD riot police met the marchers at a local park, where they stormed the demonstration, fired teargas, and beat and arrested numerous marchers. The police also murdered Gustav Montag and Ruben Salazar. Montag, a Sephardic Jew, had joined the Chicano protests against the war because of a distinct feeling of solidarity with the Mexican American community. After being chased from the park by police, Montag and several Chicanos found themselves cornered as they tried to escape down a blind alley. As the officers aimed their weapons, Montag and the others attempted to repel the police by throwing bottles and rocks. Police opened fire, riddling Montag’s body with bullets and killing him instantly. Ruben Salazar, the voice of the Chicano community at the \textit{LA Times}, had written scathing and negative editorials about police abuse of Mexican-origin people. Two LAPD officers found Salazar, who had taken refuge from the police onslaught at a local bar, and shot him in the head with a tear gas canister. The attack crushed Salazar’s skull, and he died several hours later.\textsuperscript{48}

Perhaps nothing symbolized state repression of the Chicano movement like the violence at the Los Angeles moratorium protest and the murders of Gustav Montag and Ruben Salazar. While the murders experienced in the United States were far less violent than the massacre in Mexico, the results were predictably similar. The 1970 Los Angeles antiwar protest was the last demonstration of the Chicano Moratorium. The organization folded shortly thereafter. For many Chicanos, the police power of both the state and federal governments were far too much to overcome. Demoralized by the violence, many Chicanos withdrew from the movement.

For Chicano activists, the United States had not lived up to its obligation toward all Americans, especially Americans who descended from ethnic groups. By organizing around a rallying call of ethnic nationalism and by using the civic and electoral apparatus of the United States, Chicanos both criticized and utilized varying forms of nationalism. They critiqued American civic nationalism by adopting a militant ethnic nationalism that utilized
Mexican cultural symbols, the Spanish language, and other forms of transnational culture. But they also used the electoral process, nay, the civic nationalism of the United States, to make their ethnic national focus a reality. Their hybrid national identity, while perhaps unique, provoked a response from the state. While not as violent as the response to radicals in Mexico, the U.S. government, state and local government, and Democratic and Republican Party leaders all reacted negatively to the Chicano activists. They all worked to destroy the Chicano movement.

CONCLUSION

The American’s Mexican and the Mexican’s American connoted a transnational sense of Mexican culture in America and American culture in Mexico. In the United States, activists saw Chicano Power as Mexican Power. Chicano youths rediscovered, or discovered as was often the case, their Mexican roots in the late 1960s and early 1970s, augmenting their militant ethnic nationalism with a greater sense of their own ancestry and heritage. Invoking this past often meant little more than speaking Spanish instead of English. Chicano activists also adopted the Mexican national flag as a sign of their radicalism and to represent their connection to Mexico. They viewed the United States as a plural society that welcomed all ethno-national groups. The desired a broader, more inclusive nationalism. So too did Mexican radicals in Mexico City. Altering the broader culture in Mexico and evoking a new sense of Mexican ethnic nationalism often involved something as basic as listening to, and later singing and playing, American styles of music. American music became protest music, a wedge between the activists and the state.

These similarities aside, the protests that Mexican and Chicano activists engaged in were also dissimilar. UNAM students in Mexico City had different goals than did Chicano students in Houston or Los Angeles. While Mexican youths protested deep-seated poverty and political stagnation, Chicano youths protested American racism and the Jim Crow system. Mexican youths were not punished nor derided for speaking Spanish, nor were Chicano students killed in massive numbers for protesting. In each country activists attempted to open their respective nations’ understanding of nationalism and craft a more inclusive, hybrid national identity.

Transcultural transmissions were key to crafting hybrid national belonging. Mexican youths used American cultural imports for their own advantage and manipulated these cultural forms to suit their own needs. Rock and roll culture became a tool to force the PRI to change its ways. American hippie culture was similarly used by Mexican youths both to show their displeasure
with the political, social, and economic systems in Mexico—including their displeasure with Mexican nationalism—and also to freak people out. The New Left, it would appear, was more than simply an American phenomenon. Rather, it crossed borders and generated radicalism in new locales.

Chicano activists likewise benefited from the culture of Mexico. Chicano students identified with the brutal treatment of the Mexican students by the Mexican government, although Chicanos were unwilling to criticize the Mexican government. Chicano students waved the Mexican flag to symbolize their connection with Mexico. They also fought for the adoption of Mexican cultural heritage and history programs in southwestern schools. These students also chose to celebrate Mexican holidays supposedly “forgotten” by their parents, including el diez y seis de septiembre (Mexican independence) and cinco de mayo (commemorating the 1862 battle of Puebla). They saw in these cultural forms a powerful way to analyze their own ideologies and understand and refine their sense of national belonging.

Clearly, culture and cultural exchange played a key role in the development of political and social ideologies in both Mexico and the United States. The transnational and cross-border flow of cultural elements and national symbols inspired Americans of Mexican descent and Mexican youths in Mexico City. These cultural and nationalistic products gave new meaning to movements in the United States and Mexico, altering the meaning of the terms “Mexican” and “American” and their concomitant ethnic connotations. Interestingly, activists in both nations frequently reinterpreted their borrowed cultural elements. For example, La Onda’s refried Elvis took a distinctly American rocker and transformed The King into a Mexican symbol. But the refried Elvis in late 1960s Mexico was The King from the 1950s United States. The Mexican Elvis was about a decade off the mark from the Elvis of the late 1960s (who by this time had already started to become the “fat Elvis”). In taking The King out of chronology, Mexican youths reinterpreted the real, and by this point aging, Elvis. But that new interpretation was purposeful. Mexican youths took as their model the most radical and disruptive form of The King they could locate. By appropriating the Elvis of the 1950s, Mexicans not only reminded those in-the-know about the fears and apprehensions that Elvis generated in the 1950s, they helped imbue their own movement with some of The King’s radicalism. As such, while perhaps incorrectly visualizing Elvis, the students created a hybrid Elvis to help radicalize and popularize their movement. And it worked. The refried Elvis gave Mexican students an outlet for their frustrations, a vehicle for their activism, and a symbol for their movement. Combined with the adoption of hippie culture, Mexican youths succeeded in disrupting the national character of Mexico and its capital city to the point that the state lashed out violently at their actions. Perhaps the Tlatelolco
massacre, while it helped destroy the movement, showed the success of Mexican radicals, since it provoked such an incredible response from the government. The refried Elvives helped moderate Mexican culture by bringing in foreign elements and reframing them to suit the needs of Mexican people. Today this adoption and restructuring of American culture can still be seen in Mexican music, especially the continued popularity of Mexican rock, but also Mexican hip hop, rap, and interestingly enough, country music.\textsuperscript{49}

Such was the case in the United States, where Chicano youths adopted aspects of Mexican culture and with them generated a violent and negative response from the government. While spoken Spanish may not today seem all that radical, at the time it was, and demanding a cessation to punishment for speaking Spanish was in many ways an insurrectionary act. The general acceptance of spoken Spanish today is in part due to the activism of the 1960s. The same cultural borrowing can be seen in food and clothing. For generations, Mexican culinary products like tequila and menudo were seen as inferior and unwanted in the United States. Many Mexican Americans drank tequila and ate menudo, a traditional Mexican soup made of tripe, in hiding. Chicanos embraced drinking tequila and eating menudo because they saw in these foods the strength and adaptability of their ancestors. Chicanos also wore what they saw as traditional Mexican garb, particularly ponchos and serapes, in order to recognize the strength of their ancestors. The general popularity of tequila and the widespread consumption of menudo (you can find it on the menu of just about every Mexican restaurant) was the result of Chicano activism at the time. And finally, the flag—Chicanos adopted the Mexican flag as the symbol of their movement. The Mexican flag made appearances at almost every major Chicano protest in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As with other imports from Mexico, the Mexican flag was long looked upon by white Americans as a foreign symbol of despotism and sociocultural backwardness, which caused Mexican-origin people to refrain from flying the flag in the United States. But during the Chicano movement, youths embraced the flag, rearticulating what it meant in the United States. The flag represented homeland and history, but it also served as a thorn in the side of Americans, something Chicanos could use to frustrate their critics. And it worked. As in Mexico City, the adoption of Mexican cultural symbols and products in the United States spawned a violent and negative reaction from the state and federal government. Perhaps the success of these cultural elements can be seen in this negative reaction.

As in Mexico City, Mexican Americans in the United States in many ways reinterpreted Mexican culture. For example, while spoken Spanish was important, many Chicanos were monolingual and they had to learn how to speak Spanish. Because of their developing knowledge of the
Spanish language, many Chicanos spoke in a broken and ungrammatical Spanish that Mexicans frequently did not understand. So too with clothing—Chicanos utilized the poncho and serape, a type of dress that relatively few Mexicans used in the 1960s, save for folks in the countryside. While Chicanos reframed the consumption of certain foodstuffs, they often did so incorrectly. For example, menudo is often served on special occasions, but Chicanos ate menudo regularly and often added products—potatoes, chicken, ground beef—that would not be found in traditional recipes. Chicano use of the Mexican flag was also problematic as they often used and handled the flag incorrectly and contrary to Mexican law and custom. But as the Mexican rockeros had done, Chicano usage of Mexican culture created—or openly acknowledged—a syncretic form of Mexican/American culture and ethnicity in the United States. By adopting and embracing aspects of Mexican nationalism and culture, Chicanos helped reforg the ethnic identity of Mexican Americans. That reforging was the most clearly felt, and readily obvious, way for them to (re)create an understanding of ethnic nationalism. And the way we understand Mexican Americans today is due in large part to the transnational and transcultural borrowings of Chicanos in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In each of these cases, the inculcation of foreign cultural elements proved an important mechanism through which Mexican and American students vented their social, political, and economic frustrations. This transnational cultural flow proved to be both Mexican American in the United States, and American Mexican in Mexico. Transnational cultural exchange helped reframe the basic idea of what it meant to be a Mexican in Mexico and what it meant to be an American of Mexican descent in the United States. It helped create a hybrid, novel, and more expansive vision of nationalism, ethnicity, and ethnic nationalism. Transnationalism expanded the definition of what it meant to be American in the United States and Mexican in Mexico. That reevaluation of ethnicity in both countries went far in developing our modern understanding of Mexican and Mexican American national, cultural, and ethnic identity.

NOTES

1. In this chapter, I use the term “Latino/a” to describe the broad group of Latin American-descended individuals in the United States. When I refer to individuals of Mexican descent in Mexico, I use the term “Mexican.” For Mexican-descent people in the United States, I use the terms “Mexican,” “Mexican American,” and “Chicano.” For African Americans, I use the terms “black” and “African American.” And for European Americans, I use the term “white.”


15. Ibid., 255.


17. Ibid., 90, 132, 133, 150.


20. Ibid., 240. See also Zolov, Refried Elvis, 212. The most important of these demands were freedom for political prisoners and dismissal of Mexico City’s chiefs of police.


23. See Zolov, Refried Elvis, chapter 3 in its entirety.
24. Ibid., 108.
25. Ibid., 102.
30. Zolov, Refried Elvis, 127. Zolov asserts that protest leaders later encouraged Mexican protestors to adopt their own national heroes as symbols of dissent instead of the red-and-black flag.
32. Mabry, The Mexican University and the State, 256.
34. Ibid., 131.
36. Ibid., 204–5.
41. Ibid., 195.
42. “Latins Demonstrate at School to Mark Mexican Holiday,” Houston Post, September 17, 1969. See also, Behnken, Fighting Their Own Battles.
43. Behnken, Fighting Their Own Battles, 184–85.


48. For a good overview of these events, see Lorena Oropeza, *¡Raza Sí, ¡Guerra No!: Chicano Protest and Patriotism in the Viet Nam War Era* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005).