
¡Como un Indio!: An Anthropological Literary Examination of Chican@ Indigeneity Representations

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In the United States, the distinction often drawn between the ethnic identities of “Native American” or “Indian” and “Chican@” creates an interesting paradox because most Chican@s have indigenous heritage. Efforts to prove that Chican@s are indeed Native Americans, and should thus be included under that ethnic identity tend to be misplaced, for there are many reasons why the two groups represent distinct, separate identities. A more fruitful focus is to examine the reasons behind the denial of a contemporary indigenous heritage within the Chican@ identity. That examination can proceed from Mexican national history to the Chican@ civil rights movement to the present-day perceptions of Chican@ identity. Each of these facets has had very real implications for the interactions and subsequent representations of indigeneity in Chican@ identity. One important and little used way to explore the factors of identity is through works of literature, three of which are the focus of this study—Sandra Cisneros’s *Caramelo*, Rudolfo Anaya’s *Heart of Aztlán*, and Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*.

Some definitions of key terms, particularly Chican@ and indigeneity, are an important first step. A Chican@ can be defined as a person of Mexican ancestry born in the United States of America but emphasizing an indigenous heritage. For many Chican@s, their indigeneity is affiliated

with the Aztecs, or Mexica. This definition is still somewhat problematic because of its simplicity, but it nevertheless relays the point. In his book *Aztecas del Norte: the Chicanos of Aztlán*, Jack Forbes offers a similar definition regarding Chican@s indigeneity. In his view, Chican@s “all possess Mexican Anishinabe (Indian) descent to some degree. It is from this common Mexican (ancient Nahuatl-Aztec) background that the basis for modern Mexican and Mexican-American identity is derived” (Forbes 13). Indigeneity refers to indigenous people and can be defined as an ethnic group having historical connections to a particular geographic region. Also of importance are the ties the group had to the region before and after European colonization. That definition encompasses any ethnic identity group formed subsequent to a colonial encounter.

Research focused on the Chican@s identity primarily emphasizes indigenous heritage in the past, limiting it to the nation of México and the now non-existent tribal empire of the Aztecs. The heavy focus on the past negates any contemporary tribal identity and draws attention away from the possibility of Chican@s having Native American heritage with extant tribal nations in both México and the United States. The reasons behind this association can be traced through Mexican colonial history. In his book *México Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization*, anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla introduces a colonial process known as “de-indianization,” which describes the ways in which the mestizo populations of México lost touch with their indigenous roots after the arrival of the Spaniards. Batalla argues that “de-indianization is a historical process through which populations that originally possessed a particular and distinctive identity, based upon their own culture, are forced to renounce that identity, with all the consequent changes in their social organization and culture” (Batalla 17). This process was not applied to all indigenous populations within the nation but had much more devastating effects upon those who were

of mixed heritage, the mestizos (those individuals of Indian and Spanish heritage). Within Mexican colonial society, these individuals occupied a separate social class, lower than that of Spaniards but higher than Indians. The class structure made it possible for mestizos to elevate their social status, making it in their best interest to deny indigenous heritage. A somewhat loftier position on the social ladder did not ensure economic betterment but instead became a matter of "social purity." In contrast to the situation in the United States, the claiming of an indigenous identity is less of an individual matter and more of a socio-economic standing. Those individuals in power have always been more westernized, which basically means adhering more to an Anglo heritage and being further removed from any indigeneity.

The socio-cultural pressures subsequently create a dilemma for mestizos in the sense that they are left to occupy a marginalized social space. They know that being an Indian automatically places them into both a lower social and economic standing, making it easier to deny indigeneity and creating a form of internalized racism. Those same individuals compose the majority of México's population but often occupy the larger poverty stricken areas of Mexican cities and rural villages. Their adherence to a European past often does not afford any economic betterment, and they are usually forced to migrate into the United States in search of better paying jobs. Subsequently, they form communities whose members in later generations identify as Chican@s—persons of Mexican ancestry born in the U.S. Therefore, a refusal to adhere to an Indian identity is carried into subsequent generations. The process of de-indianization is not about casting blame, quite the contrary. No one individual or group is to blame. Instead, the focus should be placed upon the colonial history that has primed the foundations of identity creation. Sandra Cisneros's *Caramelo* offers an excellent example of the mestizo experience, speaking

specifically to the attempts to reconcile both indigenous and Spaniard heritage, but identity conflicts become apparent in the novel.

The Chican@ Movement of the 1960s is the second important facet of Chican@ identity. Although some people have the impression that Chican@ as an ethnic group dates only from the social movement of the 1960s, it has earlier origins linked to the creation of the Mexican American border in the 1840s. Nevertheless, the movement's importance lies in the ways in which it was a stage for reclaiming Chican@ indigeneity. One of the driving factors behind the ethnic uprising was the need for Mexican Americans to remove the emphasis on European heritage and instead embrace indigenous roots. Some scholars have argued that the value placed upon indigeneity was a direct reaction to the perceived discrimination that dominant white society perpetuated against Mexican Americans. Racism was especially prominent following the Mexican American War, the annexation of Texas, and the continued influx of white Americans into areas heavily populated by Mexicans. Racism was rampant in border states and "chicanismo"—a sense of Mexican/brown nationalism and pride—was a result. Chicano and its push to maintain and preserve every cultural element related to Mexican nationalism helped to create an identity with the Aztec empire, a problematic link but a source of great national pride. In recent years, the dramatic effort to reclaim indigeneity, ultimately a positive step, has created problems of identity appropriation. Many Chican@s have begun to identify with Southwest tribes with whom they may not share historical roots. Instead, they are following the dominant United States viewpoints of "Pan-Indianism"—that all Native Americans are essentially the same and that a single Indian culture exists. Author Patricia Penn Hilden takes exception to this attempted cultural revelation and proclaims that Chican@s essentially are looking for an indigenous identity that does not truly exist and are instead perpetuating cultural appropriation. She contends that

“such shifts in identity assertions, however progressive in a Chicano/a world that once shunned any suggestion of “Indio” heritage, nevertheless hide the actual indigenous origins of many Chicano/as” (Hilden).

Hilden’s contention highlights the problem of indigenous appropriation but fails to recognize the possibility of Chican@ tribal heritage in the Southwest. Yet the definition of Chican@ with an ethnic identity anchored in the Southwest, while advanced and supported in some literary sources, has received little attention from anthropologists. Most of the attention to that issue has come from the growing field of ethnic studies rather than more traditional anthropological or ethnographic approaches. Moreover, anthropologists often overlook literary works as legitimate avenues to analyze identity because they often view works of literature as lacking enough sufficiency to truly reflect community ethnicity and perceptions. That view is problematic because many literary works, especially those that have autobiographical elements, have enhanced value as forms of ethnographies. Novels offer an unhindered perspective of a community’s self-definition from the viewpoint of an individual of that particular community. The views are unhindered in part because the authors are free to write of their own personal experiences in their respective ethnic communities, minus the constraints imposed by the formalities of the social sciences.

Rudolfo Anaya reflects a Chican@ reclamation of indigeneity in his novel *Heart of Aztlán*, a story chronicling a community’s struggles in a New Mexican barrio. The journey of the Chavez family in the novel represents Chican@ struggles to recover indigenous roots. In the novel, the community, including the family, faces the problems of land loss, cultural disconnection, and social disempowerment made worse by labor exploitation. Anaya’s portrayal of indigeneity, however, is often problematic in part because he perpetuates dominant societal stereotypes.

The novel is a powerful examination of the plight that Chican@s have faced regarding their indigenous heritage. The Chavez family and Chican@s generally are influenced by the colonial Mexican past and the mainstream U.S. culture with its images of Indians and demands for acculturation. The characters deemed "Indian" in the novel are underdeveloped, and fail to truly represent persons of contemporary indigenous heritage. They fall under the heading of the "Invisible Indian," with examples ranging from the trusty Indian Guide to the Indian Witch Woman dabbling in the black arts. Anaya's attempt to reconcile the identities of Chican@s and Native Americans results in stereotypical representations. His effort highlights the difficulties of clarifying native identity within Chican@ communities and illustrates ways that elements of identity can be downplayed or devalued.

Anaya's use of Aztlan as a concept relates directly to the idea of an indigenous homeland within the United States. Within indigenous societal structures, land base is at the forefront; a people cannot exist without a place to claim roots. The concept of Aztlan answered the Chican@ cry for a legitimate land base while refusing to recognize the artificial, political borders constructed by the U.S. An established base on the land and roots in history contest the dominant society's definition of Mexicans and Chican@s as illegal aliens, the idea behind deportation. When people lack a land base, they are lost and doomed to be displaced, a problem that plagues the characters in *Heart of Aztlan*. In the novel, the Chavez family has been uprooted from Guadalupe, New Mexico, and forced to search for economic support. That early displacement characterizes the Chican@ experience.

A connection to a homeland is the very essence of an indigenous identity, and Clemente, the patriarch of the Chavez family, understands that important link. In his view, leaving one's land base is equivalent to severing old, sacred ties with the Earth. "Without the land, the relationship

a man created with the earth would be lost, old customs and traditions would fall by the wayside, and they would be like wondering gypsies without a homeland where they might anchor their spirit" (3). He knows that the family's arrival in Albuquerque means a loss of land and culture. His children, Juanita, Ana, and Benjie, are eager to shed the old life, seeing it as stagnant and failing to incorporate the ways of the dominant society. His other son Jason is more hesitant, having been guided by a nameless "old Indian" who bestowed upon Jason the old traditions and customs. In contrast to his siblings, Jason remains more interested in applying what he has learned and feels that the city will not allow that to happen.

The attempt to bring the indigenous element of Chican@ identity to the forefront is challenged by consistent contradictions throughout the novel. Clemente and Jason draw indigenous and Chican@ identities together but in problematic ways. The difficulties of proclaiming an indigenous identity are increased and lack substance if authors fail to depict contemporary affiliation. For instance, the customs the old Indian taught Jason differ from the customs Clemente describes and holds dear. Clemente discusses the ways of the *llano*—translated as grassy plains—but more specifically the way in which cowboys could herd their cattle on those lands. These practices were part of the Chavez means of sustenance and were generational. In contrast, the Indian taught Jason tribal practices such as the meaning and importance of the Earth. Anaya never discloses the tribe to which the old Indian belonged. Anaya never explains the actual meanings of the customs nor how those customs apply to Jason. The youngest son appears to be the first character that functions as a gateway into indigeneity for the family.

Seeking to enhance parallels between Chican@ ancestry and that of Natives, Anaya has Clemente's wife Adela attempt to make a key revelation to her husband. She accepts the loss of their land as a fact of life

and offers the revolutionary idea that a person's home can never be fully forgotten if it is kept in spirit. To ease her husband's worries and ensure the children's remembrance, Adela gathers some earth into a coffee can with the intention of mixing it in their new garden. As Adela gathers the earth, the novel changes its pace and introduces an unknown, supposedly ancient community who did the same thing long ago.

[C]enturies before, the brown hands of an Indian woman had scooped the earth of the heartland into a clay vessel...and the people had carried that sacred urn as they wandered across the new land to complete their destiny. The earth was the new covenant between the people and their gods (7).

The scene is significant because it is the only instance in which Anaya portrays Adela as something other than a burden. For a brief moment she steps out of the role of cumbersome female and takes on a sense of indigeneity, but the moment passes, and the event adds to the contradictions of the novel.

Problematically, Anaya never states who that Indian woman and her people are meant to be, but leaves readers to assume that they are the founders of Aztlan. The result is a pan-indigenous view that presents all Indians as the same. In addition, Adela seems to be a narrow, undefined character. Instead of having the same passion as her husband about their situation, she instead accepts it with an air of complacency. When they arrive in the barrio, Clemente is forced to accept employment at the railroad yard that is plagued by a foreman who fails to pay fair wages. Instead of lending support, Adela continually challenges Clemente's masculinity as they face the challenges of child rearing. Her actions, combined with her almost one-dimensional character, present an element of betrayal and are consistent with the view of the dominant society that indigenous women are essentially treacherous, betraying both family and community. Anaya

remains consistent with that machismo stand by suggesting that Adela's assertion of a leadership role is indicative of the decline not only of the family but also of the community as a whole, an issue that recurs later in the book as well.

One poignant but difficult to interpret scene with implications for indigenous identity focuses on Clemente's work in the railroad yards. The working conditions are dangerous, and the men are expected to work only two at a time when connecting rail cars, conditions indicative of the oppression they face. The general lack of concern and low wages outlines the plight of the laborer in the novel and symbolizes the societal strife experienced by the Chican@ people. Because of the poor conditions, a worker loses his life, and his blood sacrifice is accepted by a Sun Deer, Anaya's allusion to an indigenous god of sorts. The worker's death awakens this "sleeping" god and begins the "fifth cycle," or a new way of the world. The blood sacrifice leads Clemente and the rest of the workers to call for revolution and represents Anaya's method of connecting the ancient, traditional ways with modern struggles. He uses the idea that when assistance was necessary for tribal survival, a blood sacrifice was made to the gods. The sacrifice ensured that the gods would be satisfied. In this instance, the blood loss was both a gift and a sign of urgency to address the plight of the people.

This scene relies on graphic, bloody violence as the worker's head is ripped off by a giant hook, an apparently necessary piece of machinery used to pull rail cars together. Anaya goes into detail about the way in which the man dies, describing his death throes and the blood-soaked earth. Following the incident, an alarm alerts the barrio about the death of a worker. The alarm relays the consistent threat posed to the laborers and underscores the necessity to work dangerous jobs because of the group's economic disadvantages. Yet, Anaya's choice of graphic violence

relies on the use of a barbaric blood sacrifice in a stereotypical indigenous representation.

[T]here had been times of darkness, four times the earth and its life had been consumed in the void, and each time the blood of sacrifice had raised the light. Now the fifth sun, a blinding white deer raced across the sky; a new legend would have to be told... before the deer gave its power to the people (25).

The failure to name a particular tribe continues the notion of Pan-Indian nationhood, with all tribes holding the same spiritual beliefs. Nevertheless, it ties the people of this barrio into an indigenous past by referencing the cycles of the earth and ages, as well as the god-like deer lending its power.

Clemente denounces the role of proactive leader and chooses instead to remain complacent as he encounters these social problems. Just as Clemente realizes the need for drastic change to the societal infrastructure, he begins to lose control of his life. The boss, sensing Clemente's involvement with the worker uprising, swiftly fires him. After losing his job, he doubts his masculinity as his family relies on his daughters' wages for support. Clemente becomes depressed and begins drinking heavily, conditions from which his family is nearly unable to draw him out. The only sense of healing comes from an old blind man named Crispín, who plays a magic guitar and sings of Aztlán. Once Clemente learns of this ancient homeland, a source of inspiration and strength for his ancestors, he yearns to find its location. Crispín takes him to an old Indian woman who is called a *bruja*—translated as witch—and dabbles in witchcraft and the black arts. She guides them on a sort of vision quest in which Clemente learns that Aztlán does not exist physically but is rather a spiritual entity.

The figure of the *bruja* raises additional problems because of its representation of indigenous healers and women. Anaya seemingly based

the character on popular cultural stereotypes of indigenous spiritual systems with roots in the black arts and with some sort of connection to a mythical demonic figure. The idea relates directly to a colonial mind frame, drawing from Catholicism rather than indigenous beliefs, and raises an unfair—and ultimately generic—representation of Native beliefs. In addition, the very fact that the *bruja* is able to allow Clemente to take a “vision quest” further perpetuates a generic, stereotypical view of Indians. In reality, that particular form of vision quest is limited to United States tribes located in the Great Plains. Simultaneously, Anaya does not lend any actual strength to this old Indian woman but instead portrays her as a practitioner of witchcraft. He falls in line with the dominant view that indigenous women are capable of trickery and black magic but hold no actual power or cultural significance. She does not directly lead Clemente on his quest; rather it is the magic that she exudes and her reliance upon the Devil.

Because Aztlan is a spiritual manifestation, as Clemente learns on his vision quest, if the people of the barrio can simply draw upon their heritage and its power, they can better their situations. Using this knowledge, Clemente pulls the workers together and stages an uprising. He invigorates his fellow Chican@s by reminding them of their indigenous roots and long established homeland of Aztlan. With their reclaimed identity, they gain a sense of legitimacy and realize how to end social oppression. Anaya implies that the reclamation is possible because of the help of an ancient, indigenous god, Sun Deer, who facilitates the recognition and reclamation of an indigenous past for his people.

Did he sleep in the lands south of Aztlan, unaware of the sufferings of his people?...The golden deer stood still. He pawed the fresh earth of eternity, sniffed the fathomless space of his journey, then he leaped northward into a trail of blazing glory that would take him to his people (201).

The novel has no clean, happily-ever-after end despite the gained knowledge. Instead the book ends with the people coming to Clemente's house where they prepare to begin a march to the railroad yards. Perhaps a clean ending to the novel is not appropriate given the nature of any discussion of Chican@-Indian identity.

Indigeneity is a difficult topic to process, especially considering the historical connotations throughout México, as well as the paradoxes within Chican@ identity. For Chican@s there is a need to become truly comfortable and confident with a mestizo identity that stems from cultural interactions within the homeland, an idea that is the direct concept for Sandra Cisneros and her novel, *Caramelo*.

In *Caramelo*, Cisneros follows the generations of a Mexican family and their lives within México and the United States, while commenting on the paradoxes that exist in the Chican@ identity. The novel presents the possibility of becoming secure with a *mestiza* identity—finding a common ground between Spanish and Indian heritage. Yet, an indigenous identity lacks a positive spin and instead continues to be a negative aspect of an individual's character. As the novel progresses, anti-Indian sentiment flourishes and is neither countered nor thoroughly explained. Instead, the Indian aspect is left generally untouched resulting in the ever present "invisible Indian," an undercurrent and theme for the current project. In the end, the novel fails to reconcile the identities stemming from the Spanish and indigenous heritages and perpetuates a negative view of Indians. Moreover, through her attempts at identity reconciliation, Cisneros creates a number of identity paradoxes that she leaves unexplained.

Caramelo is truly a novel of transnational identity, representing the experience of bi-cultural individuals. The novel focuses on the experiences of Celaya, the adolescent main character, as she discovers that an individual's identity is shaped by a family's experiences. She

tells of life on both sides of the border between México and the United States, relaying the difficulties faced by those with bi-cultural identities. To incorporate the confusion and discovery of such experiences, Cisneros shapes the novel into a coming of age story. She sentimentally conveys the reality of acculturating to a new American society and integrating traditional Mexican ways. In his article, "The Politics of Translation in Sandra Cisneros' *Caramelo*," Bill Johnson González argues that

what makes Cisneros' work unlike so many other Chicano texts, which tend to depict that community's struggle to preserve its cultural difference from the dominant culture of the United States, is precisely the novel's exploration of the tensions and critical differences within the Mexican/Chicano community (4).

The novel opens with an example of that identity conflict; it begins with a memory of a family trip to Mexico City to visit Celaya's grandparents, the Awful Grandmother and Little Grandfather Reyes. The Reyes family is Creole, born in México of Spanish heritage and very proud of this fact. In contrast to the idea of European purity are the washerwoman Amparo and her daughter Candelaria. They are dark skinned, obviously Indian, and representative of the social stratification in México that defines who occupies the lower rungs of the social ladder. Throughout the novel, Celaya and her family never give a second thought to the place of Indians in society, and the washerwoman's plight is one example. Initially, Celaya's youth makes her ignorant of the sentiments of Creoles, and she often plays with Candelaria, who Celaya feels is the epitome of beauty, with skin the color of caramelo. Their differing places in society are starkly evident when Cousin Antonieta Araceli tells Celaya, "How can you let that Indian play with you? If she comes near me, I'm leaving" (36). Celaya's mother Zoila repeats the sentiment by forbidding Celaya ever to have contact with Candelaria again, for the implied reason of lice and other sanitary

considerations. Those comments are indicative of the general anti-Indian sentiment and the Reyes sense of superiority.

Although the presence of Candelaria may seem trivial, it holds deeper social implications regarding the view and treatment of indigenous people. On the surface, the Reyes family simply seems to be prejudiced and regards Candelaria as a lowly individual. The prejudice, however, goes much deeper than surface appearance. Although not revealed until later in the novel, Candelaria is Celaya's half sister. Her father, Inocencio, had an affair with the washerwoman Amparo making Candelaria an illegitimate child. The situation involves double-sided discrimination. Not only was Inocencio exempt from claiming responsibility for Candelaria, but he was simultaneously permitted to use Amparo as a sexual object. Adding further insult to her humanity, let alone her femininity, she was expected to return to work without any questions. Amparo lacked the rights to confront Inocencio, never mind expect any parenting assistance. Of course, the enormity of the relations between these two characters goes largely unnoticed because of the one-dimensionality of Amparo. She is indicative of the invisible Indian, undeserving of any further development. Furthermore, the washer woman and her daughter fail to make further appearances in the novel once the truth is uncovered. In fact, a troubling ambiguity exists in the characters of Amparo and Candelaria. Cisneros leaves the reader dangling in the sense that she fails adequately to explain the societal implications behind the subjugation of these characters. That shortcoming is especially problematic in the face of the title of the novel, *Caramelo*. It stems from Celaya's fascination with the color of Candelaria's skin, "Smooth as peanut butter, deep as burnt milk candy [caramelo]" (34). Within the novel there is a lasting impression of her complexion, but a lack of interest in any other aspects of the girl and her life. The anti-Indian attitude is rampant throughout this example, continuing to include Celaya

and her mother.

An incongruity underlies Celaya being forbidden to play with Candelaria because the latter is an Indian, and it relates directly to the person who forbids the contact. Zoila is a one-dimensional character with little development other than a bitter, menacing personality. One in-depth identity element sheds an ironic light on the Candelaria situation—Zoila is an Indian herself, a fact revealed late in the novel and only in passing. The Awful Grandmother worries that Celaya does not have a womanly figure, and Inocencio quips that it is due to the Reynas, Zoila's family. "The Reynas are all built like a mountain range. It's their Indian blood. Pure Yaqui" (241). Zoila reacts with dissension, but Cisneros does not pause over this fact for long, choosing to continue the story and leave the larger implications of Zoila's identity unexamined. The anti-Indian, internalized racism that Zoila expresses becomes an aside, but it is glaringly pertinent to the overall message of the novel. Zoila disliked Candelaria, prior to learning of her husband's infidelity, simply because she was an Indian. Furthermore, Zoila is unhappy with her own indigenous identity, but these aspects of her character remain unexplained, placing her into the category of invisible Indian as well.

Directly related to the invisible Indian, as represented by Zoila and Candelaria, is the self-hating Indian. This idea depends upon internalized racism, and the novel pursues that theme. The entire second part of *Caramelo* tells the story of the Awful Grandmother, whose name is Soledad; the story allows Celaya truly to understand her relationship with her grandmother. Soledad's story is told post-mortem and makes clear that the grandmother was a bitter woman who had a difficult life. Yet, her difficulties can be attributed to an indigenous identity and a self-hatred of her heritage. The reader sees the hatred that Soledad felt towards her identity arising from being abandoned by her father. Because of her mixed blood status—

indigenous and Spaniard—the father no longer wanted to raise Soledad after the death of the Indian mother. Sent out into the world, she became a servant, befitting her Indian status, and coincidentally, worked for another part of the Reyes family. During that time, two additional occurrences further cement her future identity, ensuring that Soledad would suffer from internalized racism.

Regina Reyes was the perfect example of a woman suffering from internalized racism and served as a model for Soledad who later exemplified the same traits. Regina, great grandmother of Inocencio, came from indigenous roots, but had managed to marry higher up in class status. She married a Spaniard, automatically elevating her social status, and leading her to ignore her Indian background and despise those who had the same beginnings. She was the embodiment of self-hatred, but nevertheless took pity upon Soledad because “Soledad was a Reyes too, although of the backward Indian variety that reminded Regina too much of her own humble roots, a peasant Reyes from the country” (113). Nevertheless, Regina refused to claim her indigeneity and knew that Soledad was going to fulfill the expectations of her lowly status, that of servant girl.

The fate that befell Amparo reflects that of Soledad, further displaying the anti-Indian attitude expressed by the Reyes family and others in México. Soledad met and fell in love with her cousin, Narciso, and fully believed the feeling was mutual, especially when he began making nightly visits into her kitchen quarters. “Soledad could not have known Narciso was not singling her out among all women, but simply enjoying her as his birthright. Was she not ‘*la muchacha*’ after all, and was it not part of her job to serve the young man of the house?” (156). That event exemplifies the thought process of los Creoles and set the stage for what happened between Inocencio and Amparo, the washerwoman. In the end, Soledad became pregnant and marries Narciso, whose father forced him to uphold

the obligation. Thus, Soledad improves her social standing by marrying a Spaniard and is able to ignore her Indian heritage. Ultimately, the marriages, as both Regina and Soledad experience them, represent a form of internalized racism. Both women, awarded the opportunity to deny their indigenous heritage, embraced the ability to forget their histories.

The ultimate example of identity paradox is seen in Celaya whose coming of age story tells her family's history. The purpose of Celaya's exploration of the experiences of mestizas, especially her grandmother Soledad's, is to express a hope of coming to terms with her own identity. Although the story seeks a middle ground between the Spaniard and Indian existence, the broader goal is not accomplished. Instead, a narrative centering on the importance of her Spaniard relatives flourishes, and the Indians are pushed to the back. In fact, the mention of any Indian ancestry has negative implications and reactions from other characters. The novel allows only a limited focus on any Indian aspect of los Reyes, while emphasizing Spaniard relatives and blood.

[T]heir blood was Spanish, something to remember when extolling their racial superiority over their mixed-blood neighbors. And even if these ne'er-do-well Reyes had not inherited anything but an overdose of pride, the family Reyes was still *española* (163).

Celaya reflects that attitude by speaking much about her Spanish history, but leaving out the mestiza element. She has reached no reconciliation.

A belief exists that once an individual crosses from México to the United States, assimilation into American culture will inevitably occur, resulting in the loss of indigenous heritage. This idea has been at the forefront of Chican@ identity, placing indigeneity in the past and embracing a hybrid of Mexican and American cultures. Cisneros's *Caramelo* and Anaya's *Heart of Aztlán* are novels concerned with exploring that concept and embracing the notion of identity determined by the border. Leslie Marmon

Silko, in her novel *Almanac of the Dead*, chooses to disavow the power of the border through characters that do not fit the identity mold. Many of her Indian characters keep their indigenous identities intact despite living in *el otro lado* (the other side), as they often refer to the United States; they exist within American society, successfully avoiding assimilation. Silko discusses the Mexican-American border as permeable, stripping it of its impenetrable existence and lessening its divisiveness. Instead, she emphasizes the shared histories of colonialism within Indian communities of both México and the United States, creating a pan-indigenous network. This makes the adherence to a particular identity, whether Chicana@ or Indian, irrelevant and melds the two identities into one.

Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* is truly a vast novel, attempting to encompass stories and experiences from the perspectives of the oppressed and oppressors. Essentially, it is a novel of reclamation for tribal persons worldwide but with particular emphasis given to the indigenous people of México and the Americas. The story concerns events that presage the return to ancestral lands by all persons residing on the American continents. Capitalism is beginning to crumble because resources are quickly being depleted and violence is beginning to turn on the perpetrators. The violence can be seen within México with escalating indigenous uprisings caused by the wealthy who have used resources indiscriminately. Silko has created an apocalyptic world filled with indigenous uprisings. She attempts to uproot persons of European heritage so the land may once again belong to the Indians. In his article, "The Dissolution of the Mexican-American Border and Redefinition of Chicano/a Mexican Identity in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*," David Harding contends that Silko's work "explores the implications of apocalyptic consequences of a reawakening of indigenous identity among Mexicans living on both sides of the Mexican-US border" (153). The reformation of the Indian identity is a vital

aspect of *Almanac of the Dead*, but Silko also presents a re-rendering of Chicanismo. The novel makes the argument that because people on both sides of the border share history, the border no longer has significance, nor does the continued identity distinction between Mexican and Indian, or even Chican@ and Indian.

To make connections between Chican@s and Indians, the border must be penetrable, and tribal connections that existed prior to European arrival must have importance. This is the premise throughout *Almanac of the Dead*: with the border diminished, Silko places importance on indigenous connection and contemporary identity. Unlike Rudolfo Anaya's romanticizing the Indian by placing indigeneity in the past, Silko's indigenous characters are representative of contemporary indigeneity relating to Mexicans living on the U.S. side of the border. Silko argues that "the white man had always been trying to 'control' the border when no such thing existed to control except in the white man's mind" (592). The novel asserts that cultural and tribal differences must be set aside and the history of violence and colonialism is a history that can be shared. The imposition of the border only works to create divisiveness, but if people ignore the border, then connections can be re-established between indigenous people.

The fragmentation of the novel, seen through its non-linear plot line, indicates the climactic chaos occurring within the Americas. Silko links the feelings of her characters to identity issues and conflicts, such as those between Europeans and Native Americans in the U.S. and México. Many of the direct interactions between whites and non-whites hold a tension that is indicative of colonial history. Nevertheless, the conflict between the indigenous history of Chican@s and that of México and the United States has been a common theme in history and literature. That theme rests on the ideas that Chican@s not only lost their Indian identity when they

crossed the border, but also that their identity began to wane before the actual crossing. Mexicans, and those of Mexican descent, are consistently viewed as foreigners. One native character asserts that

the people he had been used to calling “Mexicans” were really remnants of different kinds of Indians. But what had remained of what was Indian was in appearance only...They had lost contact with their tribes and their ancestors’ worlds (88).

These conflicts appear to be the driving force behind Silko’s decision to alleviate the importance of the Mexican-American border and present Indians on both sides as similar. She places importance on the shared history of colonial impositions and violence that Native Americans have faced throughout the continents. The willingness of Zeta and other Indians to traverse the border to bring about the revolution undermines the political reality of the border. Many Indians, realizing the importance of forming a union between Mexican and U.S. tribes, realize the border has no real power over their lives. Calabazas, a Yaqui associate, asserts:

We don’t believe in boundaries. Borders....We are here thousands of years before the first whites. We are here before maps or quit claims....We have always moved freely. North-south. East-west. We pay no attention to what isn’t real. Imaginary lines (216).

A new foundation for Chican@ identity results when indigenous connections in the novel transcend the political border. The characters challenge the contention that indigeneity must be set aside after leaving one’s homeland, in this case México. The characters who best exemplify the reformed identity are Yoeme, Lecha, and Zeta. Rather than sever ties with their tribal affiliation, those three women work to keep their indigenous identities intact. They actively work towards producing a revolution in which Native Americans on both continents will retake lost land.

Just as Silko removes artificial boundaries that create separation, so she

removes the insistence upon “pure” blood. The idea of purity in blood may be one barrier preventing a Chican@ identity from being considered an indigenous identity. Therefore, alleviating blood quantum from the rubric for “Indianness” compliments the novel’s argument. Removing the focus on blood and purity also works to underscore the trivial nature behind continuing to draw distinctions between Chican@ and Indian identities; they are one and the same. In the novel, the twin Yaqui sisters, Zeta and Lecha, are embodiments of the Chican@ experience with clashing histories embedded in their blood. They are products of colonialism at the nadir of which an Indian meets a European not out of love but domination, but each woman comfortably claims Indian identity. Originally, Zeta and Lecha were taught to deny their Indian identity and, instead, to claim Mexican heritage because it was grounded in European not indigenous ancestry. That view held until their grandmother Yoeme—the indigenous name for the Yaqui—enters into their lives. She makes it clear that they are of indigenous heritage, and it has simply been their mestizo, “half no-brain white, half worst kind of Indian” (121) relatives who had diminished their ancestry. In her granddaughters Yoeme recognizes the potential for harnessing abilities needed to bring about the revolution that will end European domination throughout the Americas. Yoeme little cares that her granddaughters do not possess pure Indian blood but are half-breeds. This is an example of how the novel removes the emphasis on blood quantum and focuses instead on the shared histories of colonial violence. Unknown to the girls, their family has quite the history of being both the perpetrators and simultaneous receptors of that violence.

The family history is indicative of the tensions existing between Native Americans and Europeans and the problems arising from the attempt to maintain an indigenous identity. Yoeme was married to a Spaniard named Guzman as part of an agreement to maintain peace between the Spaniards

and her tribe. The Spaniards broke the treaty, as many other treaties were broken, and massacred Yoeme's clan. She fled, knowing that remaining with her family would result in her death as well. Yoeme makes it well known that her half-breed children, one of whom is Zeta and Lecha's own mother, lacked the resolve to be true Indians. They were too willing to forego their indigenous heritage for that of a white identity. Simply having "Indian blood" is not enough; a particular ideology and potential needs to exist as well. Yoeme's own life experience lends her the resolution needed to become a driving force in the revolution. Survival was essential, because she possesses a book, an almanac, containing prophecies about the future of the world. She knows that the time of land reclamation is near and that the notebook must be passed on so that its different prophecies may be interpreted.

Zeta and Lecha are twins and opposites; two halves of a whole. Neither sister fits the mold of the stereotypical, dominant societal depiction of the spiritual Indian, working to bring peace between whites and Native Americans. Lecha represents knowledge of colonialism and its historical significance. She brings to light the atrocities and impacts of colonialism, acting as a gateway between past and future. As Silko explains, "The power Lecha had seemed to be as an intermediary, the way the snakes were messengers for the spirit beings in the other worlds below" (138). For people to participate in the Indigenous revolution, they must be aware of the past and how it will influence the future. Lecha's insight seems to sense only death for the whites and their brethren. She traverses the talk-show circuit, touting herself as a psychic with the ability to locate those that are lost, but most troubling to Lecha is that the lost always turn up dead. Many of the people who approach Lecha are of European ancestry seeking lost children. The fact that the children always turn up dead, murdered in terrible ways, is indicative of the lack of future for whites. The

terrible deaths of the children seem to parallel the ways in which whites perpetrated colonial violence against indigenous people. To ensure that Indian populations ultimately declined, many U.S. and Mexican soldiers murdered Indian children. Lecha's encrypted messages to society at large make it obvious that the tide of colonialism is shifting, with violence and death being directed against the oppressors. Many Indian tribes take that shift to mean the final end to European domination is on the way, an idea that fits Lecha's predictions and contrasts with the notions of the Spirit Guide Indian who foresees only good things for whites. In Silko's work, both the psychic insights and the almanac interpretations speak of the end of colonialism and the uprisings of indigenous people. The language and words behind history and future change is Lecha's primary concern. Inciting change and ending such colonial impositions as a divisive border are possible when people become aware of history.

Freely crossing the Mexican-American border shows absolute disregard for European impositions and brings Indians one step closer to revolution. The character of Zeta represents the actual physical aspects of war and revolution. The impact of historical impositions is visible through her actions. While Lecha is concerned with spreading the word of change, Zeta enacts it by smuggling weapons from México into the United States. She holds no qualms about the revolution taking on a violent quality. Humorously, Zeta helps finance the Indian revolution by selling cultural items to white people who are interested in garnering authentic Indian "trinkets." Unknowingly, the whites who buy her products are funding their own demise. A further irony lies in the fact that the weaponry will be used to uproot people of European ancestry and send them fleeing back to their respective homelands. The tribal community is chagrined over Zeta's behavior, proclaiming it to go against the "Indian Way." While conducting

her arms smuggling across the Mexican-American border, Zeta faces people who claim it is not right to go against the laws of white men, but she challenges them:

What wasn't the "Indian Way"? The people had been free to go traveling north and south for a thousand years, traveling as they pleased, then suddenly white priests had announced smuggling as a mortal sin because smuggling was stealing from the government (133).

Zeta never accepted the adage of the Indian Way as meaning weakly complacent and willing to continue to allow European domination to continue. The mere idea that assisting her people is somehow un-Indian makes Zeta scoff. Revolution remains unobtainable if people are unwilling to examine the colonial history of America and subsequently act to change the future.

In the end, each woman—Yoeme, Lecha, and Zeta—possesses an element necessary for survival and revolution. Each sister is an embodiment of an ability needed to overcome European domination and put an end to colonialism. Yoeme exemplifies indigenous survival by refusing to recognize any agreement between Europeans and Native Americans. She represents the importance of community ties. Lecha possesses the ability to bring past and future to the forefront, being wholly representative of the mind frame needed to create a revolution. She brings to society the idea that the colonial legacy of identity division can be overcome by recognizing the common history and indigenous identity. She exemplifies the spiritual bonds between indigenous communities. Zeta possesses the ability to negate any physical power the U.S.-México border has by unboundedly crossing it at a whim. There are no tangible differences between Indians on either side, but rather the idea that the border imposes differing identities. In this way she makes the indigenous communal connections a corporeal manifestation.

Conclusion

This project held challenges on many fronts. The essential task was choosing three works that really embodied the different problematic aspects of Chican@ identity and indigeneity without seeming simply to attack Chicanismo. Rather, the task was to explore the historical and contemporary representations of indigeneity and attempt to find the root causes behind the identity confusion embedded in the Chican@ identity paradigm. Three issues stand out as contributing to that confusion: Mexican colonial history, the reverence of Aztec culture created by the Chican@ Movement, and the present-day Pan-Indian identity appropriation.

Rudolfo Anaya's *Heart of Aztlán* simultaneously serves two functions and becomes representative of two aspects of indigeneity identity confusion—the influence of the Chican@ Movement and an adherence to Pan-Indianism. The author seeks to portray the pride of Mexican indigeneity through his character's adherence to the Chican@ Movement and the social uprisings of the barrio. Yet, Anaya also has his characters participating in Pan-Indianism through Clemente's vision quest and Jason's Indian Spirit Guide. Each of these characters yearns to learn of his Aztec past and reclaim his masculinity in the face of societal oppression. Women have minor roles within this novel and seem to act as hindrances to the reclamation of indigeneity. That attitude highlights a major problem of the early Chican@ Movimiento and its tendency to discount or exclude women. Anaya presents a struggle to lose the European, foreign aspect of identity, replacing it instead with an ancient presence. In the end, he perpetuates a misogynistic, romanticized version of Indians.

In Sandra Cisneros's *Caramelo*, the feminine is in the forefront and explores an effort to reclaim a mestiza identity. This novel is representative of the ways in which Mexican colonial history has impacted the view of Indians mainly through class matters and social standing. Despite the

fact that this history was restricted to a particular nation, it nevertheless had an impact on the formation of Chican@ identity. Cisneros offers a personalized account of these impacts. Her particular account proves to be interesting because it focuses on a particular character—Celaya—tracing her family's Indian past and attempting to overcome the negativity and discrimination perpetuated by the Mexican mestizo population against the indigenous populations. When the indigenous element is present in the novel, however, it is represented by negative stereotypes of Indians. Cisneros places much more emphasis on a European past, while excising the contemporary and ancestral Indian. The primary focus of her novel involves the reconstruction of roots in an attempt to create and maintain pride in an indigenous heritage in the face of acculturated discrimination, but she fails to do so because of her continued focus upon Spanish ancestry and an inability to discuss Indians in any meaningful way.

Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* is drastically different from the other two novels under discussion. Interestingly, the difference lies in her ability to accomplish the goals of both Cisneros and Anaya. The reason for her success is difficult to pinpoint, but it may lie in the fact that Silko identifies as indigenous with Mexican heritage rather than the other way around. Thus, she is able to portray the indigenous heritage of Chican@s while ending the divisive designations of "Chican@" and "Indian." She accomplishes that end by portraying present day Chican@s, who are still very much invested in their Mexican indigenous heritage, with a tribal affiliation that is not the Aztec nation. Instead, their tribe is a living nation, the Yaqui, located closer to the Mexican-American border. She puts an end to the constant reliance upon a Pan-Indian identification, whether by identifying with the Aztecs or by appropriating Southwestern native tribal cultures. A second reason behind Silko's achievement may be attributable to the main theme of her novel—indigenous unity across all American nations. Therefore,

she draws no distinctions between Chican@s, Mestizos, or full-blooded Mexican Indians, but rather develops the idea that each of these groups has an indigenous heritage that should be the unifying factor.

In the end, perhaps less attention needs to be focused on finding actual solutions to the Chican@ indigeneity complex and more effort devoted to outlining the historical and contemporary particulars for the identity confusion. It is important to understand the historically negative sentiments towards indigeneity in Mexican culture and the way that sentiment crops up in contemporary Chican@ culture. The building of pride in an indigenous heritage, although problematic, nevertheless is a hopeful sign for an eventual reclamation and identification with contemporary tribes. It is not necessary to remove or completely discount the contributions that adherence to the Aztec tribal nation has afforded Chican@s, but perhaps it is important that as a people we begin to shed that dependence.

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