

**'MEXICANIDAD'**  
**THE RESURGENCE OF THE INDIAN IN POPULAR MEXICAN NATIONALISM**

'Mexicanidad' is not so much a struggle for mainstream political power as a proto-nationalistic 'indianist' movement, whose supporters are predominantly socially marginalized young males of Mexico City (and elsewhere). The paper explores how the actors, by articulating meanings taken from the pre-colonial past in processes of socio-symbolic elaboration, are creating new identities for themselves with which to challenge, performatively, the priorities of the state.

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#### First Draft

The Mexica are by now well known in the Mexican national space. Photographs of them appear in daily newspapers dressed in Aztec style costumes, crowned by exuberant feather headdresses with seed rattles tied around their ankles. This is how they accoutre themselves to espouse the cause of *mexicanidad*, as their movement is called, by means of which they contest their present situation and are articulating a discourse about a possible future. The occasions at which such pictures are taken are indicative of what the Mexica conceive of as central to their representations of 'indianity': some are of ceremonies to glorify Aztec culture heroes, a few of events for causes related to the indigenous peoples of Mexico but more are of ritual dances performed on significant dates in the Aztec calendar backed by a mythology that they are currently elaborating.

Despite appearances, the Mexica are not some indigenous group living on the periphery of the nation state or hidden away in some no longer so remote rural enclave, rather they are inhabitants of the capital city where they give to *mexicanidad* a public face, as they dance in the Zocalo. This is a place that is not only in the centre of Mexico City itself, but also the site where the idea of Mexico as nation-state is continuously regenerated by the rituals involving the national flag (which is ceremonially raised, with full military backing from the adjacent Palacio Nacional accompanied by a brass band, on a number of occasions during the year). Yet the Mexica claim to not want to

be party to the authoritarian state's plans for ever greater involvement in the capitalist project and the concomitant processes of globalization that this entails. As 'techno', 'ethno' and other 'scapes' become increasingly more similar worldwide (Appadurai 1990), there will be perhaps an increasing need for 'escapes' from the 'scapes': the Mexica are they claim in search of the 'real' Mexico, the Mexico that existed prior to the Spanish Conquest, which has been being systematically destroyed ever since.

In this paper I will be looking, then, not at mainstream nationhood, that sense of belonging to the greater Mexico, which although often not as yet present amongst rural peasants, is difficult to avoid for those who live in Mexico City. But rather at those who have been on the whole born and bred in the City, who have been inculcated into the ideas of nationhood since their childhood, who in theory should have the advantages of an urban know-how that living at the centre of a nation-state engenders, but who, despite being the children of capitalism, see Mexican society as it is currently constituted not as a source of opportunity and hence empowerment (as their immigrant parents may well have done) but rather the opposite. I will be looking at those who are actively stating, albeit largely performatively, that they do not want to take part in mainstream urban life and whose perceptions of it are that it can only fail them. They propose rather a form of proto-nationalism, as yet largely performative and informational, which is perhaps best described as a 'collective imaginary' (Escobar 1992:68). This tends to be seen by outsiders as an 'ethno-escape', and by analysts as a proto-nationalistic social movement or a subculture to be tolerated - constituted as it is, in a way that is as yet apparently non contiguous with other existing social structures. But to the proponents it is much more than this, an essential form, a means to achieve a *reinvidicaion* of the indigenous past which will lead them to a better future: very much the only path worth following.

The Mexica are not alone in feeling that there is something amiss with the national project. For decades but especially in the run up to 1992, there has been a spate of publications on the subject. Lomnitz-Adler (1992) has suggested that we know plenty about the representations of the national space - the literature by the pensadores (as he calls essayists such as Paz) - but very little about its sociology: about what is actually going on. There is he claims a vicious circle 'built on the tensions that occur between the maze of social relations that exist within the national space and the ideologies regarding a common identity, a shared sense of the past, and a unified gaze towards the future' (Ibid:3). It is the failure to find a way out of this circular dialectic, the labyrinth (of his title) that is stopping Mexico advancing. Another slightly earlier book is Bartra's (1992), in which he emphasizes that Mexicans are entrapped by a paternalistic authoritarian government that creates a sense of disempowerment. It is because of this 'cage', that Mexicans have not yet been able to 'finish' themselves: that is emerge as a democratic people.

Neither Lomnitz-Adler nor Bartra are proposing that the national project be abandoned, while in essence this is what Bonfil (or at least some of his interpreters) have been suggesting for some time. He senses that Mexico is forgetting its roots, that the 'profound' Mexico, so central to the establishment of Mexico as a nation state in the '20s is being forgotten. He sees the burdensome state apparatus to be founded in Western ideals of hegemony which have produced and are still producing what he calls an 'imaginary' Mexico, 'which assumes itself to be the bearer of the only valid plan for the country's future' (Bonfil 1987:174). For Bonfil, Mexico as nation state is the imagined community (Anderson: 1991), that has imposed its language and cultural codes by means of the hegemonic machinery of government, on a plurality of smaller communities. His claim is that the imported model of development that has been imposed has ignored the 'real' Mexico and has failed to use the diversity already to hand. Bonfil's suggestion that Mexico could

return to a 'Mexico Profundo' seems at best romantic at worst naive, as he does not indicate how this is to be achieved, but it clearly touches something that many Mexicans feel very strongly<sup>1</sup>

There is no doubt that this has been and still is a crucial time for Mexico. On the one hand Mexico is only now becoming an equal partner as a producer with the USA and Canada, with the signing of the NAFTA agreement, as globalization moves on apace, yet as indicated above there is a perception that the whole machinery of government that made this possible was not one produced *sui generis* but imported or imposed. The whole process of imposition began at the time of the 'Conquest', for which the Mexicans have never forgiven the Spaniards for it caused the destruction of a civilization that in many ways was superior to that of their conquerors. They have not forgotten the slow dissolution of a society that it is claimed looked after its citizens well, although some were slaves and others were sacrificed. This resentment has simmered for centuries, as 'foreign' ideas or institutions have been imported one by one from Europe or the USA, or were forcibly imposed by post-Hispanic invaders. The renewed fervour of wanting Mexico for the Mexicans, of wanting to purify it, scourge it of all extraneous elements and to lay great emphasis on its cultural patrimony, particularly that of the Aztecs, has increased again recently because of a renewed self-consciousness brought about by the so-called celebrations for the 500 years of discovery of the Americas in 1992.

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<sup>1</sup> The sale of Bonfil's book (44,000 were printed of the 1989/90 edition) is an indication of its popular appeal.

This is not a new phenomena. Mexico's independence from Spain in 1813 produced a neo-Aztec movement: Iturbide was crowned emperor of Anahuac. After the revolution of 1910, the use of Aztec elements became an important aspect of 'indigenismo' in the interests of building up a 'Mexican' nationalism. A new neo-indigenist movement emerged in the 1950s (Odena Güemas :1984), which Freidlander refused to study as it consisted almost entirely of 'erudite contemporary idolaters' (Paz 1972:91): Mexico City elites (particularly lawyers) who read up on the Aztec past and elaborated 'invented' Aztec ceremonies to various culture heroes (Friedlander: 1975) (cf Rostas: forthcoming, for a discussion of this).

Knight has drawn a useful distinction between 'indigenismo' and 'indianism'. While official 'indigenismo' has always implied a desire for integration, 'indianism' asserts the need for autonomous development. The later has come in various forms: those groups who were cultural extremists, 'parlor aztecofiles' as indicated above (Knight 1990:81), those who were more politically radical and who argued for autonomous development, and finally the more recent and 'vigorous' indianist movement, that is Pan-American, and sees indigenous populations as 'potential nations' and like the extremists, sees indigenous culture as a 'valid alternative in the face of western civilization' (Ibid:106,ft note 56).

But can Mexico be said to be indigenous? The indigenous population has only existed as a rural peasantry, distant from the mechanisms of the developing state and its economy, for centuries. Marginalized and powerless, the rural indigenes have a subsistence economy and have tended to be exploited rather than assisted, submitted to ethnic genocide rather than privileged and until recently have been largely unrepresented, because mostly ignored in the current national project. The appearance of the EZLN in Chiapas in 1994 has helped substantially to start a process of rural

empowerment (from outside the established system) but it remains to be seen whether the negotiations to achieve more representation and hence consideration at a Federal level can come to anything.

The stratified indigenous urban society that existed before the Spanish Conquest disappeared long ago and with it any representation that indigenous people may have had at the centre: the indigenous in most Cities today are either those who are there to work for temporary periods and whose long term base is in the countryside or what we might call the 'culturally dispossessed', those who have given up on a life on the land and have succumbed to the proletarian path. The Mexica fall predominantly into the latter group of people, often the children of rural immigrants, who despite being to all intents and purposes 'mestizo', nonetheless want to make claims to being indigenous and who are demanding, performatively at least, a different future for themselves.

They like the members of the earlier movements are also 'cultural extremists'. But they are also spiritual extremists with a nationalistic bent. According to the popular writer Velasco Piña whose novels have been one of the other strong formative influences on the Mexica, Mexico is to become, in the near future, the centre of the spiritual world (as this moves westwards from Tibet)<sup>2</sup>. Thus the present is not so much a crucial moment economically and socially as cosmically, giving *mexicanidad* some of the qualities of a millenarian movement.

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<sup>2</sup> Velasco Piña has published a number of novels based on historical themes. *Tlacaelel* (1979) depicts what life might have been like in Tenochtitlan at the time of the Aztecs. While *Regina* (1987) combines recent historical events, the death of a young olympic athlete at Tlatelolco in 1968 with the esoteric: she was predestined to sustain the chakra that is Mexico. More recently he published **The Return to the Sacred**. The popularity of his books can be assessed by the size of the print run: for *Regina*, 7000 copies of the second edition.

## THE MEXICA

The Mexica are predominantly male, young, mestizo and residents of Mexico City (and other large cities such as Guadalajara). Some live in the older, longer established but now run down central parts (of Mexico City), but more come from the rapidly growing barrios that are expanding ever further into the countryside and from rural communities. Their experience is that the city holds very little future for them. There are few jobs, few chances of training or further education. But perhaps more pertinently they are not interested in the jobs available: to take work in a factory would be to succumb to the very system that they are wanting to reject and would be insufficiently varied and interesting (but might be considered for a while in the USA because so much better paid). Some are involved in what Harvey has called 'flexible accumulation' (1989:189): part-time work in the service industries or other enterprises. More make their money when and how they can as part of Mexico's huge black economy, and are in that sense 'New Age': so for example Pedro (alias Tecpancalli), trains dogs in the morning and sometimes in the evening near to where he lives on the outskirts, makes enough to subsist and has free time for Mexica activities. Jorge (Cuauhtemoc) practices traditional medicine between dances and other events. Metzli (Carlos) achieves what many would like to be able to do: he makes all his income from Mexica related pursuits; the fabrication of headresses, feathered shields and leg rattles.

The Mexica are the young who have frequently been marginalized because of their ethnic origins. For although Mexico may now be predominantly a Mestizo nation, and the castas long since gone, racism is still rife: a white skin still gives you better opportunities. For the majority of immigrants or second generation people in Mexico City, the aim has been to rid themselves of indigenous traits that may give their ethnic origins away, such as language and dress but their skin colour is



ineffaceable. The *Mexica* however are turning this on its head. Those attributes that in early life may have acted against them, they are now using to advantage to build up their movement. Proud of their skin colour, they flaunt it as they dance in Aztec style costumes that reveal much of their bodies. They want to redeem rather than reject their linguistic inheritance. Although the number of indigenous languages in Mexico is still quite large (50+), they privilege Nahuatl (the language of the Aztecs) over all others and many are learning it. The use of this language is a significant part of their identity construction. Caso has suggested that 'an indian is one who feels that he belongs to an indigenous community' (quoted in Knight: 1990:75) which is as Knight points out the extreme of the phenomenological approach: the Mexica, despite being 'mestizo' according to official classification (and common usage), are, as members of one of the many smaller groups (Kalpulli) which make up *mexicanidad*, reclassifying themselves as 'indigenous'. This begs the question as to whether *mexicanidad* is really to do with 'race' and not rather a reaction to a class position; an attempt to mask class relations with ethno-cultural elaboration, with an invented ethnicity: *mexicanidad* is clearly about identity politics.

As already indicated, prior to becoming Mexica, many suffered from the kind of anomie that characterizes life in a rapidly changing environment. What was their identity? What could they identify with, where did they belong? In one sense, they knew that they were at the bottom of the pile. But they went to school (or at least some of them did for a while), they hung out in the local vicinity, drank, smoked, played football, went dancing, attended cockfights perhaps, where part of various groups, but what was it that gave them a sense of purpose in life? For many that lacuna in identity formation (and socialization) has been filled by *mexicanidad*.

## MEXICANIDAD

*Mexicanidad* is being constructed as a reaction to the disorientating, identity threatening and anomie creating processes of the hegemonic state and has been described, by its analysts/proponents, as 'social, political and cultural'(ref). Elsewhere I have discussed whether *mexicanidad* can be seen as a socio- or politico-cultural movement (Rostas: forthcoming). Certainly the idea of what a social movement can be said to be, has shifted over recent decades. Increasingly many of the actors have been seen to be engaged not so much in struggles to gain better material conditions<sup>3</sup> as in cultural reformulations or strategies, that is in a form of socio-symbolic elaboration in the search for new identities which involves articulating contested meanings ((Escobar & Alvarez 1992, Escobar 1992, Melucci 1985, Evers 1985). As Escobar has put it the task ahead can be seen to be 'the construction of collective imaginaries capable of orientating society and political action' (1992:68).

*Mexicanidad* is certainly constructivist rather than essentialist and has a performative agenda which is socio-cultural rather than Political (Melucci 1985). In general in such movements the meaning of the action is to be found in the action itself rather than in the stated or pursued goals. As the action is focused on cultural codes, the form of the movement is itself the message (Melucci 1985:801). Such movements need no longer be dramatic events that penetrate to the 'cupola' of power. Even though they occur at a level way below existing hegemonic power relations and may never develop into a 'revolutionary threat' to the dominant society, the 'doing it differently' at an

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<sup>3</sup> Although Mexico City is networked by social movements of this type: collective action aimed at gaining access to land, housing and services cf Miguel Diaz Barriga 1996.)

every day level in itself signifies and can be a potential danger.

So how are the Mexica doing it differently? Many Mexica are members of a Kalpulli, the Aztec term for a self-governing local group or community (Ricard 1966:25) which gives a certain structure to their lives. The Kalpulli usually has a head (or Tlatoani) who makes most of the decisions (the Mexica tend not to be interested in democratic structures) and the members attempt to live their lives in a manner that is as Aztec as possible<sup>4</sup>. Some live in communities while others live separate existences like everyone else.

Many spend their 'working' time fashioning artifacts, making pre-colombian musical instruments for sale, building te-mescal (Aztec steam baths), learning (or teaching Nahuatl) and also studying other aspects of Aztec cosmology such as astrology which uses the complexities of the pre-colombian calendar to predict. Although they claim to want to reject the infrastructure of the capitalist world, most urban Mexica do not question their use of electricity and running water (nor the watching of television)<sup>5</sup>.

The more performative side of their practices, their dances, are also the more public. The places where they dance are also sites for the dissemination of information. In the environs of a dance, there will often be a range of items on sale which attract the interest of say rural families visiting Mexico City, who as yet know little about their Aztec past. Objects of use such as dance artifacts,

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<sup>4</sup> It is now more usual to use the term 'Mexica' to refer to the Aztec past, however here I am using Aztec to mean historical beliefs and processes as distinct from those practised by today's Mexica.

<sup>5</sup> I know little about this side of their activities but am hoping to fieldwork on this aspect soon.

small drums and pipes, natural crystals and 'power' stones, as well as second hand books on themes of interest to the Mexica, xeroxes of important literature and various journals including possibly **Ce-Acatl**, about which I say more below.

A dance in the Zocalo in Mexico City frequently involves 5 to 10 groups of Mexica, often intermixed with groups of Concheros. For the dances that the Mexica perform are those of the Concheros, a tradition that has existed for sometime<sup>6</sup>. Although the Mexica also sing the same songs and play the same music, they stress that they are not Concheros, for they have stripped the Concheros' practices of any Spanish elements. Where the Concheros play a stringed instrument made from an armadillo shell, the *concha*, the Mexica do not, rejecting it as being *gauchupine*. They play only pre-Colombian instruments which are predominantly percussive: their music is thus more strident than that of the Concheros. Where the Concheros' way of dancing emphasizes 'ritualization', that of the Mexica lays much more stress on 'performativity': for while the Concheros dance to achieve at-one-ment (atonement) with a Christian God, the Mexica claim that their dance is to get in touch with, or recreate the various energies of those entities that have been falsely called deities. The Concheros' dance ideally consists of a balance of men and women who perform in 'union', while the dances of the Mexica usually have more male than female performers. Flamboyance is encouraged and dancers are highly competitive one with another (cf Rostas:in press). Although often the Concheros attract a crowd, they dance not to be watched, for their dance is religious: concerned primarily with inner states of being. The Mexica on the other hand are primarily dancing to 'make a show'. They have truncated many of

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<sup>6</sup> Some claim the Concheros dance started at the turn of the century during the early period of indigenismo, others that it was an off-shoot of Mexican Independence in the 1820s, others again that the present form of their dances are Aztec and that they were carried out in secret for several centuries (cf Rostas 1991, forthcoming).

the preliminaries of 'ritualization' that the Concheros follow. They do not say prayers, nor enunciate 'el es dios' before they dance which enables a sense of community. The mode in which they ask permission to dance is an exercise in individual prowess, rather than a sequence of movements requesting permission of the deities which leads to harmonious interdependence. Nor do they present themselves to the four winds (*las animas conquistadores de los cuatro vientos*), which are clearly not Catholic but are not considered pre-Conquest either. If they have any religion, it is an ongoing reconstruction of Aztec beliefs and practices (excluding the human sacrifice which they deny) which feed into a form of nationalism that has millenarianism undertones: theirs is the heady religiosity of proto-nationalism!

The pursuit of *mexicanidad* is **not** just one of the many aspects of any one Mexica's life, something to be followed in her but more generally his spare time, but a way of being that informs their whole lives. The Mexica seem to attend as many dances as possible: will dance not only with their own group but also those of others and with groups of Concheros. Although increasingly Conchero events have become restricted to the weekend, so as not to interfere with the schedule of work, the Mexica seem to be reversing that trend. A dance at the weekend in some small town outside Mexico City, may be followed on the following Wednesday by one outside a monastery, by invitation of the order in the south of Mexico City: previously a Conchero event but now increasingly dominated by Mexica dancers. The Mexica distinguish themselves from the Concheros not only by the way that they dance but also by their clothing. Where the different groups of Concheros wear a range of styles made from many different materials, some of which cover the body more than others, the Mexica are exigent not only about style but also about the use of materials. They aim to use only materials available before the Spanish conquest, natural not dyed feathers for their headresses, and snake skins (or other leathers) for their clothing rather

plastic gold and/or silver trim: the overall designs being based on depictions in the codices. Many grow their hair and wear it tied at the back, (symbolic of the warrior who has not yet taken captives) but let it loose when they dance. Many Mexica have adopted Nahuatl names in preference to their Spanish ones, Nanacatzin, Tlakaelel or Moctezuma (and e.g. Mazatzin below). As already indicated they signal their difference not only by means of a clothing code but also linguistically: most aim at some point to converse entirely in Nahuatl, but they all exchange greetings and use idiomatic expressions in that language.

The journal **Ce-Acatl**, mentioned above is a good guide to the diversity of interests and beliefs that they hold. Published every 20 days, according to the Aztec calendar, it has appeared regularly since November 1990, and reports on and advertises the activities of *mexicanidad*. Calling itself the journal of Anahuac culture, it aims to redeem the culture of 'nuestros antepasados', 'not as a museum object to be collected and placed behind glass but in order to know it and recreate it on a daily basis' (Editorial **Ce-Acatl** 1991. 1:3 (my translation)). **Ce-Acatl** has recently been increasingly concerned with the wider issues of indigenous peoples throughout the Americas but more particularly in the area of Anahuac. Usually defined as the central plateau (of Mexico) (Ricard 1966:25), one contributor to **Ce-Acatl** declares that Anahuacan culture is that which developed throughout 'the length and breadth of Aridamerica (meaning presumably the northern states of Mexico and the southern States of the USA) and Mesoamerica and as far as Nicaragua (Nican-Anahuac) (until the time of the Spanish conquest) (Mazatzin 1993:4).

In general early issues of the journal (1991) were concerned with cultural recovery in a historical sense. The first issue is devoted to a series of articles on eclipses (a total eclipse was due very auspiciously on July 11th 1992 and Cultural Centres in towns and villages throughout Mexico

were particularly asked to make arrangements to prepare for and be receptive to this cosmic event). In 1993, two articles challenging the truth about human sacrifice were published (Hassler 1993:3). The Mexica, amongst no doubt others in Mexico, clearly feel that a phenomena so horrible to our present day sensibilities could never have occurred. The second ends in nationalistic style with a quote from Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin in Nahuatl and Spanish: 'as long as Mexico-Tenochtitlan exists, its fame and honour will never finish' (my translation), which leads the reader to doubt the veracity of the argument.

Much of this issue is however taken up with two sections that always appear. The central one is based on pertinent newspaper cuttings on various topics - which range from archaeological zones, to traditional medicine and health, education and culture, the ethnic situation and rights for indigenous peoples. There are also international news items, about Guatemala for example. From which it is clear that the working definition of today's Anahuac corresponds to what we now know as the Nation State of Mexico. The section at the back on cultural activities, the 'what's happening' section, gives an indication of the kinds of facilities and events available to those interested in things to do with *mexicanidad*. It ranges from conferences (the 7th International Congress on Traditional Medicine) to ceremonies such as 'Huizilopochtli Tlacatiliztli', performed for the winter solstice which is associated with the birth of Huitzilopochtli. But it also gives information on various Kapulli, such as the Kapulli Movimiento Sexto Sol which gives classes in Nahuatl Philosophy, Calenders, cosmic vision, astronomy, mathematics and dance. But many other groups are also listed that don't claim to be Kalpulli but that also offer dance, variously called chitontiquiza, danza mexika chichimeka, or danza Azteca; or classes in Nahuatl (13 possibilities are listed); there are workshops in theatre and dance; classes in indigenous writing

at the Escuela Nacional de Antropología y Historia and much more besides!<sup>7</sup>

Specific articles on *mexicanidad* (or aspects of Anahuacan culture that are relevant to it) are not as frequent as might be expected. One article discusses the 'levels of the dance Azteca Chichimeca', which seems to be confounding the Aztec terms for different kinds of dance, for different aspects of the same dance<sup>8</sup>. Issue 67 has an article on the origin and meaning of the word 'teotl'. Usually translated as 'god', this is however a gloss that the Mexica strongly resist. For many of them 'teotl' signifies rather energies: the different so-called Aztec deities being seen as manifestations of different forms of energy. For the Mexica, Huizilopochtli is not the deity who at the time of the Spanish Conquest demanded frequent human sacrifices in order that the sun would rise every day, but rather an abstract force. As the Mexica point out the images, whether sculptural or in the codices, that have survived of the so-called deities are not fully anthropomorphic but represent rather powerful 'abstract' entities. Rather surprisingly on the www (from California), Ometeotl is described as the Nahuatl (Mexica) name for the one God (although God it is pointed out is an English word) and the elements of water, earth, air and fire as different manifestations of Ometeotl (Tlaloc, Tezcatlipoca, Quetzalcoatl and Huizilopochtli): reinforcing, I would have thought, the Christian notion of a single omnipotent deity (Olin Tezcatlipoca 1996). According to Linares Aguirre (1995:5 -7), the word teotl denotes 'marvellous', 'magnificent',

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<sup>7</sup> Later issues have a greater proportion of articles on social issues related to the indigenous peoples of 'Anahuac'. The last issue I have (No 69, 21 April 1995, post the Chiapas uprising) is devoted almost entirely to articles on politics rather than culture.

<sup>8</sup> Mazatzin 1994 but see Rostas (n.d.) where I suggest that technically or historically, rather than being different levels of the same dance, these are terms for different kinds of dance that existed either prior to the arrival of the Spaniards or were introduced subsequently.



'unforseen' but not god. He points out rather patronisingly that only too frequently the followers of *mexicanidad* do not work hard enough at getting to the roots of Nahuatl and only too often invent greetings (for example 'cualli teotlac' (Ibid:5), philosophy, ceremonies, terminology and names (e.g Nican-Anahuac above) while still thinking in the Spanish or European way. Again he finishes with a proto-nationalistic exhortation: 'Mexihco es raiz, es unico y es nuestro. Luchamos por nuestra esencia antigua, no por la disfrazada...' (Linares Aguirre 1995:7)

But what exactly is the philosophy behind *mexicanidad*? It is a plural one, an invented one. Every adherent of *mexicanidad* has his (or her) idea of what should be emphasized. Some see themselves as warriors for the future who need to fight to get back not only Anahuac but, from the point of view of those Mexica now living in the United States, Aztlan as well (the Southern States of the US and the area from which the original founders of the Aztec empire migrated): 'Our heritage must be reclaimed: we must declare again and again that we are the true owners of the lands of Anahuac and Aztlan. We must work and struggle and take our lands back under our control' (Olin Tezcatlipoca 1996:3). Some claim that Nahuatl or Uto-Aztecan was the stem-language spoken not just in Central Mexico and the Southern United states but in the northern United States and South America as well. As already indicated many Mexica are intensely and almost irrationally nationalistic: Mexica! Wake up! Where are our warriors! Mexica men and woman defend our people! Our Mexica future is waiting for us! Mexica knowledge and courage will free our people! (Olin Tezcatlipoca 1996). Other authors, however, address the problem of plurality. One writer suggests that the spirit of the cultural synthesis of the Mexica people is the basic principle of *mexicanidad*: a form of survival (Mazatzin 1993:4-5). He claims that his ('nuestra') movement envisages the emancipation of all Mexicans, whether descended from indians or not and the 'demystification of mestizaje', a European creation 'to belittle the indian race'. He emphasizes that the Mexica, as a Nation must reject the occidental project of the nation state which

does not give the right of self government to the plurality of ethnic groups. '*Mexicanidad* proposes the emancipation of all peoples that make up the mexican nation for the construction of an appropriate national project, where all can themselves construct their destinies in the plurality' (Ibid).

But is there any sign that this is what *mexicanidad* is achieving? Admittedly it is early days yet, but the Mexica have been described by several writers as fanatical (Juan Anzaldo Meneses 1990, 1993) and as Aztec imbeciles - '*imbeciles aztequicantes*' (Luis Gonzalez de Alba quoted by Anzaldo Meneses 1993). Although individually they propound (and theoretically envisage) a future of brotherly love and cosmic harmony, in fact they seem to have little tolerance for the ideas of others. When, for example, some Mexican Buddhists were encountered performing ceremonies on dates of astronomical significance for themselves at Teotihuacan: there was an unpleasant confrontation. The Mexica chased them off the site, claiming that they, as the proponents of *mexicanidad*, were the only true guardians (Anzaldo Meneses 1993). They increasingly use archaeological sites for their ceremonies, were occupying Teotihuacan in the Summer of 1995, making it difficult for tourists to enter and would like to take them over altogether. A proposal was raised at the Third Anahuac Congress in 1991, to at the very least allow free entrance for 'indigenous' Mexicans and to increase the entry fee for outsiders (Ce-Acatl 1991: 16 pg 28). But they are also intolerant of each other: there are many fights not only between groups at dancers and thus in the public domain but also within groups, which are clearly power struggles over not only meanings but inter group politics. *Mexicanidad* is fluid, it is not a movement with much structure. My impression is that what holds groups of Mexica together are charismatic characters and/or hierarchical manipulation and idealism about an imagined future. Overall *mexicanidad* lacks a sense of social unity (De la Peña Martinez 1993).

## CONCLUSION

Writers and intellectuals tend on the whole to be disparaging of the Mexica and to imply that they are merely fanatics who are 'playing': that their movement constitutes some sort of cultural 'noise'. However, a recent science fiction novel has suggested that by the year 2045, an Aztec revival will be in full swing (Hogan 1992). Not only will the religion of *mexicanidad* be vying for hegemony with various Protestant sects, attempting still to hold sway over their converts from behind the United States (Tortilla) Curtain, but Mexico City will once again be called Tenochtitlan. At its centre, at least, this is a high tech city, of complex buildings, phone screens and weapons, such as the zumbador which injures by means of sonic waves: very necessary to counter the guerilla tactics of the various opposing groups. Most people speak a slanguage, Espanahuatl, part Spanish part Nahuatl and human sacrifice is on the increase. This is a suggestive novel, but does its scenario just poke further fun at *mexicanidad* or can the adoption of such a theme be seen as an indication that the Mexica, as the younger generation who are 'buscando su camino en la vida' do have something to say about Mexico's future; that *mexicanidad* will go on growing and has the potential to become sufficiently culturally significant to provide a social input for a future Mexico (cf Lomnitz-Adler 1992).

As currently constituted, *mexicanidad* certainly does nothing to alleviate the social ills of life at a physical level in Mexico City, nor have the Mexica ever had much interest in rural indigenous peoples: as City people they on the whole have a dislike of the countryside. To visiting foreigners it may even seem like 'exoticization', connected with tourist interests (Urban & Sherzer 1992:11). But to its proponents *mexicanidad* is far from being folkloric: *mexicanidad* provides a nexus for action which is purposeful for those involved, even though the activity at present is more about

the representation of indianity than the actuality of resistance and political empowerment (which as already indicated seems to be more on the agenda of USA *mexicanidad*, where 'ritual, ceremony, and dance', not to mention 'superstition and other diversions' are described as keeping 'us from being the true warriors of our people' (Olin Tezcatlipoca 1996:9). The pursued goals as currently stated are probably unrealizable but as Melucci has indicated perhaps the meaning of the action should be looked for in the action itself, rather than in the stated goals (Melucci 1985:801). Although to the Mexica, what they are doing seems possible, realizable and certainly serious, to outsiders I would suggest that what they are creating is seen as mere representation of what are already representations (the Aztec past). But representation (or a representation) is always a first step in any political process and should not be undervalued. The Mexica may not be taken seriously yet, but the foreign media have noticed them and see them as a central part of what typifies Mexico at present; photos of them appear in guide books, in serious historical films on the Aztecs and they are mentioned in radio programmes on how globalization is affecting Mexico (Radio 4, Feb-March 1997) where the sound of their drums in the Zocalo was in evidence in the background.

Although the Mexica claim that they want to reject the capitalist project and do not want to be counted as members of the nation state as it exists today, in part the question I have been begging in this paper is whether the Mexica are not being as nationalistic as many Mexicans, if not MORE so, involved as they are in a subculture that foregrounds 'Nationhood'. Although they claim to be presenting a project that rejects State authority, if anything they are reinforcing its underpinnings, the re-evaluation of the Aztec past (so important to the State's indigenismo of the 20s) as they dance in the Zocalo outside the Palacio Nacional in Mexico City. That they perform here is perhaps also an indication that the PRI realizes the significance of this aspect of nationhood to a growing

number of Mexicans and will be appropriating it, if they are not already doing so: I remember a Mexica friend telling me in 1993 that his Kalpulli had been invited to give a presentation to the military, (which at the time surprised me!).

Finally, *mexicanidad* is perhaps better seen as a subculture, a form that expresses, 'a fundamental tension between those in power and those condemned to subordinate positions and second class lives (Hebdige 1979:132). Subcultures are after all forms of resistance that challenge the social order symbolically but whose resistance is overcome 'by an expansion of the dominant order' to incorporate with time their ever transforming styles and/or practices (Lomnitz Adler 1992:320 ft 24, Hebdige 1979:133, Hall 1976, Scott 1990).

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