

### Performing the Other: Indigenous Identity and Regional Resistance in Sonoran Literature of the 1980's

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#### Abstract

During the decade of the 1980's there occurs a preoccupation, presence and notable change in the representation of the *indígena* in the cultural production of the State of Sonora. This articulation of a modified ethnic discourse is a product of the economic and social changes that impacted the region during this period. Through a detailed examination of three Sonoran writers we observe how this ethnic discourse leads to a reformulation the traditional images of the *indígena* and reflects the negotiation between local and national interests to determine the meaning of the region, its identity and its place within the nation.

**Keywords:** Yaqui, Mexico, Sonora, Indigenous, Leo Sandoval, Rodrigo Tena Figueroa, Gerardo Cornejo Murrieta

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The early history of the state is one of conflict between the settlers to the region and the various indigenous peoples that resided in the area previous to the arrival of the Spanish. Early Sonoran communities and their sense of identity were forged in the relative isolation of the region and the struggle to rest control of the resources of the state from the numerous *indígena* communities. The Yaqui were in open rebellion with the Mexican state as late as the first quarter of the twentieth century. As one would expect, the formation of a Sonoran identity was one that was defined in contrast with the *indígena*. Colonial discourse as a tool of power depended upon the production of knowledges that both created and denied difference between colonizer and *indígena*. Through such discourses early inhabitants of the region became the civilizing edge of the nation in conflict with the "barbaric" *indígena*. It is during this time that the popular stereotype developed of the Northern Sonoran as tall, blond and fair skinned with a diet and way of life that is distinct from that of the mestizo and/or *indígena* culture of the South.

The importance of this process is not lost on critics such as Rolando Romero who have suggested that at the beginning of the XX century Sonoran identity was shaped and determined through a process of marginalizing and dispossessing first the Apache and later the Seri and Yaqui (39). Mary Kay Vaughn has observed that: "Sonorans' model of identity, avidly promoted by Governor Rodolfo Elías Calles, rested upon their contrasting themselves with the Yaquis: primitive, fanatical, wasteful, brutal, dirty" (148). By "othering" these historically resistant peoples and appropriating their geographical homelands, the people of Sonora were able to articulate an image of self and create the material conditions of the modern Sonoran life.

Given the historical oppression of the *indígena* in Sonora it may be surprising then to observe the manner in which an *indígena* identity has come to occupy a central position in the discourses surrounding Sonoran identity. One need only observe the state seal to understand its importance. The seal centers prominently the graphic of an *indígena* figure representing the Deer Dance, a typical dance readily associated Mayos and Yaquis. It is obvious that identities, rather than static and immutable, change in accordance with the relations of power that mould and create them. Almost immediately upon the defeat of the Mayos and Yaquis as a real threat, there began a process of rehabilitation and reincorporation of the *indígena* back into the state.

#### Indigenous Representation and Regional Identity

During the decade of the 1980's we witness a preoccupation, presence and notable change in the representation of the *indígenas* in the cultural production of the State of Sonora. I will argue that this articulation of a modified ethnic discourse is a product of the economic and social changes that impacted the region during this period. Many of the discourses of the northern border region reflect the struggle for control between the Center and the North. The political, economic and cultural situation of the historical moment creates an environment that produces a number of regional, national and international discourses of identity. These discourses have an important impact on the

ethnic discourse of the *indígena* that leads to a reformulation the traditional images and reflect the negotiation between local and national interests to determine the meaning of the region, its identity and its place within the nation.

I attribute this significant shift in the representation of the *indígena* in Sonoran cultural production to several factors that come together to create a unique cultural moment. The first would be the 100th anniversary of the death of José María Leyva, "Cajeme", who led the Yaqui in one of the few successful uprising that produced a considerable period of political autonomy. As Alejandro Figueroa Valenzuela points out, Cajeme occupies a unique position within Sonoran society (26). He has come to occupy an iconic position, having been converted into a legendary and mythical figure for a large part of the non-*indígena* Sonoran population. As the most prominent leader of the Yaqui rebellions he has become a symbol of their indomitable and heroic spirit. This moment would lead to a reflection on the cultural significance of the Yaqui within Sonoran society, their history and presence.

Additionally the regional discourse surrounding the reevaluation of the *indígena* seems to intersect with the national dialogue concerning the traditional *indigenista* policies and programs of the post Revolutionary period. *Indigenismo* as originally conceived was meant to integrate, modernize and acculturate the *indígena* into the nation. Manuel Gamio proposed in *Forjando patria* (1916) a fusion of races to create a more homogeneous, civilized and improved nation. Others such as Alfonso Caso explained that through a project of acculturation this process would "cambiar los aspectos arcaicos, deficientes y, en numerosos casos, nocivos de esta cultura, en aspectos más útiles para la vida del individuo y de la colectividad" (35). As the quote implies the non-*indígena* would be the arbiters of what form this process would take place and what cultural elements would be discarded. The *indígena* would have little to no voice in the process of integration. Guillermo Bonfil Batalla observes that this official discourse undergoes a change beginning in the mid-1970s towards a more open pluralistic stance towards the *indígena* peoples (120). Henri Favre utilizes the term *indianismo* to describe this new discourse that favors an articulation of rights of the *indígena* to self-determination, independence and administration of their own territories and natural resources (126). This emerging discourse of *indianismo* would affect and shape the manner in which non-*indígena* Sonorans would represent the *indígena* within the cultural production of this period.

Another factor that greatly influences this discourse of ethnicity is the economic and social changes affecting the region during this period. The 1980's witnessed the growth of the maquiladora industry, the increase of the local population through migration and a greater importance of the northern border region to the national economy. The economic crisis of 1982 and failures of the national government during the 1985 earthquake served to further undermine the central government and the legitimacy of its monopoly on power. The economic crises of the 1980's meant that the central government had to loosen its control and embark on a decentralization and regionalization of many of the services that had belonged to the Federal government. This coincided with the growing delegitimization of the governing PRI's political monopoly. Northern Mexico in particular would witness the establishment and growth of the conservative opposition PAN. Such changes sparked a growing discontentment on the part of the region with the heavy handed and often corrupt control by the central government and its local agents. Much of the discourses of the northern border region reflect this struggle for political control between the central and local governments. Central to these varied discourses is the configuration of national and regional identity.

Within Sonora a heated discourse would emerge that centered on Sonoran identity and its difference with the Center. These can best be characterized by the indirect dialogue between José Teherán and Gerardo Cornejo Murrieta. José Teherán's *El cazador de guachos* (1984) use of the derogatory term for someone from Mexico City, *guacho*, is an obvious example of the strong anti-centrist sentiment that pervaded Sonora at this moment. Such was the feeling that the book itself would go through three printings. Clearly it is a reaction to the privileging of Mexico City as a cultural and political center and the marginalizing effects that this has had on the rest of the country. José Manuel Valenzuela Arce posits that Teherán's text may also imply a latent racist sentiment directed towards the Mesoamerican culture of the south (94-95). This racism has roots in the historical framing of ethnicity within Sonora that we discussed above and also is a means of separating the non-*indígena* North from the largely *indígena* and mestizo Center. Gerardo Cornejo is representative of the local voice that echoes a centrist preoccupation with the potential separation of the region from the country. Edward Williams also remarks that the 1980's is a particularly strained moment in the frequent ups and downs in relations between the North and the Center of Mexico (299). Carlos Fuentes's novel *Cristóbal Nonato* (1987) reflects this strain and the preoccupations of the Center. His novel describes a hypothetical invasion of Mexico by the United States. Tellingly, Gerardo Cornejo would publish a similarly themed novel to that of Fuentes, *Al norte del milenio* (1989). Cornejo is alarmed and critical of the chauvinistic regionalism he witnesses and its effects. In response to the death of nine year-old boy attributed to a beating by other students because of his Mexico City origins he would comment in a *New York Times* article that: "Regionalism may be a normal phenomenon in any country, but when it takes on such ugly and

blind characteristics and comes to divide a nation that needs to be united, it becomes a dangerous force (Rohrer A4)."

**The Regional Response to the Center**

I can mention a number of works that in whole or in part respond to this preoccupation with representation of the *indígena* including: Gerardo Cornejo's *Al norte del milenio* (1989), Miguel Manríquez Duran's *Tetabiate en el exilio* (1985), Rodrigo Tena Figueroa's *Yoreme: estrofa de un cantar agónico* (1988), Leo Sandoval's *La otra época* (1989) and somewhat later Oscar Monroy's short theater piece *Tetabiate y Cajeme* (1991). Directly related to the anniversary of Cajeme's death the State of Sonora would republish Armando Chávez Camacho's *Cajeme, novela de indios* (1987 originally published in 1948) and the historical non-fiction work *El indio Cajeme y su nación del Río Yaqui*. For brevity's sake I will principally be focusing my analysis on those by Leo Sandoval, Rodrigo Tena Figueroa and Gerardo Cornejo Murrieta.

We can make some initial general observations about these works from the 1980's. One should note first they are all positive in their view of the *indígena*. The *indígenas* of Sonora are typically seen as victims of historical or current injustices suffered at the hands of more powerful social actors be they local/national/international governments, business and political elites or hegemonic capitalist forces. Each seeks to defend and illuminate the notable and unique qualities and values of the peoples they write about. They have clearly been influenced by the on-going national dialogue and seem to reflect what Favre identified as *indianismo*. There is a respect for *indígenas*, their culture and their right to live according to their traditional cultural practices separate from the dominant non-*indígena* society. In fact this struggle for relative independence and self-determination is the very aspect most celebrated in the Yaqui.

Concurrently, we can identify certain characteristics that they have in common with *indigenista* intellectual thought. They are works written about the *indígenas* but present a perspective that emanates from the dominant society. They are not cultural products of the *indígena* community but rather are reflections on and an admiration of the *indígena* cultures by the dominant non-*indígena* society. These texts are not written by members of the communities that they write about. We can identify similarities with what Luís Villoro identified as the second and third stages of *indigenismo* (238-239). In each there is an attempt to appropriate and recover the *indígena*. The *indígena* is appropriated for uses that may or may not reflect the interests of these same *indígena* communities. Rather, there is an equalization of the situation of the *indígena* and the non-*indígena* society. They undertake a process of interiorization of the *indígena* past and present which is then projected into the future. This interiorization of the *indígena* focuses principally on the questions of regional and national identity. Having assumed the *indígena* it serves as a support with which to construct a future regional identity that breaks free of exterior hegemonic political and cultural forces. The nature of these exterior forces, as we will see, varies according to the author but the mechanisms by which the *indígena* is deployed are similar.

**Performing the other: Leo Sandoval's "Una danza estilada"**

"Una danza estilada," a short story from Leo Sandoval's collection, *La otra época*, is in many ways a useful starting point due to the manner in which it signals several important aspects of the construction of *indígena* identity and its intersection with the other factors affecting the above mentioned discourses of regionalism and national identity. Sandoval's narrator describes the arrival of a new schoolteacher from out of state to a small town in Sonora. As part of the school's musical festival the hapless instructor decides to present an artistic representation of the Yaqui Deer Dance. His intention is to pay homage to the local *indígena* traditions and bring some culture to the ignorant locals. He takes liberties with the dance due to his own ignorance of the dance and to adapt it to his own artistic tastes. His alterations of the Yaqui dance engender the ire of the local townsfolk who stop short of lynching him. The locals take great offense to the perceived slight of the representative dance of the state.

The scene is reminiscent of the post-Revolutionary work of the Secretaria de Educación Pública (SEP). It was during this period of the 1930's and 1940's that the Yaqui Deer Dance would first gain notoriety both inside and outside of the state. This is perhaps not surprising as the post-Revolutionary period was also a moment in which national unity was perceived as being threatened and the national government rolled out a number of programs to exert the central government's control. Edward Spicer describes almost fifty years earlier a Mexican Flag Day school ceremony in the village of Potam that is similar but with different results:

[O]nly a few Yaquis attended the evening program where the director of the school gave a reading on the meaning of the Mexican flag, its colors, symbols, and history as three dark-skinned boys held the flag at attention behind them. The school boys and girls then imitated an Apache dance with feathers in their hair. A [Yaqui] deer dancer came in half naked with a rattle in each hand and did a crouching dance. The crowd roared.... [He] struck everybody as burlesque and was laughed at accordingly. (cited in Vaughan 154)

The contrast of these two scenes is interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, the reaction of the predominantly military and civil authorities in the episode that Spicer relates is quite different from Sandoval's and points to the radical transformation of the Yaqui symbolically within non-*indígena* Sonoran society by the 1980's. Even as this older scene took place the symbolic positioning of the *indígena* within dominant Sonoran society was changing. This was made possible by the fact, as we mentioned above, that the Yaqui had ceased to be perceived as a threat. Two years after this performance in 1944 the State seal would incorporate the Yaqui Deer Dance prominently in the center.

It also points to the difference in this symbolic order between the Center and Sonora. In this earlier example the Apache and Yaqui dances were included as expressions of an official Mexican history that sought to present the *indígena* as a glorious past that united the nation. This central discourse had little resonance with many local Sonorans because of the still common view of the *indígena* as "savages subdued for the sake of progress" (Vaughan 154). Both episodes point to the gulf that exists between the Center and Sonora. In Sandoval's short story he seems to be making allusions to this history. It is replete with instances of well-intentioned programs and clumsy attempts to control and draw the North more closely into the national fold. Their origins far from the Center meant that they did not always take into account the local social reality leading to resistance and resentment. Highlighted is the long history of this struggle with the Center and the similarities between the past and present. Sandoval sees in each moment a similar sentiment in which the Center expresses the paternalistic need to educate and nationalize the provincial population. In addition, the Yaqui Deer Dance and its alteration by the teacher are indicative of the manner in which regional culture is perceived to be misunderstood and distorted by the Center. Perhaps ironically, the Cárdenas administration and the central government had an essential role in aiding the Yaqui people in their struggle to restore and conserve their communal lands and culture against local and outside interests.

The reversal in the audience's reaction to the Deer Dance may also point to the power and success of *indigenismo* in reshaping the *indígena* and the regionalist discourse. In a somewhat subversive manner, through this discourse of *indigenismo*, the *indígena* is appropriated and assigned a new regional position. Sonoran intellectuals would adopt the symbolic power of the *indígena* and utilize the Yaqui's historic struggle in order to create and define a regional identity. Alejandro Figueroa Valenzuela observes that in a process that is complex and contradictory Sonorans view themselves as the spiritual descendants of the Yaqui while ignoring or disavowing both a racial connection to the Yaqui and their historical dispossession (32-33). Just as Aztec culture comes to represent and serve as symbols of Mexican identity separate from Western culture, the Yaqui in a similar fashion would come to stand in as symbols of Sonoran identity in opposition to the Center. In Sandoval's short story the instructor views the local populace in a similar manner as the *indígenas*: uneducated, ignorant and in need of incorporation into the modern nation. *Indigenismo* would become a powerful tool to be utilized in the resistance to what were perceived as outside cultural intrusions. It emerges as an effective counter ideology, an alternative to hegemonic discourses that would seek to marginalize the region. *Indigenismo* and the imagery associated would be an effective means to express resistance and protest what otherwise would not be sanctioned by the national state apparatus.

One final aspect that is important in exploring in the contrast of each episode is the manner in which the *indígena* is taken outside of its cultural context and put to use as a tool for identity construction. As is the case in the works that I have mentioned, the *indígena* becomes the focal point for this protest. Importantly, it is the performance of the *indígena* rather than the defense of the *indígena* subject and/or voice that draws the ire of the public. The *indígena* subject is totally absent replaced by a fetishized facet of that culture. As Homi Bhabha has pointed out, within discourse the fetish can be viewed as the interplay between metaphor and metonymy (298). As such, there is a simultaneous disavowal and recognition of difference that gives access to an identity. The episode lays bare this process in a number of ways and reveals the multiple layers that exist. In the case of the *indígena* we see both their absence and presence. The dance signals their presence within Sonoran society but they are conspicuously absent from the event. This is due in large part to the fact that the dance has in this instance been removed from its cultural context and has ceased to maintain a connection to that culture. It stands in for the struggle between Sonora and the Center. Both attempt to gain power by projecting the other as degenerate or deficient while at the same time maintaining their connection to the Yaqui through an implicit sameness. This is done through the deployment of several stereotypes; the representation of the stereotype of the ignorant central Mexican, and the response to the stereotype of the cultureless and ethnically deficient Northerner. The fetishized dance becomes the battleground on which the struggle for subjectification and subjugation between the Center and periphery takes place. The school teacher in Sandoval's text represents those elements in the central discourse that seek to at once establish difference (lack of racial/ethnic/cultural markers shared with the center) and sameness (traditions of the *indígena*). For the audience the teacher's dance has a similar function establishing difference from the Center

(ignorance) and sameness (pride in and knowledge of local traditions of the *indígena*).

The *indígena* also comes to stand in for those local values and traditions that have come under attack from outside influences be they from the South or from across the border. If the *indígena* can be viewed as a substitute for regional culture we see that the performance is about the discursive production of knowledge about regional identity and who is authorized to engage in this performance. It is a struggle over the symbolic order that will prevail—regional or central—and ultimately what the performance of the *indígena* will mean. This ongoing struggle is important because of the manner in which it constructs the relationship and negotiation of power between the Center and the periphery.

### Rodrigo Tena Figueroa's *Yoreme: The Other Within*

The other two works that I will examine share much in common with Sandoval's work. They continue this appropriation of the *indígena* as a means to establish identity and go further to open up a dialogue about the relationship between Sonora and the Center. In each, the *indígena* is a means of defending their particular ideological position and critiquing what they see as corrupt elements of national or regional societies. It serves as a contrast and highlights difference between Sonora and external influences. What are distinct about the two visions are the ends to which the *indígena* is employed. Rodrigo Tena Figueroa's portrayal of the Yaqui is meant to outline a sympathetic vision of their culture and its struggle to defend itself from outside influences. What becomes clear is the manner in which this portrayal is also a defense of regional culture and the encroachments of central control. Gerardo Cornejo, as we mentioned above, is worried by what he sees as the dangers of regionalism and utilizes the *indígena* as a pointed critique of what he sees as local Sonorans corruption by US cultural influence. Both point to the malleability and centrality to Sonoran identity of the *indígena* during the period that we are discussing.

Tena Figueroa's novel, *Yoreme: un cantar agónico*, centers on the male protagonist, Fernando Maldonado. He is sent by his Yaqui community at a young age to live and be educated among the wider Sonoran society. The novel relates his rise as a savvy political figure that through his contacts in the *indígena* communities, his commercial interests and maneuvers within the labyrinth of the central political machine is able to place himself in the position of being named the next candidate for state governor of the ruling party. It is at the culmination of his rise to power that he is conflicted by his straddling of two worlds. He is called upon by the elders of the Yaqui community to take up the position of his father as leader and reconcile himself with the culture and traditions from which he has increasingly become alienated. He is divided by the pull of the *yori* (modern European/mestizo) and the *yoreme* (Yaqui). His personal struggle is echoed by the emerging political struggle with the ruling party. As he reconciles himself with his *indígena* past and assumes his role as leader of his people he befriends and allies himself with the outgoing governor. Fernando Maldonado, like the governor, angers the national party by failing to cede to centrally connected interests and instead defends the state and its people. This alliance creates a conflict with the national party and leads to the protagonist's assassination at the hands of national agents.

There is a clear referencing of the figure of Cajeme in Tena Figueroa's depiction of his protagonist. Cajeme was similarly a divided figure who lived his early years outside of the Yaqui community as far away as California. After distinguishing himself in the military he would come to be appointed to oversee the Yaqui and subsequently lead them against the state. Tena Figueroa's novel is in many ways typical of the Sonoran discourse of the *indígena* which focuses on these historic Yaqui leaders and imparts upon them a mythic quality (Figueroa Valenzuela 26). Cajeme is the most well known of these leaders but others include Tetabiate, Pluma Blanca and Juan Banderas. This focus on historic figures is a typically Western view of evaluating and interpreting history. Like Aztec or Mayan ruins they become cultural artifacts that have the effect of fixing the Yaqui in that very past. What remain are those feats of military prowess, resistance and the historic injustice that they have endured. The focus on the individuals obscures the mass of the Yaqui people and the daily cultural practices that their resistance was meant to defend. Perhaps as importantly, the heroic or mythic nature to these figures enables a process of identification and appropriation to take place on the part of the non-*indígena*. The transcendental nature of these heroes and their qualities make possible the bridging of the cultural divide.

The novel is particularly interesting in the manner in which it demonstrates and exemplifies some of these same discursive elements. As we noted, its focus on the protagonist Maldonado is similar in that he is almost the exclusive focus of the novel and the main gateway through which we are to gain insights into the Yaqui culture. Contradictorily, we see very little representation of that culture. Maldonado and the vast majority of the action take place outside of the Yaqui village. The few other Yaqui characters in the novel appear briefly and are characterized by a stoic silence that relegates them to a minor position. The Yaqui teacher and love interest Soledad occupies a similar position as Maldonado. She has been educated outside of the village and returns to her village to work on their behalf. Maldonado's double existence both inside and outside of each culture provides the perfect vehicle for exploring and contrasting the two different worlds that he inhabits. He is a guide and mediator for the non-*indígena* reader serving as that cultural bridge that enables the process of self-recognition in the *indígena* "other" that we

mentioned above. Another avenue through which the reader identifies with Maldonado is by idealizing his character and essentially converting him into a myth. He is a vision of the Yaqui hero that in many ways represents a traditional Mexican masculine ideal but one that highlights those qualities commonly attributed to the Yaqui. Maldonado demonstrates a strength, confidence and pride coupled with inherent intellectual and physical abilities that allow him to dominate those around him. The very qualities that enable the Yaqui to survive a hostile desert climate and defend their community from continual outside encroachment facilitate his own success economically and politically within the *yorí* (non-*indígena*) world.

In some ways it may be possible to see Fernando Maldonado as a fantasy on the part of the non-*indígena* who desires to leave the sterility, complexity and immorality of the modern world for the simplicity and purity of the natural world of the *indígena*. We get a sense of this through the personal journey of the protagonist when he returns to the village and rejects his *yorí* existence in order to lead the Yaqui people. Part of his re-entry into the community is a nocturnal spiritual transformation which the protagonist perceives as a “dream” or “hypnotic” state (150).

Sin saber en que momento, empezó a percibir sonidos y olores de milenios pasados. Su otra conciencia, la aletargada, comenzó a aflorar y de repente se dio cuenta que podía reconocer los sonidos de la noche, la ubicación exacta de cada cosa y ser viviente que habitaba en la obscuridad. El aroma verde del monte también le brindó sus intimidades y descubrió que podía distinguir con facilidad dos, tres o cinco aromas distintos a la vez.  
(150)

Wearing only a loincloth he is said to die and be reborn through a process that culminates with a battle with an anthropomorphized Yaqui River and the impregnation of the beautiful Yaqui teacher Soledad in a sexual act that is described as instinctual, passionate and savage (154-155).

These descriptions of the *indígena* community in many ways are reminiscent of what Henri Favre describes as *telurismo* (59). This vein of *indigenismo* conceptualizes the formation of the nation as a product of the forces of nature and the *indígena* as original products of these very same forces and their physical environment. As such, they become the most authentic representation of nationality or regional identity. The Sonoran discourse of the *indígena* in some ways varies from the typical expression of *telurismo*. While the example we mention reveals this closeness and symbiotic relationship between the Yaqui and nature there also exists the conflict with nature. They do not enjoy a Garden of Eden like existence. This springs out of the fact that the desert is a more a hostile environment; one that the Yaqui must overcome and tame. Alejandro Figueroa Valenzuela explains that in a contradictory manner the non-*indígena* have come to inherit this legacy (32). Early settlers to the region suffered and overcame the same environmental obstacles in their struggle to eke out an existence. What contributes to this sense of struggle —and simultaneously is subsumed in the regional imaginary— was the long history of conflict for the control of the land and resources from the very same Yaqui inhabitants.

By way of his divided protagonist we see the elaboration of a cultural binary that separates the *indígena* and non-*indígena*, modern and natural, instinct and reason, dark and light, past and present, truth and lies, and, physical and mental. Inherent in this dichotomy is a primitivist vision of the *indígena* that views it as a reductive state to that of the dominant mestizo society. Maldonado once free from the intrusive overlay of learned behavior and corrupt practices of the mestizo political world that he inhabits is free to express and feel a connection to the natural world (Price 32). This discarding of the trappings of modern life takes him to a state that is more profound, important and valuable (Contreras 18). The reader's identification with the protagonist Maldonado might also imply the idea that the hybrid nature that he demonstrates is one shared by all. The *indígena* is that primal state that all of us, like Maldonado, have repressed in modern society. Unlike Maldonado, our distance from that natural state prevents us from escaping the alienating effects of Western society.

Equally important to Tena Figueroa's representation of the *indígena* is the manner in which it intersects with the regionalist discourse. The overriding conflict of the novel, Maldonado's search for identity and his ultimate tragic end all take place within the struggle between local Sonoran political interests and the Center. Maldonado by siding with the people of Sonora and deciding to act in their interests, instead of those of the ruling party, sows the seeds of his own death. His friendship and alliance with the outgoing state governor make him the inheritor of his political mantle. This process once again draws the connection between the *indígena* and non-*indígena* Sonorans. This is obviously problematic due to the manner in which it elides the difference between their political goals. Their goals become one and the same in the same manner in which Maldonado pursued the governorship and the position as Capitan Mayor of his people.



### The indigenous as (re)source

As we noted above, Gerardo Cornejo's novel, *Al norte del milenio*, is similar in its appropriation of the *indígena* in order to articulate a vision that runs counter to what he sees as the pernicious effects of regionalism in Sonora. While the *indígenas* of the state are peripheral to the novel they serve an important function as a touchstone; a means of validating and authenticating the identity narrative that Cornejo proposes for national identity and Sonora's place within that overarching narrative. Such is the power of the traditional *indigenista* discourse and its connection to nationalism that Cornejo deploys it to counter the equally powerful regional resentment. Another element that makes his novel notable is the influence of the border in this debate. The *indígena* and its connection to national identity serve also to demarcate and establish the national limits and repudiate what Cornejo views as the dangerous encroachment of the United States and its economic and cultural influence.

*Al norte del milenio* narrates the story of a contemporary hypothetical conflict between el Imperio (the United States), la Ciudad Norteña (Hermosillo, Sonora) and la Centro-Capital (Mexico City). The novel presents a panoramic and epic vision of the border in which the region attempts to separate itself from the rest of Mexico. The local elites and the Catholic Church with the help of the United States attempt to create the independent state of "Amermexico." The central government paralyzed by its bureaucratic and sclerotic system has alienated the population of a fictitious northern state. According to Cornejo, there has occurred what he calls "La Gran Alienación." It is the process by which the population of the North has drifted farther from the South of the country and the national identity that has its origins there. Simultaneously, Northerners view with admiration the economic power and culture of their neighbor just across the border. Upon declaring their independence from the rest of the Mexico and forming a new state, the United States opportunistically annexes the region.

Cornejo's vision readily reflects much of the anxiety associated with the Northern Mexican region that we noted earlier during the 1980's. It also plays against many of the celebrated aspects of Sonoran regional culture. While Sonorans are often viewed as hardworking, independent, democratic and resistant to outside interference for Cornejo these virtues are accompanied by a tendency that is aristocratic, closed, savage, authoritarian and exploitative. Cornejo creates the term "BIR (Broncos, Ignorantes y Reaccionarios)" in order to differentiate and determine those regional elements that demonstrate these characteristics (25). These tendencies which are a result of the long military struggle against the local indigenous peoples have created a society resistant to central control and a national identity based in the *indígena* cultures of the south. According to the author the regional population demonstrates "los tres padecimientos psíquicos de la época: EL ANTISURISMO HEREDITARIO, EL REGIONALISMO INCULCADO Y LA GRINGOFILIA PUERIL" (25).

While Cornejo's text describes this negative image of the Northerner he juxtaposes it with that of the indigenous elements of the region. There is a complex weave of historical discourses of the *indígena*. His use of the term *bronco* for those reactionary stereotypes of regionalism signals his reversal of traditional colonial discourses. *Bronco* had originally been used to differentiate between those Yaqui that resisted subjugation and cultural integration to non-*indígena* society. It was a means of configuring political confrontation in terms of civilization versus barbarism or European versus *indígena*. These were utilized to legitimize the conquest and dispossession of the *indígenas*. In a similar fashion to what was done in the nineteenth century Cornejo redeploys this discourse to delegitimize and depoliticize the resistance to the central government (Alonso 156). According to this new configuration political resistance to the center, such as the rise of the PAN in the region, is portrayed as a barbaric corruption of national values and traditions. Rapid economic growth, increased commercial interaction with the United States and a demographic surge are viewed as chaotic and irrational. On a national level federal control is viewed as a means of restoring the national character and unity and curtailing the excesses caused by the economic influences of the U.S. The violence wrought by U.S. cultural and economic dominance of the region is the source of barbarism within the region and the *indígena* as the civilizing wellspring for the cultures and traditions of the nation and region.

This cultural binary of the BIR and the *indígena* is further elaborated through the lens of the specific history and geography of the state. The valley or desert regions of Sonora represent the first of these two regional subjectivities and the mountains (la sierra) the *indígena* or traditional subject position that stand in opposition to the valley. The mountains come to represent the traditions of the region. Isolated from modernity, it is there that authentic regional and national identities have been preserved. Mountain communities maintain a way of life that is characterized by communal nature in which the values of social justice, equality and democracy of the first *indígena* and colonial inhabitants. It is clear that for Cornejo these geographical divisions mark a distinct moral gulf between the two regional cultural communities. In historic and ethnic terms this geographical division is significant. It was in the mountainous regions of the state that the Apache, Yaqui and Mayo found their ultimate refuge and attempted to resist the Spanish colonizers and later federal forces. It was in the relative inaccessibility and isolation of the mountains that made it possible to preserve *indígena* traditions and identity. While Cornejo concedes the historic

abuses and neglect of the central government in the region and the validity of resisting ill conceived policies from the Center, he sees a greater threat of domination from the United States and the local elites who serve their interests. Consecration of the figure of the *indígena* is an appeal to this tradition of independence and resistance in order to impede the gradual assimilation of Sonora and reincorporate the state back into the national imaginary.

Similar to Tena Figueroa's depiction, the *indígena* reflects an emerging contemporary discourse that shares certain elements with primitivism and *telurismo*. Cornejo expresses this vision through the voice of a non-specific *indígena* character. He explains the difference in cultures:

[C]omo pueblo de seres acompasados con los ciclos de las cosas; como criaturas entonadas con el Gran Orden Natural y con las consecuencias de las relaciones; como seres originarios que amamos la madre de las cosas no hechas por hombre y vivimos con ella y no contra ella; como sus hijos que no buscamos cambiarla sin acompañarla por los ciclos de la vida. Sufrió entre ellos y vio cómo están enfermos de compradera y cómo su progreso sólo es un desnaturalizar las cosas y las gentes, su desarrollo un desgajar montañas para fabricar bienes muertos y su civilización un imponer su manera de vivir sobre la de otros y borrarles su moda original de ser.... que los blancos no tenían vida comunitaria sino lucha individual en la que todos querían y necesitaban extraer cosas de los demás para acumularlas y luego permitir que estas decidieran sus vidas... (37-8)

Reminiscent of the earlier primitivist use of the *indígena* as a critique of "Western" culture Cornejo structures the *indígena* in opposition to what he designates the "American way of life." These US consumerist cultural practices are contrasted with a pre-Columbian communal ideal which reveals them to be morally corrupt, misguided and self-destructive (Contreras 18). The life of the *indígena* is simpler, cooperative and harmonious while modern Sonoran society in the thrall of its northern neighbors is exploitative, violent, sterile and void of spirituality. The *indígena* shares a symbiotic and religious relationship with the natural world. These elements of primitivism have also found new expression in what Henri Favre describes as the discourse of *indianismo* emerging at this time that also resonate with various European and North American movements. They establish connections with groups of differing types from the ecological to the New Age. As Favre explains:

El discurso indianista come el doble invertido de la cultura occidental.... esta cultura sustituiría, en todo, el orden y las relaciones de equilibrio por los conflictos y las rivalidades, de modo que ignoraría el expansionismo depredador. Sería respetuosa de la naturaleza, a la que no trataría de dominar sino de comprender mediante un conocimiento intuitivo que evitaría los sofismas de la razón y que llevaría a la simbiosis del hombre con el universo, del que no es más que un elemento. (Favre 136)

Cornejo's views seem to clearly fall within this emerging *indianista* discourse. Importantly, he adapts these ideological precepts to the internal dialogue that is taking place within Sonoran society as a means to argue for a distancing of Sonoran society from the cultural models of its Northern neighbor and move it towards national models that have their origins in the Center. Thus *indígena* histories are utilized in order to construct alternative versions of the individual and community identities that resist the hegemonic narratives of individualism and a regionalism that maintains its separation from the rest of the nation. These regionalist narratives, according to Cornejo, come too close to the individualist and savage capitalism that characterizes the unjust society of the United States and stray from the socialist ideals of the Mexican nation. A revalorization of the region's *indígena* past is a means by which to halt the alienation of U.S. capitalism; a means of returning to the land—the source of national and regional identity—and reaffirm the national spirit. Cornejo authorizes a subjectivity that is oriented towards the *indígena* past and rejects that which is directed towards a modernity along the future model of U.S. capitalism.

One other important element that Tena Figueroa and Cornejo share is the theme of hybridity and cultural contamination. Each cautions the reader about the dangers of cultural mixing and its corrupting influence on the *indígena* identity. Their cautions to the reader are in part a reflection of the emerging consensus that recognizes that *indígena* identities and cultures are to some degree dependent on preservation of distinct economic, political and social practices. The post-Revolutionary *indigenista* project to modernize and assimilate *indígena* communities has had negative impacts on these communities and their efforts to maintain traditional cultural practices. Cornejo laments this process when he states:



[L]a integración les habían ido imponiendo la cultura oficial hasta hacerlos perder su memoria colectiva. Y vio con horror, cómo ya no eran sino híbridos estériles entrapados en la negación de su futuro étnico, en seres extraviados en la nocultura y en la modernidad arrasadora. (39)

The overall context of the work and the positioning of the *indígena* within the novel make it clear that Cornejo is also warning Sonorans of the dangers of adopting cultural and economic models originating in the US. In his novel the military invasion has been preceded by a long process of cultural assimilation. This process has led to the distancing of the region from the nation and its cultural values. The voice of a US senator explains:

[H]a sido tan sostenido, gradual y sistemático que ha llegado ya a los niveles de la anexión.... hemos ido apropiando de su industria, de su comercio, de su producción, y de la mentalidad (a través de nuestros eficaces medios de telecomunicaciones y de nuestros grupos religiosos).... piensa y aspira a vivir nuestro imperial way of life si la mayoría de los que forman esas dos capas ya son una especie de americanos por imitación cuya idiosincrasia se acerca más a la nuestra que a la del resto de su propio país. (188)

The intersection of the *indígena* and regional identity is interesting in that the process of hybridization and cultural mixing in both cases leads to the erasure of ethnic and cultural boundaries. The *indígena* discourses overlap with central discourses of the border. At this moment of national anxiety they portray the northern border region as a dangerous hybridization of Anglo and Mexican cultures. Resistance to the center is equated with deviation and betrayal of the nation playing into existing stereotypical narratives of northern inhabitants as *pochos* and *malinchistas*. The historical processes that brought about the destruction of *indígena* cultures and identities throughout the country and the region signal a similar process taking place along the border.

In the case of Tena Figueroa's *Yoreme* the hybridity of the protagonist Maldonado similarly proposes the inability to maintain his traditional cultural practices while adopting those of dominant non-*indígena* society. For Maldonado it ultimately has a corrupting influence that he comes to understand when he is forced to choose between leading the people of his village and assuming the governorship. Like Cornejo it is also a warning concerning the relationship between the Sonora and the Center. While Cornejo cautions against cultural corruption and soulless economic policies from across the border, the corruption and economic exploitation that Fernando Maldonado must escape has its origins in a national political system that subordinates the region to the avarice and cynicism of the Center. The protagonist's return to his cultural roots is a caution to the reader to avoid the corrupting influence of the center and an appeal to fortify regional values.

## Conclusions

The preceding texts reveal the complex nature of the competing discourses that surround the *indígena*. This is especially true during those moments when community, regional or national entities are perceived to be threatened. There are conscious and unconscious efforts to seek out and determine pure origins or the essential character of their respective communities. Subaltern groups such as the *indígena* because of their subordinated position within society are more easily configured for this use. Furthermore, how these groups are realized as a social edifice reflects the particular power structures in flux and their future configuration. The border further complicates these discourses of identity and opens up identity narratives to varied and multiple interpretations. The *indígena* as a sign comes to have significations dependent on the numerous discourses of identity emanating from the region be they regional, national or international.

Finally, we may want to ask how the Yaqui themselves might respond to the works that we have examined. While we might assume that they would appreciate the expression of support for their community, some of their goals and the admiration of their culture it is difficult to say with any certainty. Figueroa Valenzuela has pointed out that the mythic representation and appropriation of Cajeme is somewhat problematic within the Yaqui community (26). Given his prominence within Sonora he is, perhaps surprisingly, not particularly celebrated or even recognized. The great majority of Yaquis who are even aware of him as an historic figure view him as traitor or more often with indifference. In much the same way, each of the representations we have examined presents a monolithic and reductive vision of these communities obscuring their complex natures as active social communities. Mary Kay Vaughn points out that even the Yaquis' celebrated resistance to acculturation and independence essentializes the history of the community (194-5). During the critical post-Revolution period the community was divided and central government support was critical to the success of the Yaqui intellectuals' project to reconstitute the community and its traditional culture. We might imagine that the Yaqui reaction to these works would be similar to the scene that Edward Spicer described above. They recognize something of their culture and history but find them alien to the

point of estrangement due to their grounding in a cultural context separate from their own. What is clear is that the representations of the *indígena* we have studied fall into a common trap. In their attempts to find common cause or extend their support or sympathy to these peoples their representations end up being more a mirror than a window. They tell us more about the dominant society —its values, desires, fears— than the peoples they purport to represent. While the intent of each text may be to give voice and prominence to the *indígena* they simultaneously exploit these groups as a resource to articulate a wider regional and national identity. Ironically, attempts to identify with the *indígena* and retaliate against their perceived oppressors leads to a discourse that in many ways coincides with that of the same oppressors (Chow 135).

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