

Popular Narratives and Mestizo Horsemen: Creating a Racial Ideal in Nineteenth-Century Mexico, 1844–1896

E. Mark Moreno
Texas A&M University-Commerce

Between 1844 and 1896, two archetypal figures on horseback known as *rancheros* and *chinacos* were disseminated through print publications. As war with the United States loomed in 1844, a relatively obscure Mexican writer depicted the *ranchero* as a “true national type” in a popular magazine. Eighteen years later another archetype on horseback, the *chinaco*, appeared in newspaper propaganda designed to provoke resistance against an imminent French advance into the Mexican interior. Later writers, such as Justo Sierra and Antonio García Cubas, imbued such figures with racialized mestizo qualities and heroic martial traits, equating mestizo blood with strength and martial capabilities that could build a more advanced Mexican state. The depiction of both figures as of mixed-race origins was a popular perception that carried over into the Porfirian years. This article traces the origins of these figures in popular reading during the years in which Mexico dealt with war with the United States, a civil war, and finally the French Intervention. Through an analysis of popular reading and intellectual commentaries, supplemented by archival research, *mestizaje* as a foundational concept of Mexican nationhood is traced to these early depictions.

Keywords: archetypes, china, chinaco, French Intervention, nationalism, print culture, popular reading, *ranchero*.

Entre 1844 y 1896, las publicaciones impresas de México difundieron dos figuras arquetípicas a caballo, conocidas como *rancheros* y *chinacos*. Cuando se avecinaba la guerra con Estados Unidos, un oscuro escritor mexicano describió al *ranchero* como un “verdadero tipo nacional” en una revista popular. Dieciocho años más tarde, otro arquetipo a caballo, el *chinaco*, apareció en la propaganda periodística diseñada para incitar a la resistencia

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contra un inminente avance francés hacia el interior de México. Más adelante, escritores como Justo Sierra y Antonio García Cubas infundieron tales figuras con las cualidades racializadas del mestizo y los rasgos marciales heroicos, equiparando la sangre mestiza con la fuerza y las capacidades marciales necesarias para construir un Estado mexicano más avanzado. La representación de ambas figuras como mezcla de razas constituyó una percepción popular que se mantuvo durante los años del Porfiriato. El presente artículo rastrea los orígenes de estos dos arquetipos en las lecturas populares durante los años en que México libró una guerra contra Estados Unidos, una guerra civil y, finalmente, lidió con la intervención francesa. A través de un análisis de las lecturas populares y los comentarios intelectuales, complementado con una investigación de archivo, se rastrea el origen del mestizaje en cuanto concepto fundacional de la idea de nación mexicana hasta estas representaciones.

Palabras clave: arquetipos, china, chinaco, cultura impresa, intervención francesa, lectura popular, nacionalismo, rancho.

In 1844, an article titled “Los rancheros” was published in the magazine *El Museo Mexicano*. The author, Domingo Revilla, called the rancho a “true national type.”¹ This may be the first print description of what became a quintessential national figure. It was perhaps the first time any figure was given such a label in Mexico. *El Museo Mexicano* was based in Mexico City but distributed to urban centers nationwide, therefore this description of a rancho was disseminated throughout Mexico. Rancheros later appeared in reports of guerrilla activity during the Mexican-American war and were the subject of other characterizations in the popular press over the following decades. In a similar vein, in the spring of 1862, the Mexico City newspaper *La Chinaca* gave the chinaco an image as a humble guerrilla horseman ready to die fighting for the homeland against advancing French forces. The chinaco was associated with militant liberal republicanism of the Reform era. He was depicted as an Everyman of the Republic, a properly gendered warrior and patriot with his own local culture. Chinaco narratives describing these individuals as expert horsemen of mestizo origin continued through the Porfirian era in published accounts and commentaries.

The two figures of the rancho and the chinaco are the subject of this study. Both were early citizen archetypes presented as uniquely Mexican: the rancho as an idealized native countryman in the time

1. Domingo Revilla, “Costumbres y trajes nacionales: Los rancheros,” *El Museo Mexicano*, vol. 3, 1844, 551.

preceding the Mexican-American War; and the chinaco as a patriot warrior during the French Intervention (1862–1867). As horsemen both figures were based on individuals living in contemporary rural communities. As men on horseback with distinctive attire and martial traits, they lent themselves to nationalist constructions. The *ranchero* and the *chinaco* also had female counterparts, who were included, albeit minimally, in the narratives. These two figures were imagined archetypes based on real people, who were realized in print as a response to an elusive sense of nationalism during decades of vulnerability for the fragile Mexican state (before the presidency of Porfirio Díaz), when national sovereignty was threatened by the U.S. and France. These popular constructions arose amid a general lack of national cohesion, with tenuous links of identification between rural populations and Mexico City, in a weakened and divided state that lost substantial territory to the United States in 1848.

Mestizaje as a concept

In the late nineteenth century and during the Revolutionary era intellectuals forged a national ideology based on *mestizaje* (the idea of a racially mixed citizenry, comprised particularly of Spanish and Indigenous peoples, but including Afro-Mexicans). Prior to this, an articulated *mestizo* identity circulated in popular print materials. This *mestizo* identity was linked to rural life and national identity. In newspapers, magazines, and published personal accounts, references to race—either specifically referenced as *mestizo* or implicit in descriptions of physical characteristics—formed the literary foundation upon which later *mestizaje* ideologies were based.

There are two important reasons for considering early manifestations of *mestizaje* as the national ideal in Mexico, and these carry implications for manifestations of race and nation worldwide. Firstly, incarnations of *ranchero* and *chinaco* horsemen transmitted the interlocked notions of race and nation by constructing traits which differentiated Mexicans from others of the antagonistic Western world, particularly those states that threatened national sovereignty (the U.S. and later France). Secondly, while the development of these two archetypes occurred concurrently with the use of new print technologies and emergent liberal sentiments that prioritized “progress,” the subjects were not modern by nature, but horsemen in rural communities, with female counterparts. Thus, writers and illustrators reaffirmed rural traditions. In the case of *chinacos*, they depicted warriors who led the charge into the age of liberal modernity with resistance to the French military occupation.

A few decades later, writers in the Porfirian era built upon the earlier foundation of nationalist racialization in print when shaping nascent ideologies of race and nation—in other words, in shaping ideologies of mestizaje.

Ethnies

Although nation-states are by nature modern, Anthony D. Smith argued that nationalism often congeals around core ethnic populations, or an “ethnie.”² The Mexican racialized ethnie, the Spanish-speaking mestizo (as opposed to a culturally and linguistically Indigenous person), is as much a construction of successive generations of popular traditions as it is a biological construction. According to Smith, ethnies often share ancestry and a “historic territory.”³ Many nations “are formed on the basis of pre-existing ethnies and the ethnic model of the nation remains extremely influential today. . . . [W]ould-be nations that lack a dominant ethnic base often have great problems in forging national consciousness and cohesion.”⁴ In this study, Smith’s model on ethnies and historic territory is the framework utilized to reference Mexican nationalism based on the idea of mestizaje. The modern construction of mestizaje as the racial and ancestral foundation of the state bound to a Mexican “historic territory”—according to Smith’s model—is traced to the period immediately preceding the Mexican-American War. This was earlier than the Díaz presidential years and the revolutionary era.⁵ Because “race” is referred to as a biological determinant associated with *ranchero* and *chinaco* horsemen by nineteenth-century writers examined in this study, “race” is referred to rather than “ethnicity” (which denotes culture). However, the term *ethnie* broadly applies as a concept referring to a “core population,” again in Smith’s words.⁶

Sources

This study focuses upon specific depictions of *rancheros* and *chinacos* in print media in the context of foreign military threats and general internal conflict. I present examples of language employed in these popular narratives that indicate attempts to construct

2. Anthony D. Smith, “Culture, Community, and Territory: The Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism,” *International Affairs* 72 no. 3 (July 1996): 445–458.

3. *Ibid.*, 447.

4. *Ibid.*, 447.

5. *Ibid.*, 447.

6. *Ibid.*, 447.

a nationalist sense of race.⁷ Popular conceptualizations of mestizaje as manifestations of nation in the earlier Mexican republics have not been widely researched. This study is therefore important because it aims to incorporate early glimpses of mestizo personifications into the historiographies of popular nationalism and national identity in Mexico, and to generate understanding of the grass-roots origins of such phenomena.

This study entails an examination of popular constructions of *rancheros* and *chinacos* from 1844 and 1896. The sources include five specific portrayals of these horsemen. These portrayals are compared with the later writings of Mexican intellectuals in their own descriptions of *rancheros* and *chinacos*. They wrote both for popular publications and for individual tracts targeted at more specialized audiences. This raises important questions: Does this historical trajectory provide evidence of an emergent mestizo ideology before the Revolution? What is at the historical core of mestizo ideology? The questions are answered in the following pages, through examples that demonstrate the historical grass-roots elements of the modern conception of mestizaje.

Structure

This article is organized into twelve sections and a conclusion. These discussions cover the following areas of analysis and explanation: examples of historiography concerning mestizaje as a concept and an intellectual construct; the historical backdrop of the print industry and the political situation in Mexican City out of which the initial *ranchero* figure, as portrayed by Domingo Revilla, arose; the historical context of the Mexican-American War, in which U.S. forces reported guerrilla activity by *rancheros*; two further examples of the *ranchero* in popular reading during the 1850s; the historical context in which the *chinaco* of print media emerged, namely the War of the Reform and the French Intervention; analysis of *La Chinaca*, the newspaper that presented the *chinaco* image that later developed in the popular imagination, including an explanation of possible origins of the term *chinaco*; a description of *chinaco* narratives in other published accounts; and a comparison of passages of writings

7. I am using Smith's model and his term "ethnic," which can also encompass race, but not always. That term is not my term. Mestizaje refers to race, of course, but the Mexican case offers complications because it connected to a sense of culture as well. That makes it "ethnic."

in published works of the Porfirian era with references to race in the earlier popular accounts of *rancheros* and *chinacos*.

1. Mestizaje

In the case of both the *ranchero* and *chinaco*, these secular national types were native figures not culturally Indigenous and not symbolically linked to ancient civilizations, which had been an important factor in the construction of creole identity in the late colonial era.⁸ Early development of the horseman as a mestizo or mixed-race and Hispanicized patriot is an important component in recognizing Mexican state formation through the lens of racialization and popular print culture.⁹ The popular depictions of *rancheros* and *chinacos* are the earliest literary antecedents.

Such manifestations of race in connection to Mexican national identity differ from other types of constructions. For example, Edward Wright-Rios argues that the liberal writer and politician Ignacio Manuel Altamirano presented Indigenous peoples as communities on which to build the nation-state.¹⁰ While that vision was perhaps never realized, the popular origins of mestizo horsemen eventually did materialize into an ideology. *Ranchero* and *chinaco* figures as idealized mestizos developed at first from popular reading. They were only later conceptualized as representatives of a uniquely Mexican nation. Writers of the Porfirian era built upon that construction on the basis of the perceived warrior traits and physical toughness of the mestizo horsemen. This study provides a historical base that augments scholarship on mestizo discourses of independent Mexico. Such discourses led to the establishment of a Mexican “mestizo state” framed in literature as a struggle for land, resources, and the “naturalization of inequality,” as described recently by Joshua Lund.¹¹ I draw on Lund’s idea to “read race.” This involves examining references to race in popular reading and intellectual commentaries. This is a departure from

8. See David Brading, *Los orígenes del nacionalismo mexicano* (México, D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1980).

9. The influential essay *La raza cósmica* (1925) by José Vasconcelos, propelled the embrace of mestizaje as a revolutionary ideology of the twentieth century, and universalized the concept.

10. See Edward N. Wright-Rios, “Indian Saints and Nation-States: Ignacio Manuel Altamirano’s Landscapes and Legends,” *MS/EM* 20, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 47–68.

11. Joshua Lund, *The Mestizo State: Reading Race in Modern Mexico* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), xiv–xv.

previous studies focusing upon or including examinations of mestizaje constructions.¹²

Previous works on the intellectual constructions of race in nineteenth-century Mexico also demonstrate a mestizo racial ideology taking shape in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1950, Luis Villoro asserted an inherent Indian consciousness underlying Mexican national identity, one that had roots in colonial times, even as it was suppressed or ignored during different periods. Beginning with the construction of mestizo identity in the post-Reform era of the late nineteenth century the idea of mestizaje acknowledged incorporation of Indigenous ancestry, although allowed for distance from it, and implied internal cohesion. As Villoro stated: “The racial concept was converted into a symbol of social conglomeration.”¹³ I argue that this is a process that commenced with early imaginings of *rancheros* and *chinacos*, whose creators demonstrably avoided or downplayed acknowledgments of indigeness.

The emergent construction of the mestizo as the demographic embodiment of nationhood (“mestizofilia”) was analyzed in 1992 by Agustín Basave.¹⁴ The liberal regime and its proponents who overcame the French occupation and conservative monarchist government, while inspired to promote the advantages of mestizaje, also articulated a desire to incorporate Indigenous people into the state through education—although they retained positivist beliefs regarding their supposed racial inferiority.¹⁵ In the era of the Restored Republic (1867–1876), triumphant liberals began to differentiate the mestizo from the *criollo* as “trustee of Mexican national identity,” as Basave stated.¹⁶ Such sentiments extended out of the mestizo ideal presented in early popular media, although the concept was, at the time, not developed enough to incorporate a patronizing approach toward Indigenous populations. That is a responsibility which full “mestizo” hegemony—a negotiated position of dominance

12. Ibid., *Mestizo State*, xv.

13. Luis Villoro, *Los grandes momentos del indigenismo en México* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1950), 173.

14. Agustín Basave B., *México mestizo: Análisis del nacionalismo mexicano en torno de mestizofilia* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2011 [1992]).

15. See Martin S. Stabb, “Indigenism and Racism in Mexican Thought: 1857–1911,” *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 1 no. 4 (Oct. 1959), 405–423.

16. Agustín Basave B., *México mestizo: Análisis del nacionalismo mexicano en torno de mestizofilia* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2011 [1992]), 33.

and state control—implies. That concept developed after the writings of Francisco Pimentel in the 1860s.¹⁷

Recently, scholar Laura Angélica Moya López has undertaken an extensive analysis of Justo Sierra's edited volume *México: su evolución social*.¹⁸ According to Moya, Sierra exemplified the evolving implementation of mestizaje as an "organism," and was perhaps the most open to a "synthesis of the races," and was least judgmental, among his peers, of Indigenous Mexicans.¹⁹

However, in the works noted above, popular origins of mestizaje are not taken into consideration. In this study I therefore address the absence of discussion concerning the popular origins of what became an institutionalized racial construct. At the root of that construct is the attribution of exceptional racial qualities to rural horsemen who were thought to be of mixed race, a construct that was developed through popular reading.

2. Print industry

In 1835, a new national government replaced the first federal republic in Mexico City. The authoritarian Central Republic restricted voting rights to propertied men and abolished the liberal Constitution. At its head was General Antonio López de Santa Anna, who was instrumental in deposing federalists who were ousted after seven years in power. Under Santa Anna's leadership, the republic lost Texas in 1836, and went to war with the United States ten years later. While political factions battled with arms and rhetoric over the future of Mexico, the print industry grew steadily.

By 1844, there were seven weekly, monthly, or yearly periodicals published in Mexico City. The literate population of that city may have been around 10 percent in a population of 220,623 (and less in rural areas). This nascent reading public provided a growing

17. The works referenced in this article are Francisco Pimentel, *Memoria sobre las causas que han originado la situación actual de la raza indígena y medidas de remediarla* (Mexico City: Imprenta de Andrade y Escalante, 1864) and Francisco Pimentel, *Obras completas de D. Francisco Pimentel* (Mexico City: Tipografía Económica, 1903).

18. Justo Sierra, ed., *México, su evolución social: inventario monumental que resume en trabajos magistrales los grandes progresos de la nación en el siglo XIX* (Mexico: Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2005 [originally Barcelona: J. Ballezá y compañía, 1900]).

19. See Laura Angélica Moya López, *La nación como organismo: México: su evolución social, 1900–1902* (México D.F.: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 2003), 137.

market for print entrepreneurs.²⁰ *El Museo Mexicano* was published by Ignacio Cumplido, owner of a prolific Mexico City print shop which produced newspapers, literary magazines, pamphlets, memoirs, calendars, and dictionaries. Having close ties to the Mexico City intelligentsia, Cumplido gave an early voice to liberal writers such as Mariano Otero, Guillermo Prieto, Manuel Payno, and Francisco Zarco. He was also founder and initial editor of the newspaper *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, which lasted, as a widely read publication, from 1841 to 1896.²¹

My opening example of “Los rancheros” was published in *El Museo Mexicano* in 1844. It appeared during a time of a growing readership market, such that printers and would-be publishers experimented with formats. By the 1840s, production of print accelerated with lithograph technology and with the increasing prevalence of capabilities and presses.

Lithograph technology was originally popularized in Mexico by Italian émigré Claudio Linati, as early as 1828. His illustrated book of regional customs, *Costumes civils, militaires et religieux du Mexique* (which was translated into Spanish later), brought the many faces of Mexico to audiences outside of Mexico. Linati’s illustrated depiction gave the “Mexican ranchero” a role in the war of independence. The caption explains that he is roping a “Spanish officer in front of his battalion” with a lasso (a rope tied into a noose used for roping cattle).²² In the lithograph, the mounted ranchero wears silver-studded chaps and a flat-topped, wide-brimmed sombrero.²³

20. Robert McCaa, “The Peopling of 19th century Mexico: Critical Scrutiny of a Censured Century,” in *Statistical Abstract of Latin America* vol. 30, eds. James W. Wilkie, Carlos Alberto Contreras, and Christof Anders Weber (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, University of California, 1993): 6–17 (pdf. format); Lilia Guiot de la Garza, “El competido mundo de la lectura: librerías y gabinetes de lectura en la ciudad de México, 1821–1855,” in *Constructores de un cambio cultural: impresores-editores y libreros en la ciudad de México, 1830–1855*, ed. Laura Suárez de la Torre (Mexico, D.F.: Instituto Mora, 2003): 17. The literacy rate included in Guiot de la Garza’s essay, not broken down by age or gender or cited, was about 22,000 people.

21. María Esther Pérez Cantú, “Los secretos de una empresa exitosa: La imprenta de Ignacio Cumplido,” in *Constructores de un cambio cultural: impresores-editores y libreros en la ciudad de México, 1830–1855*, ed. Laura Suárez de la Torre, (México, D. F.: Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora, 2003), 102, 104–105.

22. Claudio Linati, *Trajes, Civiles, Militares y Religiosos de México* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM, 1956 [Brussels: Charles Sattanino, 1828]), Plate 21.

23. *Ibid.*, Plate 21.

Magazines that were produced after Linati's publications contained novellas, short stories, poetry, political commentaries, science essays, travelogues, and essays on religion. It was common for several magazines to cover all these topics as they grew in number. An early publication which presented Mexican life and people through an eclectic mix of different types of writing was Cumplido's *El Museo Mexicano*. This provides early examples of *costumbrista* literature: nineteenth-century depictions of everyday life. This was a product of Spain imported to the Americas which emphasized the "the ordinary and mundane in representations of their daily life."²⁴ While not political or contentious in orientation, according to May-Yen Moriuchi, these depictions carried "undercurrents of social negotiation and identity construction."²⁵ One individual, Manuel Payno was a journalist of a myriad of subjects (and later became a diplomat and statesman during the Restored Republic and the porfiriato).²⁶ He contributed early travelogues to *El Museo*, decades before his opus, *Los bandidos del Río Frío*. Another contributor was Guillermo Prieto, who took the *nom de guerre* "Fidel." During the 1840s and 1850s Prieto had a flair for romanticizing the culture of the poor. He published a poem in 1844 titled "Amor Popular," which is about a woman characterized as a *china*. The term *china* was used by contemporary writers to describe a free-spirited, flirtatious, but humble woman of the "the mestizo popular classes."²⁷ Referencing *china* with "almond-shaped" eyes in his poem, Prieto includes the lines: "Long live plebian love / so sweet like the honeycomb . . . Black / with flirting eyes / And at times fierce and haughty / Like an imperial eagle."²⁸ Guillermo makes what appear to be vague references to race and class. The *china* represents "plebian love" and has "almond-shaped" black eyes "fierce and haughty." In Revilla's article the *china* is associated with the *ranchero* and is perceived similarly. The *china* is depicted in *ranchero* and

24. May-Yen Moriuchi, *Mexican Costumbrismo: Race, Society, and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Art* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018), 1.

25. *Ibid.*, 1.

26. Eladio Cortés, ed., *Dictionary of Mexican Literature* (Westport, CN and London: Greenwood Press, 1992), 502–503.

27. See, for example, *Mexicanos pintados por sí mismos* (Mexico City: M. Murguía, 1854), 89–98. For a discussion see Ricardo Pérez Montfort, *Expresiones populares y estereotipos culturales en México, Siglos XIX y XX. Diez ensayos* (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios, 2007), 133–134.

28. Guillermo Prieto, "Amor Popular," *El Museo Mexicano*, vol. 2, 1844, 25–26.

chinaco narratives as a female counterpart to both figures (as I discuss in examples provided below).

Turning to Revilla again, in writing his relatively long piece for *El Museo*, he referred to the “man from the city.” This hypothetical reader was bored by material pleasures and “has turned to the countryside in his solitude by invoking the natural world, which has within it the balsam of solace for his affliction . . . receiving in his heart and soul new life.”²⁹ The prescribed remedy for this “affliction” was in understanding that another type of individual found comfort in his rural Mexican culture, free of such pleasures. That figure was, by extension, a representative native citizen, a man without cultural influences emanating from Europe or the United States. A truly native culture existed separate from such transatlantic Western influences and tastes so popular among lettered urban inhabitants of Mexico City and other urban centers of the Central Republic. Revilla contrasted the foreign influences on dress fashion among Mexicans with *rancheros* and their own sense of style. The author stated:

[*Rancheros*], because of their sense of nationalism, have resisted all extravagance that the foreigner invades us with in the name of fashion, and our independence is not quite perfect with that invasion.³⁰

Revilla described two types of *rancheros*: first, there were the Indigenous men who were “respected little by the Spanish government,” who had a “blind passion” for music. They possessed “dark but animated” complexions, “almond-shaped eyes,” and well-formed lips. The second group foreshadowed ideas of national *mestizaje* that appeared in late nineteenth-century literature.³¹ Revilla wrote that such *rancheros* were “from a mix of castes, however, the *mestizos* were the prevailing race. These *rancheros*, along with dark *mulattoes* and blacks in the haciendas of the ‘hot lands’ of the coast, are those who carry out the labors and other needs of the land.”³² The author reminded his readers that *rancheros* were warriors in the struggle for independence, “in which a thousand facts and features of true valor and heroism” were attributed to them.³³ Revilla presented his article as an entertainment piece rather than propaganda. Although he noted the *mestizo* racial qualities of his subjects (likely from personal

29. Domingo Revilla, “Costumbres y trajes nacionales: Los *rancheros*,” *El Museo Mexicano*, vol. 3, 1844, 551.

30. *Ibid.*, 551. All translations are by the author.

31. *Ibid.*, 552.

32. *Ibid.*, 552.

33. *Ibid.*, 554.

observation, to a degree), it is well-documented that the cattle range-lands of Mexico were ethnically diverse communities.³⁴

3. Historical context

Ranchero and chinaco figures were based on actual people (often of color) from real communities, according to writers who depicted them in the popular press. Documentation exists that supports such descriptions by writers featured in this study. For example, the perception of rancheros as of racially mixed lineage is supported in one data set of the early 1820s in the Bajío, a traditional region of rancho economics referenced in one case in this study. This supports Revilla's observations on the racial demographics of rancheros.³⁵ Remaining censuses taken within a few years of independence reveal diverse populations on the haciendas and ranchos in the department of León, Guanajuato, where families tended the corn, grain, sheep, and cattle that traditionally fed and clothed mine workers of that province.³⁶ The city of León emerged originally as a northern outpost that guarded trade routes against the unconquered semi-sedentary peoples in the northern reaches of Spanish settlement in 1576. Migratory Indian villages in the region were later granted status as repúblicas, or semi-autonomous ethnic jurisdictions.³⁷ By 1800 a majority of the people of república status lived on private agricultural estates and smaller ranchos, rather than lands of their own Indigenous communities.³⁸ At the time of independence, hacienda and rancho lands near the city of León contained a mixed array of peoples: Indians, mulatos, mestizos, and españoles. Racial categories are demarcated in some, but not all, of the census data taken on haciendas and ranchos of the region in 1822. At the Hacienda de Santiago, for example, about 46 percent of 319 residents were indigenous Mexicans, while 22 percent were mestizo (officially Spanish and Indian), 21 percent listed as español,

34. See D.A. Brading, *Haciendas and Ranchos in the Mexican Bajío: León 1700–1860* (London et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

35. Various authors, *Los mexicanos pintados*, 196; Revilla, "Costumbres y trajes," 552.

36. Brading, *Haciendas* Chapters 4 and 8.

37. *Ibid.*, 39; María de Cruz Labarthe Ríos and Adriana Ortega Zenteno, *Yo Vivo en León* (León: Honorable Ayuntamiento de León, 2000), 47–48; John Tutino, *Making a New World: Founding Capitalism in the Bajío and Spanish North America* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 150.

38. Archivo Histórico Municipal de León, Jefatura Política: Estadísticas-Censos (Political Leadership: Statistics and Censuses) 1821–1830 (hereafter AHML); AHML, Jefatura Política, Sanidad: Epidemias, Box 1, ff. 38–42.

and 11 percent were mulato or of partial African origin. Census takers who marked racial categories for that year apparently followed the practice of recording racial and ethnic categories in official records of the colonial era. Such categories vanish in archival documentation by 1830.³⁹

4. Revilla's archetypes

In his article on *rancheros*, Domingo Revilla emphasized the importance of the horse in *ranchero* culture. He wrote that *rancheros* differed from villagers in their dress and equipment, which were designed for mounting, riding, and domesticating horses, with the most important tool being the "little rope"—the lasso.⁴⁰ The horse culture aspect of *ranchero* life is given particular attention by the author. The horse's own life is linked with that of the *ranchero* "in battle" during that period in Mexico, with its internecine warfare.⁴¹ According to Revilla,

The horses undertake the same risks as their owners; they are full of loyalty, and most times they die without exhaling or moaning, falling victim to the rider's capriciousness. . . . [T]he love that the *ranchero* shows toward his horse is at times greater than that for the women and children. The *ranchero* without [a horse] is an imperfect being: he is like the half of a whole. A *ranchero* on foot, without his horse, appears as an automaton. He is sad and melancholy.⁴²

Revilla also states that the *ranchero's* horse gives him purpose in amorous pursuits. The *ranchero* is depicted as a dashing mounted figure with his love interest carried on horseback:

The *ranchero* on his horse is as light as the wind traveling to where his love is. He may be by her side without fear, and he wants to protect her from wicked and envious eyes who would want to steal her, his treasure and his hopes.⁴³

The image of a man on horseback stirred the imagination of Revilla, who was a Mexico City native. (Notably, he was friends with

39. AHML, Jefatura Política: Estadísticas-Censos (Political Leadership: Statistics and Censuses) 1821–1830, Box 1, f. 8. Hacienda lands could contain several ranchos, while other ranchos were independent of larger estates. This is a census taken during the early republic. In that case, the categories are racial in origin. Although academic historical studies often apply the term "ethnic" to Indigenous populations, reference here specifically to race is more appropriate.

40. Revilla, "Costumbres y trajes," 557.

41. *Ibid.*, 557.

42. Revilla, "Los *rancheros*," 558.

43. *Ibid.*, 558.

Guillermo Prieto and other prominent writers⁴⁴). His descriptions established the *ranchero* as a mestizo on horseback, at least to his reading contemporary audience. This figure became synonymous with a distinctly Mexican identity and with Mexican customs over the course of the next few decades.

5. Women as *chinas poblanas*

Although women of the *ranchos* are minimally described, when they are mentioned they are called “true china.” The term *china* is also a reference to the specially designed dresses known as *chinas poblanas*, which, according to legend, referred to a kidnapped Asian princess who found a home in Puebla during the seventeenth century.⁴⁵ According to Revilla, at wedding fiestas, *chinas* proudly demonstrated their abilities dancing the *jarabe*—a reference to *jarabe tapatío*, a folkloric dance said to have originated in Guadalajara (and later framed as the national dance of Mexico).⁴⁶ At such gatherings, the “*rancherillas*” (the women) and *rancheros* “get excited, and make an effort to look good; they dance and sing verses to each other to reflect their love, feelings, or jealousy.”⁴⁷ Revilla associated *chinas* with regional dance forms that were much later adopted as national cultural incarnations. In the article the term *china* is used interchangeably with “*rancherillas*.”⁴⁸ It is possible that the gendered *china* label was later applied to *chinaco* horsemen, as both labels describe people of similar demographic backgrounds. The origins of the latter term are still unclear, however, as explained below.

6. The Mexican-American War (1846–1848)

The *rancheros* featured in *El Museo Mexicano* were depicted two years before war with the U.S. broke out, in the spring of 1846. Examples provided in this section show that men described as *rancheros*, according to American military reports, took part in guerrilla actions against U.S. troops. These reports likely fostered stories that circulated orally, which solidified popular perceptions

44. Manuel G. Revilla, *Obras del licenciado D. Manuel G. Revilla*, Vol. 1 (Mexico City: V. Agueros, 1908), v.

45. Pérez Montfort, *Expresiones*, 132–133.

46. Pedely, Mark, *Musical Ritual in Mexico City: From the Aztec to NAFTA*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 87–88.

47. Revilla, “Costumbres y trajes,” 556.

48. *Ibid.*, 556.

of the *ranchero* as a warrior and a patriot. The war brought out stark divisions in Mexican society. Insurgencies broke out even as the government mobilized for defense against the U.S. military assault. Individual pronunciamientos continued to wrack the central government throughout the fall of 1846. At the same time, the military mounted an ultimately futile defense against U.S. invasions from the north and the Atlantic coast at Veracruz. In the capital, conservative militiamen based in Mexico City, known as *los polkos*, rose up against the government of Valentín Gómez Farías in the last days of fighting, but they were eventually subdued.⁴⁹ Even with the divisions within Mexico, the war and invasion ignited sparks of popular nationalism and brought out guerrilla tactics that became staples of militarism during the War of the Reform and the French occupation.

Rancheros emerge as irregular fighters against U.S. soldiers in some printed accounts and in at least one other academic study. For example, there are two U.S. print publications that reported the killing of a U.S. officer (Alexander Richey) by a *ranchero* in Tamaulipas. The officer was dragged with a lasso to his death.⁵⁰ In another example, an attack by guerrillas by means of warfare “disgraceful to a Christian nation,” occurred just after the landing of U.S. forces in Veracruz.⁵¹ The guerrillas, according to the account, attacked with “pistols, daggers, carbines, daggers, and lassos.”⁵² In the final U.S. advance toward Mexico City, one general (Winfield Scott) announced that no quarters would be given to “known murderers or robbers whether called *guerrillos* or *rancheros*,” whether or not they were sanctioned by the Mexican government, as quoted by Irving R. Levinson.⁵³ If local sources in Veracruz and other regions informed U.S. forces on guerrilla activity perpetrated by *rancheros*, then it is possible there already existed a *ranchero* mystique that circulated among some populations.

49. Timothy J. Henderson, *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and its War with the United States* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 162.

50. Turner and Fischer's *Deutscher Bilder Kalendar*, 1848 (German language, Philadelphia), 17; Marley, David F., *Wars of the Americas: A Chronology of Armed Conflict in the Americas, 1492 to the Present* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 762.

51. *Old Rough and Ready Almanac* (Philadelphia), 1848, 3.

52. *Ibid.*, 3.

53. Irving W. Levinson, *Wars Within War: Mexican Guerrillas, Domestic Elites, and the United States of America* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 2005), 67.

7. Print media in the 1850s

In 1853, five years after military defeat and territorial loss to the United States, Mexico was again a centralized republic under Antonio López de Santa Anna. At that time, the magazine *La Ilustración Mexicana* published an article about the ranchero. In this short article (that carried no byline), the ranchero again represented an idealized countryman. The general contents of the article appear to have been lifted from the 1844 article by Revilla. This anonymous author did not use mestizo and mulato racial terms. However, the author did state that rancheros were of a “mix in which Spanish and Indian blood are revealed, forming a character base that makes rancheros a special national type . . . without the spirit of rebellion or disorder.”⁵⁴ This reflected the conservative/centralist fear of liberal republicanism as dangerous to public order and good governance. Again, the ranchero is seen as a man of color, although not given to upset the current order under Santa Anna. He is presented as the Mexican symbol of Hispanic civilization. The anonymous author still reinforced the earlier Revilla depiction, making rancheros an idealized class separated culturally from the urban populations of society, noting:

Loving and affectionate with his family, officious and loyal in friendship, the ranchero has, in the end, the virtues and defects of men who live separately from society; it is ingenuous and good to be like them; it is also raw and energetic.⁵⁵

1854

A periodical of Mexican *costumbres* was published in the following year, which satirized el ranchero and a barefoot “La China,” along with other cultural and occupational archetypes. The volume was titled *Los mexicanos pintados por sí mismos*. It commenced publication in October 1854 and followed the example of similarly titled periodicals produced in Spain, Cuba, and France.⁵⁶ As a satirical publication, the magazine showcased the talents of the writers as much as it purported to depict Mexican customs and occupations. The text is in dialogue form, a *costumbrista* literary method in popular reading. For example, in one article the writer takes the

54. *La Ilustración Mexicana*, vol. 1, 1851, 129.

55. *Ibid.*, 129.

56. María Esther Pérez Salas C., “Genealogía de ‘Mexicanos pintados por sí mismos,’” *Historia Mexicana* 48, no. 2, (Oct.-Dec.1998): 194.

name of “Señor Amo,” and positions himself as one who knows nothing of rancheros or their culture, but who is reluctantly assigned to live on a rancho and to produce an article for the magazine, even if his hypothetical subject is “a personage I do not know, but it is well that in such a circumstance, that is not necessary for writing in these times.”⁵⁷ Supposedly reporting from an unnamed rancho, the writer comments that rancheros disliked cello music (in a nod to his cultured compatriots of the national capital), but preferred the soprano violin. The writer creates a guide, named Pancho, who likes to sing a song popular with “Rancheros of the Bajío” called “La Media Perra.”⁵⁸ Intended as satire, not as serious commentary like Revilla’s years earlier, the piece demonstrates that the ranchero was part of a developing vision of Mexican citizenship, albeit uncultured and profane. Later writers of the porfiriato remarked on rancheros as uncultured mestizos, but of sturdy character and physicality.

8. Ranchero narratives and media circulation

References in the popular press cited above indicate that rancheros were a topic of conversation, at least among the reading public, and that songs attributed to rancheros may also have been popular. It is possible that popular cultural dissemination about the ranchero circulated orally well beyond reading audiences. Using the subscription list for *El Museo* as evidence, the ranchero article by Revilla reached a wide reading audience. Literate consumers of popular culture were relatively small, given that Mexico’s population approached 8 million people by 1860. However, subscribers resided in nearly every urban area. Nationwide, 1,209 subscribers are listed, which included two women, for 1844.⁵⁹ As a result of such wide distribution, ranchero popular narratives likely continued to circulate orally. These narratives were then reinforced in popular perception during the 1850s by the rancheros depicted in *La Ilustración Mexicana* and *Los mexicanos pintados por sí mismos*.

9. Warfare, intervention, and propaganda

In the aftermath of war with the U.S. and subsequent loss of territory in 1848, relatively fragmented political factions coalesced into two virulently opposed ideological groups: conservatives who favored

57. Various, *Los mexicanos pintados por sí mismos*, 191–192, 196.

58. *Ibid.*, 192.

59. *El Museo Mexicano*, vol. 3, 568–584.

a return to monarchy and corporate governance with a strong Church presence as in the colonial era, adhering to traditional Spanish institutions; and liberals who favored a “modern” and secular constitutional republic with male suffrage and an emphasis on private enterprise and property rights. The two sides fought a three-year civil war, known as the War of the Reform, that resulted in a liberal victory and the administration of President Benito Juárez. Two years later, French troops dispatched by Napoleon III, who supported Mexican conservatives, attempted the fateful march toward Mexico City and were defeated by an undermanned republican force at the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862.

The newspaper *La Chinaca* was first published in April 1862. This was prompted by the march of French troops toward the capital. A propaganda organ, its editors created *La Chinaca* to ignite martial spirits among the popular masses, labeling itself as a newspaper “only and exclusively for the people.”⁶⁰ The paper was available for an “eighth of a real.” *La Chinaca* existed for a just over a year. It ceased publication shortly before the final and successful French advance into Mexico City in June 1863. At least at the beginning of its publication in Mexico City, the paper appears to have been directed toward cross-sections of the population, although the extent of its nationwide distribution is unknown to me. The first issue appeared in April of 1862, as the French moved toward Mexico City, having landed in October ostensibly to collect millions in debts acquired by the Juárez government. (The Tripartite Agreement entered into by France, Great Britain, and Spain led the three governments to send warships to the port of Veracruz. However, only French forces remained after October, by agreement with the government in Mexico City. The initial French military advance from Veracruz to Mexico City commenced in the spring, although Mexican forces ultimately halted that excursion at the battle of Puebla. Foreign occupation of the country was delayed a year after the battle—a crucial development that allowed for organization of guerrilla forces.)

The newspaper’s title, *La Chinaca*, is a gendered and feminized version of “chinaco,” the mounted guerrillas that were featured in printed imagery, songs, and stories within its pages. The chinaco term is also associated with the china poblana, or chinas, described earlier.⁶¹ More plausibly, the term was rooted in the eighteenth

60. For example, see *La Chinaca*, 16 April 1862, 1.

61. Monroy Casillas, “Los Chinacos: Resistencia popular en México, 1862–1867” (Tesis de Licenciatura, Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia [ENAH], 2004), 21; See, for example, *Mexicanos pintados por sí mismos*, 88; *La Chinaca*, April 16, 1862, 1.

century, when the terms *chino* and later *chinaco* denoted persons with African lineage. Casta paintings depicted male *chinos* in interracial marriages as of darker complexion, in one case as a water-bearer in tattered clothes, for example, and in another as well-dressed and of the upper classes.⁶²

10. Propaganda for all the people

In an issue of *La Chinaca* newspaper from early June, the front-page illustration on the masthead seems to present an image of the editors' intended audience.⁶³ The image shows a youthful, barefoot soldier who is reading the paper aloud to an assembled group of people. The group includes: a young boy, a beggar, and a dark-haired woman, who are all barefoot;⁶⁴ a uniformed man wearing sandals; and a male figure dressed in fine, if somewhat humble, riding garb of the *ranchero*, who is wearing shoes and who towers in height over the others. This image of a horseman is similar to that depicted in earlier print forms. He stands next to his horse, leaning over and listening intently to the younger man reading aloud.

In the first several months of publication, the newspaper's contents included poems and also what appear to be song lyrics, with choruses or chants meant to be repeated. In short vignettes, writers used relatively simple language designed to amuse reading or listening audiences (for literate and nonliterate people, respectively) and also appeal to the population at large. For example, in the first issue, one anonymous writer tells a story about how a "strikingly beautiful" china named Panchita married a French barber with "green eyes and red hair . . . because women, for lack of a better motive, marry, and that's it." The story continues to describe how Panchita soon abandons the barber, "Mr. Pantalón," and decides to run away with "Pepe the chinaco," who "has more value than all traitors."⁶⁵

62. Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *La población negra de México: estudio etno-histórico* (Veracruz: Universidad Veracruzana, 1946), 179; Marco Polo Hernández Cuevas, *African Mexicans and the Discourse on Modern Nation*, (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2004), 50–51; Antonio Olliz Boyd, *The Latin American Identity and the African Diaspora: Ethnogenesis in Context* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2010), 61–63; María Esther Pérez Salas, *Costumbrismo y Litografía en México: un Nuevo modo de ver* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma de México, 2005), 117, 119.

63. *La Chinaca*, June 12, 1862, 1.

64. I am grateful to James E. Sanders who first noted the barefoot nature of the audience. See Sanders, *The Vanguard of the Atlantic World: Creating Modernity, Nation, and Democracy in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 14.

65. *La Chinaca*, April 16, 1862, 3.

The passage demonstrates how writers also made subtle references to race. The implied physical characteristics of the “strikingly beautiful” china Panchita contrast with the “green eyes and red hair” of the barber. Although the chinaco Pepe is not racialized in the story, at least one other depiction, discussed later, subtly presented non-European and mixed racial characteristics in an illustration that accompanied a poem, “El Chinaco.” In other examples, writers for *La Chinaca* combined elements of popular vernacular with calls to urge patrons to buy the newspaper, imagining a politicized chinaca community, and assuming its voice. One example of this type of writing is as follows:

We are true chinaca
 We write in chinaco
 You give us a coin
 We give you a newspaper
 Our purpose is not to profit
 But to write our opinion,
 To motivate the nation.⁶⁶

The paper included a specific description of a chinaco, the type of guerrilla fighter called for by the republican government as it prepared for a French inland military invasion.

In September of 1862, four months after the Mexican victory at Puebla, one writer described a chinaco in poetic form:

Crossing the plains
 Swift as a gale
 Mounted on his beautiful black horse
 Juan the brave chinaco
 Leaves behind his little village . . .
 And says goodbye to his loving mother
 Who sobs in her loneliness . . .⁶⁷

The poem is accompanied by an illustration that shows a man on horseback in a broad-brimmed hat, slightly stooped, carrying his lance with pennant. His facial features are somewhat obscured but clearly caricatured, with protruding nose and lips. While not literally imbuing Juan with racial characteristics, the illustration leaves such interpretations to the reader. The idealization of Juan the Chinaco coincided with the strategy of unconventional warfare in the upcoming war against the French and Mexican imperialist forces in

66. *Ibid.*, April 16, 1.

67. *La Chinaca*, Sept. 4 1862, 4.

the states. Designated guerrilla units existed alongside traditionally organized forces of the scattered republican army.⁶⁸

Early chinaco references

As the War of the Reform wound down and the victorious Juárez republican government prepared to enter Mexico City in January of 1861, depictions of chinacos appeared for the first time in the popular press. One religiously oriented conservative newspaper titled *La Sociedad* included such a reference to chinacos. The newspaper reported the ongoing battles against “soldiers of order,” who were holding back advancing liberal troops and guerrillas near Celaya, Guanajuato. A party representing the townsfolk urged the liberal guerrilla commander (Manuel Pueblita) to halt the impending invasion, since conservatives had already withdrawn from Celaya. At first he agreed but was persuaded to enter the town and extract prisoners, while fleeing conservative soldiers were pursued “by a party of rebels known as Chinaca.”⁶⁹ The incident occurred at the end of the Reform war, so the chinaco designation already referenced liberal fighters, before the eventual French advance in the spring of 1862. It is impossible to determine the exact social makeup of that particular “chinaca” force under Pueblita, and the *La Sociedad* account reveals no details on that force.

Chinacos and literary Mexico

La Chinaca's writers constructed the chinaco in relation to popular perceptions of guerrilla forces circulating in Mexico. The established ranchero of print culture was the precedent for this print creation based on individuals engaged in guerrilla warfare, or thought of in that capacity. The function of the newspaper as a print outlet devoted to war propaganda reflects a contemporary flowering of popular reading through newspapers and a limited but growing number of literate Mexicans at mid-nineteenth century.

One writer connected with *La Chinaca* was Guillermo Prieto, who was a listed editor, one of its anonymous authors of war

68. Secretaría de Defensa Nacional, Archivo Histórico Militar (hereafter AHM), Tomo XI/581.4/9021, “Documentación correspondiente a la primera División de Caballería” (Guanajuato state), Sept. 11, 1863. Listed are 246 “guerrilla” cavalymen under two unranked commanders. Ilhutsy Monroy Casillas calculated 515 guerrilla actions in seven central Mexican states between 1863 and 1866. See Monroy Casillas, “Los Chinacos,” 21.

69. *La Sociedad*, vol. 4, no. 919, 9 July 1860, 3.

propaganda,⁷⁰ and most certainly a partial if not whole creator of the public chinaco image. Earlier in his career, Prieto, a prolific man of letters, was an early *costumbrista* writer, and Mexican statesman during the years of military occupation, who founded the Academia de (San Juan) Letrán in the mid-1830s aiming to promote the “Mexicanization” of literature.⁷¹ In *La Chinaca*, the writers tailored material toward presumably lower-class populations. They cast their ideological Western liberalism in terms reflective of everyday life akin to costumbrista writings, a genre very familiar to Prieto, who was likely behind the subtle references to race.

11. Later chinaco narratives

Turning to chinaco references in accounts published after the French Intervention, I now discuss the wartime memoirs of Eduardo Ruiz, adjutant to guerrilla commander Vicente Riva Palacio. It is in this account we find use of the term chinaco in private correspondence. Riva Palacio, a future state governor (and grandson of independence hero and Afro-Mexican federalist president Vicente Guerrero), was called “My dear chinaco” in correspondence with his subordinate general Carlos Salazar, who also referred to himself as “El chinaco.”⁷² It is possible that, if there was an actual ethnic population of chinacos and their china counterparts, it is also likely that their narrative construction in print led to widespread identification with the label, which is why Salazar might use that term. It was applied as an associative link, which marked anyone thus labeled as a warrior for the liberal cause. In the correspondence between Riva Palacio and Salazar, the term appears as a badge of patriotism that could apply to all who identified with them regardless of class or social status.

After the French withdrawal and institution of the Restored Republic chinaco narratives further appeared in print media. For example, in 1868, Riva Palacio published the novel *Calvario y Tabor. Novela histórica y de costumbres*. He described a family of four chinacos—parents and two children—who refused to compromise with “the intervention” even as they were uprooted from their

70. *La Chinaca*, May 8, 1863, 1–2.

71. Amy E. Wright, “Newspapers, Novels, and Nation: The Beginnings of Serial Fiction in Nineteenth-Century Mexico,” in *Building Nineteenth-Century Latin America: Re-Rooted Cultures, Identities, and Nations* ed. William G. Acree and Juan Carlos González Espitia (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009), 59–78.

72. Eduardo Ruiz, *Historia de la guerra de Intervención en Michoacán* (Mexico: Oficina Tipográfica de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1896), 215.

home during battle.⁷³ Interestingly, Riva Palacio adopted the dress of local horsemen as republican military commander in Michoacán.

Eduardo Ruiz, also later described *chinaco* horsemanship and the use of lances in combat. He did this in his own account of anti-imperialist guerrilla warfare in Michoacán, which was published during the presidency of President Porfirio Díaz, and to whom the book was dedicated. He noted:

The French cavalry attack is impressive and terrible, but it needs open space to function properly, due to its tight formation where discipline works well. The lack of such conditions put the French at a disadvantage. The French are way behind our chinacos, who are experienced in individual combat in this environment. Chinacos take advantage of this situation, in which victory depends more on personal valor, and on absolute control of their horses . . . What purpose do they serve, in the thickness of a forest, those corpulent (horses) of the French dragoons, when facing the lightness of our small, but vivacious horses, whose riders *can control them with one finger?*⁷⁴

Nicolás Romero

Apart from the correspondence of Riva Palacio and Salazar, Ruiz directly refers to another individual as a chinaco. That was Nicolás Romero, one of several martyred guerrilla leaders of the Intervention, whose existence is corroborated in Mexican military archives and in press accounts. In 1861, he was named a colonel at the head of a cavalry force active against conservative guerrillas in the what is now the state of Hidalgo and in Mexico state.⁷⁵ In early 1864, Romero, then about 34 years of age, arrived in Michoacán with one hundred cavalrymen, placing himself at the disposal of Riva Palacio. During his relatively brief career as guerrilla commander, Romero led about one hundred fifty riders, always attached to units of the republican army, which included both cavalry and infantry. Details provided by Ruiz, who was apparently acquainted with him, described Romero in heroic terms that cloud the individual in racialized terms of admiration; words that echoed those of his chief Riva Palacio, who described Romero as a “semi-god, a species of myth.”⁷⁶ Ruiz recalled Romero as visibly of racial mixture:

73. Vicente Riva Palacio, *Calvario y Tabor. Novela histórica y de costumbres* (Mexico: Manuel C. de Villegas y Compañía, 1868), 176.

74. Eduardo Ruiz, *Historia de la guerra*, 60 (emphasis in original).

75. Ruiz, *Historia de la guerra*, 120; AHM, Tomo XI/481.3/8214, ff. 57–59.

76. Riva Palacio, *Calvario y Tabor*, 58.

Mestizo in which Indian blood predominated, his color was dark and smooth, hairless, with brown eyes that from time to time flashed, full of fire, but which ordinarily looked humble . . . Withdrawn in his mannerisms, his appearance was of someone wholly passive. Never had been seen a horseman like Nicolás Romero. He sat on his horse so naturally, as if he had been doing it his whole life.⁷⁷

Romero's last military dispatch to Riva Palacio was sent while traveling to the "Papasindan" (or Papatzindan) ranch, where he injured his leg in a demonstration of horsemanship during a fiesta. Encumbered by the injury, he was captured in a surprise attack on the ranch in late January 1865.⁷⁸ "In any case," commented the Mexico City conservative newspaper *El Pájaro Verde*, "Romero has to disappear from the scene, whether he is shot, or whether he is moved from the country. The presence of men like this always makes pacification illusory." He and three others were shot by firing squad on March 20 at an execution site known as the "plaza de Mixcalco" (today the site of a popular marketplace). At his French-administered court martial, he was charged with the murders of a prominent resident and his children during a guerrilla attack at the Metepec garrison in the state of Mexico. According to Ruiz, the man, along with conservative associates, fired upon passing chinacos from their home. The infuriated guerrillas charged into the house and massacred its occupants.⁷⁹ Called a chinaco by Ruiz, the label persists in current studies of this individual,⁸⁰ although imperialist newspapers of the time which covered his exploits, such as *Diario del Imperio* and *El Pájaro Verde*, attached no such term to Romero. So, it is unknown whether chinacos or "speaking chinaca" represented a distinct class or culture.⁸¹ The importance of chinacos as invention based on a perceived reality remains, thus demonstrating the continuation of the mythos begun with earlier rancharo constructions.

The impartation of physical characteristics to such figures in popular narratives was a method of shaping nationalist sentiment, in Revilla's portrait (even if for entertainment purposes) and in *La Chinaca's* call for guerrilla warfare. The association of mestizo racial qualities with nationhood, rancharos, and guerrilla warfare

77. Ruiz, *Michoacán*, 120–121, 251–252.

78. *El Pájaro Verde*, vol. 3, No. 35, 13 Feb. 1865, 3; Ruiz, *Michoacán*, 281–283.

79. *El Pájaro Verde*, vol. 3, No. 37, 15 Feb. 1865, 3; Ruiz, *Michoacán*, 276; *El Diario del Imperio*, vol. 1, no. 65, 20 March 1865, 262.

80. See Ilihutsy Monroy Casillas, "La voz y la letra en torno a Nicolás Romero: El pueblo y las élites en la creación heroísmo chinaco," *Estudios de Historia Moderna y Contemporánea de México*, no. 42 (July-December 2011): 7–26.

81. *El Diario del Imperio* did attach the term to other guerrilla groups.

continued as intellectuals began referencing race while proscribing indigenist remedies for the nation-state.

12. **Rancheros, chinacos, and mestizaje: intellectual constructions**

In this section, examples of select writings in the later nineteenth century demonstrate a pattern of attributing the uniqueness of the two types of horsemen described above to mestizo racial qualities.⁸² The late-nineteenth century language used by Francisco Pimentel, Antonio García Cubas, and Justo Sierra in describing *mestizaje* as the inevitable racial foundation for a future, modern Mexico mirrored language in earlier popular constructions, particularly regarding *rancheros*. Later, Andrés Molina Enríquez employed similar wording to describe qualities attributed to *chinacos*.⁸³ While references are somewhat fleeting, the commentaries are consistent in their support or acceptance of mestizo predominance, even at times calling for further European immigration to achieve it. Mestizo populations were frequently associated with ranching and rural life and believed to harbor crude but ennobling race-based characteristics that could make the state more cohesive in the absence of immediate integration by indigenous communities.

In 1864, linguist and literary critic Francisco Pimentel, born of noble lineage and esteemed by Maximilian's imperial government, published his early and influential indigenismo work that also established an ideological precedent for mestizo exceptionalism.⁸⁴ Early on, Pimentel started the process by which later intellectuals built upon the mestizo as the Mexican ideal that could solidify a future and more cohesive nation. Although he believed more European immigration would facilitate a mestizo "transition" and eventually,

82. Antonio García Cubas, *The Republic of Mexico in 1876*, trans. George F. Henderson (Mexico City: La Enseñanza Printing Office, 1876); Francisco Pimentel, *Memoria sobre las causas que han originado la situación actual de la raza indígena y medidas de remediarla* (Mexico City: Imprenta de Andrade y Escalante, 1864); Francisco Pimentel, *Obras completas de D. Francisco Pimentel* (Mexico City: Tipografía Económica 1903); Justo Sierra, "México social y político: apuntes para un libro," *Revista Nacional de Letras y Ciencias*, vol. 1, 1889, 15.

83. Andrés Molina Enríquez, *Los grandes problemas nacionales* (Mexico City: Imprenta de A. Carranza e Hijos, 1909), 42.

84. Cynthia K. Duncan, "Pimentel, Francisco, Conde de Heras," in *Dictionary of Mexican Literature*, ed. Eladio Cortés (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1992), 528; See Francisco Pimentel, *Memoria sobre las causas que han originado la situación actual de la raza indígena y medidas de remediarla* (Mexico City: Imprenta de Andrade y Escalante, 1864).

using today's terminology, "whiten" the population, his language reflected earlier popular constructions:

While the Indian suffers, the mestizo is truly strong, such that we see him devoted to hard work: in the countryside he tames bulls and horses; in the arts he is an ironworker, carpenter or stonemason . . . The mestizo is valiant, and the proof is that from his race comes forth uniquely good soldiers in whom Mexican chiefs have confidence. The rancheros of the country, and the uncouth (*léperos*) of our cities, they are people of firm and secure appearance and in their confident bearing emit the audacity that distinguishes them.⁸⁵

Similarly, cartographer and demographer Antonio García Cubas, who calculated a majority mestizo population in 1876, also advocated for European immigration and praised people of "mixed race" qualities, which set them apart from Indians.⁸⁶ According to García Cubas,

The natural inclination of the mixed race to the habits and customs of their white brethren, as well as their estrangement from those of the natives, is the reason that many of them figure in the most important associations of the country, by their learning and intelligence, including . . . the worthy members of the middling classes.⁸⁷

García Cubas wrote that the "mixed race"—he avoided the term *mestizo*—, and Mexicans in general, were distinguished by "their tenacious and strenuous resistance to submit themselves to force, and their docility in ceding to persuasion . . . If these qualities had been seasonably known in foreign countries, the European intervention would never have been resolved upon." Cubas added that they also demonstrated a "gay and cheerful character," singling out rancheros, who "display their dexterity in horsemanship" and perform their jarabe dance "with grace and skill."⁸⁸

Justo Sierra is credited with articulating the concept as an ideology—presenting mestizos collectively as the true "family" of Mexico which was then becoming the dominant population.⁸⁹ Sierra offered an optimistic assessment in the collective process of constructing a national identity. He looked forward to an inevitable

85. Francisco Pimentel, *Obras completas de D. Francisco Pimentel* (Mexico City: Tipografía Económica 1903), 146.

86. Antonio García Cubas, *The Republic of Mexico in 1876*, trans. George F. Henderson (Mexico City: La Enseñanza Printing Office, 1876), 16. English language original.

87. *Ibid.*, 16.

88. *Ibid.*, 21.

89. Justo Sierra, "México social y político: apuntes para un libro," *Revista Nacional de Letras y Ciencias*, vol. 1, 1889, 15.

mestizo population in the context of confronting the question of Indian incorporation into the Mexican state. Writing of the Indigenous Mexican population he stated:

We repeat that the problem [with the Indians] is physiological and pedagogical. It is a problem of nutrition and education. They should eat more meat and fewer chiles. They should learn the useful results and practices of the sciences, and then the Indians will change... They will transform themselves into us, into mestizos.⁹⁰

Here Sierra presents the mestizo as a determinant of the Mexican state as a forgone conclusion—a mixed-race population that also included Afro-Mexicans of the coasts. Sierra also estimated the mestizo population to be nearly 1.5 million out of a population of 8 million, strengthening the claim of inevitability.⁹¹ *Apuntes para un libro* (from which the above passage is taken) was published while memories of the French occupation were fresh, and during several years of stability and relative economic progress under the mestizo president Díaz.

Pre-Revolutionary chinaco reference: Molina Enríquez

Andrés Molina Enríquez—who was perhaps the most influential pre-revolutionary intellectual—furthered the mestizo’s potential as the biologically dominant racial group, in a process he believed irreversible.⁹² Published in 1909, *Los grandes problemas nacionales* inspired the land rights amendment of the 1917 constitution, leading to reform measures of the Cárdenas era in the 1930s. As previous authors had done, Molina Enríquez sprinkled the narrative with references to the negative but stout qualities of the mestizo, and also recalled chinacos still fresh in historic memory:

The mestizo has always been poor, vulgar, rude, suspicious, restless and impetuous, but also stubborn, faithful, generous, and suffering. Nothing identifies him better than the word by which *decent people* christen him: chinaco, or, in other words, *ragged*.⁹³

This account by Molina Enríquez reflects a continuing discourse within Mexico on race and rural culture and the interchangeability of the terms “mestizo” and “chinaco” in the popular imagination.

90. *Ibid.*, 15.

91. *Ibid.*, 16. Sierra cited Antonio García Cubas for these figures.

92. Andrés Molina Enríquez, *Los grandes problemas nacionales* (Mexico City: Imprenta de A. Carranza e Hijos, 1909), 42.

93. *Ibid.*, 42 (emphasis in original).

Conclusion

Starting with popular constructions of *rancheros*—disseminated in print in Revilla's case to invoke the natural world by envisioning a national type, and ranging through the vaguely racialized warrior patriot of *La Chinaca*—the *mestizo* appears years afterward in a popular “letters and science” magazine as the dominant future demographic in Sierra's writing (1889).⁹⁴ Seven years after Sierra's commentary *chinacos* were mythologized and racialized by Eduardo Ruiz, witness to events of the French Intervention in Michoacán. The narrative momentum was in high gear, so to speak, by the time of the Revolution and at the time of the publication of *La Raza Cósmica*, when the assumption of *mestizaje* as the national demographic was taken as fact in the popular imagination and in official discourse. The power of popular perception in constructions of national identity is demonstrated in that trajectory.

The prototype *ranchero* of 1844, upon which later Mexican constructions were built, grounded itself in local experience along with the *chinaco* of the 1860s. These two figures were not creatures of a frontier, or “rural outlaws or vagrants” who “never owned land, exercised political power, or held high social position,” to quote Richard W. Slatta in his definition of frontier horsemen in the Americas.⁹⁵ The Mexican archetypes drawn from life were sedentary and were incorporated as citizens, not members of communities on the margins of settlement and urbanity. Perhaps this fact made Revilla's early *ranchero* acceptable by urbane readers of the national and regional capitals. It also accounts for such figures being embraced by intelligentsia amid the patriotic sentiments and sense of exceptionalism unleashed at the end of the French Intervention. The figures imply inclusion of demographically varied communities, and served as potential markers of identity among disparate groups of Mexicans. Both figures lent themselves to nationalist constructions of race and nation as the *mestizo* ideal solidified over the last decades of the nineteenth century and during the pre-Revolutionary years.

In 1844 Revilla intended to comfort reading audiences with his *ranchero* at a time of national uncertainty, and with war with the U.S. looming. *Chinaco* creators utilized print media to instill sentiments of patriotism among presumed non-elites, in response to a French

94. This is on the masthead of *Revista Nacional de Letras y Ciencias*, vol. 1, 1889.

95. Richard W. Slatta, *Cowboys of the Americas* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 6.

military invasion. Verbal narratives create icons, and a historical opportunity for national symbolism arises when nation-states face outside threats to sovereignty. Foreign occupation may have evolved into intrusions into daily life, transforming these localized experiences into national experiences. Afterward, these icons remained and persisted, evolving with modernization.

In the nineteenth century, popular figures presented as national types in the Western mold, outside of *rancheros* and *chinacos*, were nearly non-existent in print. They arrived in the mid-nineteenth century when the state lacked popular nationalist symbolism. *Rancheros* and *chinacos* filled a void in the absence of a commonly imagined citizenry not of purely indigenous background.

Since the first *ranchero* incarnations, starting with Claudio Linati's book of lithographs, but racialized in Revilla's narrative, successive generations of intellectuals, including Prieto and other *La Chinaca* editors, perceived rural horseman as a national type, an effect which endured. The figures represent the first attempts at forging gendered national identities in Mexico, amid tumultuous political and economic times, tangible external threats, and an emergent print culture. Mexican governments and intellectual promoters of patriotism, from the age of Díaz through the post-revolutionary years, sought national identity within concepts emanating from the Euro-American world. This encompassed political and economic liberalism, industrialization, and the quest for essential citizen archetypes. Even as late nineteenth-century writers argued for the modernization of Mexico and sought resolution to the Indian question through education and Hispanicization, the appealing symbol was the racialized horseman: a *ranchero*, a warrior, and a singer of songs, accompanied by his *china* counterpart. It is fortunate that *rancheros* were based on real communities, as *chinacos* also likely were (although the latter term is politicized with broader meanings). Racial characteristics and cultural practices like the *jarabe* are examples of regional or local traits that over time were perceived as national characteristics, through a process facilitated by print culture.

Rancheros and *chinacos* together represent a uniquely modern drive for identity in a new transatlantic system of industrializing nations and liberal republican governance. Ironically, the figures represent rural cultures which are aesthetically suitable for popular consumption. They are the "balm of solace" (as Revilla stated) for a weakened but emergent state that faced national humiliation at the end of the Mexican-American War. By the time of Andrés Molina Enríquez and *Los grandes problemas*, *mestizaje* and the discourse

on nation became intertwined, carried into the industrial age with José Vasconcelos and *La raza cósmica*. As such the construction of nineteenth-century Mexican nationalism differs from that described by Benedict Anderson in his argument concerning print and the development of creole national identity in colonial Latin America, as a product of “printmen” who articulated that sense of nationalism.⁹⁶ Regarding print, Anderson’s imagined community is similar to what occurred in nineteenth-century Mexico. In the Mexican case, however, rural archetypes, based on actual individuals, became the foundation upon which a mestizo national ideology arose. They originated as material designed for broader popular audiences. The key difference is that the imagined communities that Anderson describes arose strictly from print culture, while rural culture in Mexico was something adapted from real life. The symbolic horsemen (and their china counterparts) were shaped and enhanced through print to encourage a sense of national identity. Stories surrounding rancheros likely circulated in Mexico City before they appeared in print, and such stories would certainly have been familiar in urban centers of the Bajío. Writers and their print outlets gave the information larger public forums and a collective vision, perpetuating the mestizo mystique built upon by succeeding generations of writers who further articulated the binds between race and nation. It was a gradual process and involved an evolving concept of race, and not only a shared cultural heritage. An idea generated by popular conceptions became a focus of intellectual discourse on Mexican national demographics. This process transformed the perceptively appealing horseman into a collective perception of self.

96. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections of the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2016 [1983]), Chapter 4.