

1-1-2001

# Martyrs of Miscegenation: Racial and National Identities in Nineteenth-Century Mexico

Lee Joan Skinner  
*Claremont McKenna College*

---

## Recommended Citation

Skinner, Lee. "Martyrs of Miscegenation: Racial and National Identities in Nineteenth-Century Spanish America." *Hispanófila* 132 (2001): 25-42.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the CMC Faculty Scholarship at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in CMC Faculty Publications and Research by an authorized administrator of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact [scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu](mailto:scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu).

# MARTYRS OF MISCEGENATION: RACIAL AND NATIONAL IDENTITIES IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY MEXICO

*Lee Skinner*

University of Kansas

THE two most powerful critical paradigms for dealing with the relationship between literature and national identity in nineteenth-century Latin America have been those established by Benedict Anderson and Doris Sommer. In Anderson's well-known formulation, "the nation [ . . . ] is an imagined political community" (6). Anderson attributes the early appearance of such national imagined communities throughout nineteenth-century Latin America to the widespread popularity of the print-capitalism forms of the novel and newspaper, which created communities of readers in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and allowed for the dissemination of large-scale national imaginings. More recently, Doris Sommer has looked at the content of the novels that these potential national communities were reading in order to argue that national consolidation in nineteenth-century Latin America depended not only on the shared activity of reading but on the messages of the works that nineteenth-century readers were consuming. According to Sommer, nineteenth-century "national novels" use metaphors of romance and marriage to inscribe ideals of national reconciliation and to establish the ideology of nationalism and national identity in Latin America. In her view, the "foundational fictions" she analyzes disseminate specific messages about the constitution of national identities and play an integral role in consolidating national identities and ideologies in nineteenth-century Latin America.

Both Anderson and Sommer present "national identity" as a relatively fixed category. Their analyses focus not on nineteenth-century Latin American national identity itself, but rather on the methods through which national identity is created and consolidated. Hence, Anderson describes the ways in which

administrative and communicative structures such as the mechanisms of print-capitalism work to create and disseminate national identity, while Sommer examines the ways in which nineteenth-century Latin American romances inscribe allegories of conflict and resolution whose message is that national reconciliation can and should take place based on a unified national identity. Anderson's and Sommer's analyses take as their point of departure the idea that in the nineteenth century a stable, pre-established national identity is inscribed in public discourses such as newspapers and novels. But what happens when the notion of "national identity" itself is called into question? In novels produced throughout the nineteenth century in Latin America, discourses of national identity are frequently shown to be contestatory and conflictive. Rather than being a fixed category from the start, national identity in nineteenth-century Latin America might more productively be thought of as national *identities*. National identity is not a fixed, unchanging category that comes into being full-blown and unquestioned at the beginning of the nineteenth century; instead, national identity, like the nation itself, is a site of contestatory discourses and competing definitions throughout nineteenth-century Latin America. In this essay I address the novels of the Mexican author Eligio Ancona and argue that within his works, as within nineteenth-century Mexico, his repeated attempts to come to terms with the Mexican past and the variations in the way he treats Mexican history based on his own changing position demonstrate that the category itself of national identity in nineteenth-century Latin America is continually under construction. The versions of Mexican national identity that Ancona produces in his texts respond to varying political, social, and ideological pressures and are contingent upon Ancona's own shifting self-identifications at the regional and national level.

In 1826, an anonymous author published *Jicoténcal*, now considered the first Latin American historical novel.<sup>1</sup> *Jicoténcal* takes as its subject one of the founding moments of Latin American history, the conquest of the Aztec empire by Cortés. In this novel, the first fictionalized version of the origins of Latin American history in general and of Mexican history in particular, the conquistadors as led by Cortés are brutal, unscrupulous villains, the Aztecs are a failing race ruled by a corrupt, decadent Moctezuma, and only the Tlaxcaltecs, a tribe of Indians who maintain their independence despite their loose alliance with the Aztecs, are presented as virtuous, brave, and honorable. More importantly, the author describes the Tlaxcaltecan system of government – a republic ruled by a senate – in open contrast to the tyrannical monarchies of Spain and the Aztecs. He puts into the mouths of his Tlaxcaltecan characters statements such as the following, uttered by the eponymous hero:

El gobierno de uno solo no me parece soportable, sino en los pueblos cuya ignorancia los hace incapaces de mirar por sí mismos, o cuyos vicios y envilecimientos los hacen insensibles a la opresión. Este

gobierno tiene para mí el gran inconveniente de la natural propensión del hombre a abusar del poder; y cuando el poder de uno solo domine, no hay más leyes que su voluntad. (I, 160-161)

When *Jicoténcal* was published in 1826, Mexico had been liberated from Spain for five years. Its constitution and democratic government had been in effect for only two years, after the brief experiment with the Iturbide monarchy.<sup>2</sup> At this early date, when the idea of the Mexican nation has barely come into existence, the author of *Jicoténcal* seeks to make use of indigenous history as a foundational source for Mexican Creole identity. Indians, and specifically the republican, despot-fighting Tlaxcaltecs, are used to mark the difference between Mexico, now seen as an emerging Creole nation, and Spain. The author is sympathetic to the democratic Tlaxcaltecs and condemns the Spaniards for their barbarous atrocities, which he attributes to their monarchical form of government. Finally, he uses his Indian characters to express liberal political ideals and has them issue pronouncements about the role of justice in society. He frequently editorializes, saying for example, "Cuando las divisiones intestinas rompen la unión de un pueblo, este es sin recurso la víctima de sus enemigos [ . . . ]. ¡Pueblos! si amáis vuestra libertad, reunid vuestros intereses y vuestras fuerzas" (II, 5), and later adding, "El verdadero patriotismo no se abate en la adversidad" (II, 6). The novelist wants to enforce a reading of the past which sees in Mexico's indigenous history the foundation for a national and social identity for Mexican Creoles that can be differentiated from the Spanish past, now seen as corrupt and decadent.

The appropriation of indigenous history and culture for the purpose of establishing a sense of Mexican Creole identity in the new nation is a gesture repeated in many texts throughout the nineteenth century. Although this rhetorical maneuver can be fraught with potential pitfalls, in *Jicoténcal* it seems to be unproblematic; the author makes use of indigenous culture and history without questioning either the appropriateness or the desirability of such an action. His ability to do so shows that the deployment of indigenous culture as a foundation for an autochthonous Mexican Creole identity posed no conceptual difficulties for him. Later authors, however, came to perceive the ideological difficulties inherent in such attempts to assimilate an alien, enemy culture to Mexican Creole identity, and their texts display the marks of their attempts to come to terms with the interrelation of indigenous and Creole identities and cultures. These later novels continue to employ a similar gesture of appropriation of the indigenous as *Jicoténcal*. At the same time, they also struggle with the question of negotiating the use of native culture as a marker for Mexican Creole difference from Spain and the Spanish colonial past. Their works show more explicitly than *Jicoténcal* the possible pitfalls in the almost instinctive desire to reach towards indigenous culture as a solution to the problem of defining a Mexican identity vis-à-vis Spain in particular, and Europe in general.

One author who addresses such problems in his own novels about the conquest is the Mexican author, politician, and journalist Eligio Ancona. Ancona wrote about the conquest in not one but two novels: one, *La cruz y la espada*, devoted to the conquest of Yucatán; the other, *Los mártires de Anáhuac*, about the conquest of Mexico. Like other historical novelists writing on the conquest, Ancona perceived the topic of the conquest as offering him the opportunity to inscribe the violent clash between Spaniards and Indians as the foundational moment of Latin American identity. The violent destruction of indigenous cultures and peoples that accompanied the Spanish arrival in the New World presented nineteenth-century Latin American historical novelists with a particular set of problems. On the one hand, such violence was necessary for the collision and subsequent melding of the Spanish and Indian cultures, without which modern Latin American society would not exist. On the other hand, the Spanish had eradicated the same indigenous cultures to which nineteenth-century Latin Americans now had recourse as signs of their difference from the Spanish rule against which they themselves had recently rebelled. Ancona's two novels, despite being published only four years apart, treat their similar subject matter in radically different ways. Such differences show his awareness of the problems posed in attempting to represent the conquest in fictional form.

Ancona displays disparate attitudes towards the conquest and towards indigenous culture in these works, at times echoing the strategy of the author of *Jicoténcal* by appropriating indigenous culture as a marker of difference between Mexicans and Spaniards and at other times drawing back from such a use of Indian history. His 1866 novel *La cruz y la espada*, a novelistic exploration of literary ground that he later covered in his non-fiction work *Historia de Yucatán* (1889), traces the first steps of the conquistadors in that peninsula. Violence in this version of the conquest is caused for the most part by Indians, who capture and sacrifice Spaniards. With a few exceptions clearly delineated as anomalous within the context of the Spanish plan of conquest, Spanish violence is a defensive response to Indian attacks. The Spaniards in *La cruz y la espada* attempt to conquer the Mayans peacefully whenever possible, making treaties and persuading them to pledge their allegiance to the Spanish Crown. On the other hand, *Los mártires de Anáhuac* (1870) treats its Indian characters sympathetically and critiques the Spanish conquistadors – as personified by Cortés – for their deceitfulness, hypocrisy and brutality. The novel is critical of the conquest, lamenting the wholesale slaughter of the Indians and condemning the Spanish strategies of pitting different Indian tribes against one another and disseminating misinformation between the tribes in order to facilitate their fall. Examining Ancona's shifting attitudes in his two novels serves to illuminate the presuppositions about race and identity that undergird them. Moreover, Ancona's return twice in the space of four years to one of the foundational moments of Latin American and specifically Mexican history and the

ways in which he frames and recasts that history indicate that that moment was perceived as problematic in his own time.

The first novel, *La cruz y la espada*, begins in Champoton, Yucatán, in 1539. The young Spanish hero, Alonso Gómez de Benavides, explains to his older companion, Bernal Pérez, that he has come to the New World to escape the unhappy memories of his lost love, Beatriz. After this lengthy scene of recollection, Benavides and Pérez venture into the jungle and are captured by a Mayan tribe. Pérez is sacrificed in an episode that Ancona describes as one of gory paganism, while Benavides falls into the hands of a Mayan chief and his daughter, both of whom are friendly to the Spaniards. Zuhuy Kak, the chief's daughter, explains to Benavides that she speaks Spanish perfectly because her mother's first husband was a Spaniard; indeed, he was the historical figure Gonzalo Guerrero, the first Spaniard to go native in the New World. Ancona alternates scenes of Benavides, as he and Zuhuy Kak fall in love and react to threats to their love posed by an Indian rival, with scenes set in the Spanish and Indian camps as the two sides prepare for war. The lovers flee and are captured repeatedly until the end of the novel when, just as Benavides is finally about to be sacrificed, he is rescued by a brave band of Spaniards led by "don Alvaro." But Benavides recognizes "Alvaro" as his long-lost Spanish love Beatriz. The novel concludes with Zuhuy Kak's death, which follows her realization that Benavides truly loves Beatriz.

This version of the conquest attempts to present the Spanish invasion of the New World as a beneficent arrival, albeit one in which a few renegade Spaniards use their superior weaponry to exploit the indigenous people. Nonetheless, such acts of brutality are depicted as exceptions in an otherwise heroic conquest. Furthermore, in this narrative the Spanish arrival is portrayed as necessary because it brings Christianity to the pagans of the New World, turning them away from their bloody human sacrifices and primitive worship and towards the true religion. In his introduction, Ancona asserts that the soldiers and priests who conquered the New World were sent by God on a divine mission of expansion and conversion. He refers to the conquest several times as an epic story, writing that "la conquista de México por Cortés es una epopeya que sólo se diferencia de la de Homero, en que ésta es el parto de la imaginación de un poeta, y aquélla un hecho real e indudable, comprobada por numerosas historias e incontrovertibles monumentos" (I, vi).<sup>3</sup> *La cruz y la espada* is meant to be a glorification of the conquest of Yucatán and of the Spaniards engaged in it, who are presumed to be linked to the present generation as grandfathers to grandsons. It is a nostalgic attempt to evoke the heroic spirit of a past age and to recreate the Spanish imperial past as epic in nature.

Ancona also uses the novel in order to criticize one of the most obvious consequences of the conquest, miscegenation. *La cruz y la espada* rejects interracial breeding, and several narrative threads within the novel demonstrate the difficulties attendant to sexual relations between Indians and

Spaniards. In the most apparently "successful" episode of interracial relations, Gonzalo Guerrero chooses his Indian wife and half-breed children over Jerónimo de Aguilar's invitation to return to the Spanish way of life. While Bernal Díaz, the only contemporary source to mention the story of Gonzalo Guerrero, does not relate what happened to Guerrero after he decided to remain with his native wife and children, in Ancona's version of the story Guerrero is taken ill and dies shortly after Aguilar's visit: "bajaba al sepulcro, invocando el nombre de su Dios y de su patria" (I, 194).

While Guerrero marries an Indian, adopts native customs, and turns his back on Spain only to be killed off for narrative purposes, Zuhuy Kak never manages to reach the Spanish encampment where she and Benavides are to be married. Before their love can be consummated, Beatriz appears and reclaims Benavides. This reclamation project is none too difficult; the instant Benavides sees "Alvaro," "se precipitó en los brazos del gallardo oficial" (II, 227) and he forgets Zuhuy Kak. That is, Benavides promptly forsakes his indigenous love in order to return to his "true" (Spanish) bride. He does so with an alacrity that suggests that even with the best of intentions, Spanish men could only see Indian women as temporary mates, not as the life-long spouses Spanish women would be.

By making miscegenation difficult or problematic, Ancona attempts to avoid its accompanying entanglements. In *La cruz y la espada*, interracial love is decidedly unfruitful; Gonzalo Guerrero's mixed-race children conveniently disappear from the scene after his death. Similarly, when Zuhuy Kak realizes that she is going to be cast aside, she removes herself from the scene by causing her own death. The potentially problematic effects of Benavides' relationship with her are further neutralized by Zuhuy Kak's conversion to Christianity. Upon her deathbed, she begs forgiveness of Benavides and Beatriz, gives them her blessing and, turning to Fray Antonio, asks,

—No es así, padre mío, como deseabas ver morir a Zuhuy Kak?  
 —Sí, sí, —respondió el franciscano; —pero recuerda, hija mía, que tu nombre es María.  
 —¡María! . . . ¡es verdad! . . . ¡Y bien! no olvidéis nunca a la pobre María.

(II, 255)

Hence, not only does Zuhuy Kak give up her native religion, she also sacrifices her name. Her death, and with it the definitive closure of any rapprochement between the races, becomes an edifying spectacle set firmly within a Christian context, as Zuhuy Kak becomes a New World avatar of the Virgin. There are never any lasting repercussions or offspring to the interracial relations between Spanish men and Indian women, on the sexual or political level. As we shall see, this is the opposite of what happens in *Los mártires de*

*Anáhuac*, a novel in which the story of Malinche reverberates throughout its pages and through the lives of its characters.

But if the limits of interracial sexual relations are not crossed in the first novel, Ancona does attempt to examine in the text the question of racial identity by exploring other, non-sexual ways in which characters experiment with racial boundaries and identities. Nonetheless, the instances in *La cruz y la espada* of changes in racial or ethnic identities never attain the status of permanent transformations. For example, in Ancona's version of the Gonzalo Guerrero story, the protagonist's decision to cross over to Indian life ends with his fictional death. The story as told by Bernal Díaz differs from Ancona's retelling in that the former ends with Guerrero, left in the forest by Aguilar, apparently slipping easily into his new Indian life and name. Bernal Díaz does not recount any further details about Guerrero, leaving him and his story in the jungle in order to follow Aguilar's return to the Spanish troops. Ancona's own *Historia de Yucatán* follows the Bernal Díaz version faithfully in its retelling of the Aguilar and Guerrero narratives, showing that Ancona was familiar with the historical "truth" of the episode. But in the fictionalized version offered by *La cruz y la espada*, Ancona "finishes" the story by killing off Guerrero with a wasting illness, a deathly nostalgia that Ancona explains by saying, "el recuerdo de la patria [ . . . ] es muy triste y doloroso en una tierra extranjera, por grandes que sean los goces que nos proporcione" (I, 193). Despite the delights that Yucatán and indigenous cultures may offer Guerrero, such pleasures cannot take precedence over his patriotic love for Spain. As Ancona tells the story, Guerrero dies of homesickness. His transition to Indian life is ultimately incomplete because the struggle between his Spanish and Indian identities causes him to waste away and die.

Another moment of transition between ethnic identities involves Benavides. In an effort to escape from one of his many imprisonments, he disguises himself as a Mayan by shaving, adopting native garb and, finally, by coloring his skin with mud. He uses this disguise to slip out of his prison unnoticed by passing as a Mayan. Nevertheless, although Benavides' disguise is successful and he manages to be accepted as an Indian, his recapture is almost immediate. That is, the disguise itself is successful, but in the context of the larger scheme of escape, Benavides fails. We may well ask, then, why does Ancona include this moment of racial slippage? What purpose does it serve to show that Benavides has the power to cross over from "Spaniard" to "Indian"? Perhaps because this is the moment in which Benavides is most in danger of repeating the story of Gonzalo Guerrero: disguised as an Indian, in flight with his native lover, he may well slip into native life, never to be heard from again. In order to prevent this from happening, Ancona not only emplots Benavides' recapture, but also places on the scene his Spanish bride, Beatriz, thereby doubly reclaiming him for a Spanish identity. Beatriz rescues Benavides both from being sacrificed and from falling into Indianness. It is also important to note



that Beatriz' disguise as "don Alvaro," a Spanish officer, makes her part of the conquering enterprise in which the Spaniards are engaged. She thus saves Benavides not only *from* the perils of miscegenation but *for* the project of conquest.

The third moment of identity slippage occurs when Zuhuy Kak is on her deathbed. As we have seen, at this moment Zuhuy Kak reaffirms her Christianity, forgives Benavides and Beatriz, and finally refers to herself as "María," her baptismal name. We might indeed think of the whole novel as an attempt to bring Zuhuy Kak over to the Spanish side: her love for Benavides, their various escapes and flights, are all meant to lead her to the Spanish encampment, to make her – as it were – camp out in "Spanish." At the very end of the novel, then, Zuhuy Kak's journey is complete: she has been brought to the world of Spaniards both physically and intellectually, via her displacement, conversion and re-naming. With her last breath she renounces her indigenous name and nature, claims a Spanish name and identity, and then, inevitably, dies. For as we have seen, crossing from one racial or ethnic identity to another cannot be a permanent change in this text. Ancona makes the shifts in ethnic identity undertaken by his characters inconsequential by showing that such alterations can only be momentary.

I would argue that the absence of permanent changes in ethnic or racial identity in *La cruz y la espada* is connected to a desire to elide miscegenation as an option in the novel. Benavides cannot become an Indian to love Zuhuy Kak; she can only become a Christian when he has returned to Beatriz and when Zuhuy Kak/María is herself on her death bed. On the surface, it would seem that ethnic identities in *La cruz y la espada* are shifting and undetermined, given the comings and goings between "Indian" and "Spanish" that mark the novel: Fray Antonio and Benavides live among the Mayans; Tutul Xiú makes an extended visit to the Spanish army; Zuhuy Kak flees through Mayan territory in an effort to reach the Spaniards. Love seems to erase racial barriers: Gonzalo Guerrero renounces his Spanish identity for his Indian wife, and Benavides cites Guerrero's case to convince Zuhuy Kak of his fidelity. But such instances of shifting ethnic identities and attempts to cross the boundaries between Indianness and Spanishness are short-lived at best. The novel concludes by carefully closing the various instances of blurred ethnic identities: Guerrero is long dead, Zuhuy Kak expires the instant she refers to herself as "María," and Benavides' brief flirtation with the indigenous charms of Mayan life and appearance is washed away – physically, as he washed off the mud with which he colored his skin, and emotionally, as he returns to the arms of his Spanish bride. The possibility of miscegenation and with it the potential to cross ethnic identities and allegiances are shut off by this series of definitive closures imposed on the stories of interracial relations in *La cruz y la espada*. On the one hand, Ancona seems to want to explore the possibilities that interracial relations offer for shifting ethnic identities; on the other hand,

such alterations in identities are only temporary within the scheme of his novel. This is significant because Ancona's novelistic attempts to maintain racial separateness clearly contradicted what had happened during the conquest and what continued to be a common occurrence to his day, that is, interracial sexual liaisons resulting in mixed-race offspring. While the characters in *La cruz y la espada* do not cross racial lines, miscegenation and its products were commonplace in Mexican society from the conquest onwards. Ancona (re)writes history by composing a text in which Indians and Spaniards do not cross racial lines for sexual purposes and in which the conquest does not bring together Indians and Spaniards to give birth to a new race and a predominantly mestizo nation.

In contrast to the relatively approving vision of the Spanish imperial project presented in *La cruz y la espada*, *Los mártires de Anáhuac*, published only four years later in 1870, changes the scene from Yucatán to Tenochtitlán and depicts Cortés and his soldiers as marauding, greedy adventurers who deceive and brutalize the Indians they encounter. In this later conquest novel, Ancona returns to some of the themes that occupied him in *La cruz y la espada* as well, but he treats them from an entirely different perspective. While *La cruz y la espada* for the most part offered negative portrayals of Indians who fought against the Spaniards, showed Spanish atrocities as anomalous events, and emphasized Spanish efforts to convert the Indians, *Los mártires de Anáhuac* praises the bravery of the Indians struggling for their independence against the Spanish invaders, depicts Spanish brutality as a programmatic part of the conquest, and claims that the conquistadors were more interested in stealing the natives' treasure than in saving their souls. In fact, the martyrs of the title are now the Indian victims of Spanish massacres, not the Spanish priests sacrificed by pagan Indians in *La cruz y la espada*. And yet, despite Ancona's radically different treatment of the conquistadors in this work, he remains preoccupied with the problem of interracial relations that concerned him in *La cruz y la espada*. He is still attempting to work through the topic of miscegenation and its consequences, albeit from a radically altered perspective.

In *Los mártires de Anáhuac*, Ancona tells the familiar story of Cortés' conquest of the Aztec empire and interweaves it with the story of the fictional characters Geliztli, Moctezuma's daughter, and her Indian lover, the priest-turned-soldier Tizoc. Ancona alternates between scenes set among the Spanish soldiers advancing from the coast and the reactions of the various Indian tribes to the invaders. When Cortés arrives in Tenochtitlán, Moctezuma accedes to his demands, allows himself to be taken captive, and offers him Geliztli as his wife. Despite Geliztli's resistance, she is drugged, raped, and impregnated by Cortés. She flees the palace, changes her name, and marries Tizoc in an effort to escape ostracism by her own people. Her baby is taken by a priest and sacrificed in atonement for what other Aztecs perceive as the "sin" she committed

of sleeping with the enemy and thus becoming a traitor to Anáhuac. The novel concludes as she and Tizoc are killed by the Spaniards while fleeing the crumbling city.

If interracial relations threatened to disturb the equilibrium of *La cruz y la espada* but were never allowed to erupt into the text, in *Los mártires de Anáhuac* Spanish male desire for Aztec women and its consummation impel the plot forward. In fact, the later novel shows the dire consequences of crossing the boundaries of race. There is no character in the novel equivalent to Zuhuy Kak in *La cruz y la espada*; it is impossible for Indian women and Spanish men to love each other chastely in this later text. Here, Indian women such as Geliztli and Malinche, who become the object of the conquistadors' desire, are "stained" and "defiled;" they lose not only their virginity but also their status as natives.

The problems surrounding miscegenation are clearly apparent in the story of Malinche as told by Ancona. In *Los mártires de Anáhuac*, Jerónimo de Aguilar's failure as a translator leads to the discovery of the multi-lingual Malinche. Although she is a newly-arrived slave, she has already been baptized at the behest of the Spaniard to whom Cortés had allotted her as loot and who, according to Aguilar, "declaró que era demasiado buen cristiano para llegarse a una pagana" (I, 26). This is one of several references in *Los mártires de Anáhuac* to the hypocrisy of men who willingly commit the sin of fornication – but only with "Christianized" Indian women. The re-named "Marina" tells her story to Cortés via Aguilar, with special emphasis upon the native priest's prophecy at her birth: "Cuando esa niña llegue a la adolescencia, amará al mayor enemigo de nuestra raza. Este amor la arrastrará a renegar de los dioses, a vender a sus hermanos y a entregar su patria al extranjero" (I, 33). Interracial love is in this way linked from almost the very beginning of the novel to racial betrayal, and Malinche is described as a "traitor" to her race and her empire both by other characters within the novel and by the narrator at various moments in the text. She not only aids in the conquest by translating for Cortés and the Aztecs, but at times uses her privileged knowledge of Aztec society to shape Cortés' words to make them more persuasive to his Aztec audience.

In the scene that synthesizes the various strands of her transformation from Aztec maiden to traitorous helper of the Spaniards, Marina/Malinche enters Cortés' tent late at night and reveals to him that she has learned Spanish perfectly. As the narrator explains, "se había obrado un milagro en Marina, no por el Dios de los cristianos" (I, 216) but because the power of her love for Cortés has come to dominate her being, explicitly connecting her proficiency in Spanish to her love for Cortés. As in the case of Zuhuy Kak, Ancona stresses the women's ability to cross linguistic barriers, and links the acquisition of the Spanish language to the acquisition of a Spanish lover – Benavides in *La cruz y la espada*, Cortés in *Los mártires de Anáhuac*. Although the speech of

all the characters – whether Indian or Spanish – in both novels is rendered in Spanish, the narrator in both cases draws attention only to the linguistic prowess of Zuhuy Kak and Malinche and underlines the fact that they are fluent Spanish speakers. This ability is related to their roles as women who are drawn away from indigenous culture and towards Spanish society; significantly, Geliztli, who resists Cortés in particular and Spanish domination in general, never learns Spanish and an interpreter must always be present when Cortés wishes to speak with her. Language thus becomes an important sign of the women's willingness to transfer their loyalties and transform their ethnic identities. Malinche then tells Cortés about the Tlaxcaltecan plan to attack the Spanish camp, thereby betraying the last hope of Indian resistance to the conquest. Finally, Cortés reminds her of the prophecy that she will love the enemy of her race and they become lovers. Here her new language and her new allegiance are linked to her new lover and to her betrayal of her "hermanos," her fellow Indians. Because of her willing personal relationship with a Spaniard, Malinche becomes the instrument of the destruction of the Aztec empire. She becomes a bridge between the two cultures, acquiring a new language and a new lover, but instead of enabling a synthesis of Spanish and Aztec worlds, she becomes the conduit for the destruction of her native world.

Ancona employs the figure of Malinche and her willingness to accede to Cortés' demands to explain the plot of the conquest of Mexico and to propel the "historical" section of his narrative. Malinche's counterpart, Geliztli, propels the "fictional" part of the novel by her resistance to Spanish male desire – both Cortés' sexual desire to "conquer" her and the conquistadors' desire to vanquish the Aztec empire. Unlike the Indian heroine of *La cruz y la espada*, who is virtuous precisely because she is persuaded to convert to Catholicism, because she rejects her native suitor, and because she helps save the lives of two Spaniards, Geliztli's virtue stems from her devotion to Tizoc, a valiant soldier in the defense of the Aztec empire. Her conversion to Catholicism, like Malinche's, is a travesty, and like Malinche, Geliztli is forcibly baptized only to soothe the conscience of the Spaniard who intends to rape her. Instead of running towards the scene of Spanish power and away from an Indian lover, as Zuhuy Kak did, Geliztli flees Spanish domination as embodied in Cortés' will to conquer her body along with her father's empire.

If in *La cruz y la espada* interracial relations cannot be allowed consummation or issue, in *Los mártires de Anáhuac* Indian women repeatedly fall prey to Spanish lust. Ancona's ambivalence towards Indian women who enter into interracial relations with Spaniards prevents him from establishing a simple opposition between Malinche, the willing lover of Cortés, and Geliztli, his victim. Ancona wants to condemn the actions of Malinche, who was never punished by the Aztecs or the Spaniards for betraying her race and heritage, but he cannot devise a plot in which Malinche is chastised for her misdeeds without wildly distorting historical events well-known to his readers. For this

reason he created the fictional character of Geliztli, whose story is an imperfect reflection of Malinche's own.<sup>4</sup> Ancona attempts to portray Geliztli as an innocent victim of Spanish desires: unlike Malinche, Geliztli does not willingly give herself to Cortés; she is drugged into unconsciousness and raped. Nonetheless, despite his effort to maintain his heroine's metaphorical purity, the novelist cannot allow Geliztli to escape the consequences of interracial sex because he is enacting through her figure a narrativized punishment of Malinche's sexual and racial betrayals.

Having become the lover of a Spaniard, however unwillingly, the fictional Geliztli must suffer the reprisals which the historical Malinche escaped. She gives birth to a half-breed son who inspires in her both maternal love and racial hatred, a mixture of emotions that threatens her sanity. This "first" mestizo child, born as the result of violent physical conquest, provokes physical rejection from his mother. Disgusted by her own unwilling complicity in nurturing the child of the conquerors, Geliztli is only restored to mental health when the child is taken away from her. But her son is offered up as a human sacrifice because "una joven azteca había cometido la infamia de amar a un extranjero, a un enemigo de la patria" (II, 284), as the priests tell the vengeful crowd. At this moment, the crowd recognizes the child and calls him "hijo de Malinche" (II, 287). Ancona had previously referred to the historical fact that the Aztecs called Cortés by the name of his translator, Malinche. Here, however, the use of the name "Malinche" implies not only the way in which Cortés' identity is collapsed into Malinche's, but also the way in which Geliztli's story is collapsed into Malinche's. By calling Geliztli's son "hijo de Malinche," the narrative points towards the way in which Geliztli's history has become Marina's due to the fact that both women have been the object of Cortés' physical desire. The coded message delivered by Ancona is that all Indian women who commit miscegenation are commensurate. Their individual stories blur together; a rape can then become equivalent to a willing seduction and a betrayal of race and country. The circumstances surrounding the act of interracial sex are erased and what is left is the political betrayal that the act of intimacy symbolizes. Ancona's message is that the races should not mix; but it is a message that had not been heeded since the beginning of the conquest, the results of which were all too easy to see around him.

The important fact is that however muted or relegated to the background, the question of interracial relations motivates both *La cruz y la espada* and *Los mártires de Anáhuac*, works that are diametrically opposed in all other regards. Crossing or attempting to cross the limits of ethnic identity for sexual purposes results in death for characters such as Gonzalo Guerrero, Zuhuy Kak, and Geliztli; Benavides escapes this fate because his former Spanish lover Beatriz makes a fortuitous appearance in the narrative and reclaims him for the Spanish sexual economy. Malinche herself, the emblematic figure of mestizaje and by extension of the modern Mexican nation, is refigured as a

sexual and racial traitor. More importantly, Ancona rejects the alternative of *mestizaje* by eliminating the mestizo offspring in both novels. Malinche, the historical mother of several mestizo children, has no procreative role in Ancona's version. Ancona decisively closes off the generative possibilities of miscegenation in both novels, recurring instead to the notion of racial separateness as a founding moment of identity. In *La cruz y la espada* the eradication of the Maya allows for the creation of a Yucatecan state based on Spanish dominance, while, as we shall see, in *Los mártires de Anáhuac* Ancona figures the Aztec empire as the true precursor to modern Mexico. He rewrites Mexican history as a narrative in which miscegenation and its results, the mestizos, are erased.

Between the publication of the two novels, then, Ancona underwent a dramatic transformation in the way he conceived of the conquest. In order to understand this change, it is essential to situate Ancona within his own historical context. Throughout his life, Ancona, who identified himself as a liberal, was deeply involved in Mexican politics at the provincial and national level. As J. Lloyd Read tells us, Ancona was at various points "governor *pro tem* of his native state [Yucatán], judge in a circuit court, judge of the Supreme Court of Mexico, and [ . . . ] deputy to the national congress" (140). When the liberals led by Benito Juárez began their rise to power in 1854, Mexican conservatives immediately fought back. At the beginning of the 1860s, the conservatives invited European forces to intervene in the struggle: French troops captured Mexico City in 1863 and installed Maximilian on the Mexican throne. More importantly for Ancona, however, the backdrop to the publication in 1866 of *La cruz y la espada* featured, in addition to this political struggle between native-born Mexican liberals and foreign invaders, the Guerra de las Castas, a violent native rebellion that Ancona, born in Yucatán in 1836, remembered clearly. In 1847 various Mayan tribes united and began a series of guerrilla attacks on the white settlements in Yucatán in which they burned haciendas, raped white women, and slaughtered white men, women and children.<sup>5</sup> They laid siege to the major cities of Yucatán and routed the Creole defenders repeatedly. The Guerra de las Castas eventually ended in the mid-1850s not because of a decisive Creole victory, but because the Mayan soldiers returned *en masse* to their homes in order to plant the harvest. Enclaves of Mayan rebels remained hidden in the jungle for decades after the official "end" of the Guerra de las Castas. Although the war apparently began when opposing factions of white Yucatecan politicians resorted to violence, the Mayan soldiers who had been recruited into the political struggles of their white masters quickly established that the grounds for combat had to do with race, not internecine political squabbles. The Maya attacked white settlers indiscriminately and, in turn, the white soldiers took reprisals against all Indians and mestizos, regardless of their loyalties. White Yucatecans sold Mayan prisoners as slaves to Cuba in 1849. Despite widespread protest from the rest

of Mexico, the trade in Mayan slaves continued intermittently until Benito Juárez ordered it halted in March of 1861.<sup>6</sup> The fact that Yucatecan Creoles resorted to selling the Mayas into slavery reflects their intense fear of the rebels and the reality of the threat that they posed to Creole society.

This backdrop of racial animosity explains Ancona's decision to glorify the Spanish invaders of *La cruz y la espada* despite the fact that he is writing at a moment in which it seemed that Mexico was being invaded by foreigners yet again – this time, the French. One might well expect that Ancona's version of the conquest would feature rapacious Spanish invaders representing the French being fended off by heroic indigenous defenders, stand-ins for the Mexican Creole liberals. But Ancona, writing from the standpoint of a Yucatecan – not a Mexican – intellectual, could not draw this obvious parallel between Spanish/French invaders and indigenous/Creole defenders in his novel because to do so would have meant to glorify indirectly the Indians of Yucatán, whose recent rebellion had so clearly threatened Ancona's class and race. Instead, Ancona exalts the white Spanish conquistadors whose success in Yucatán had to be replicated by Creoles in order for the threat of indigenous violence to be erased as swiftly as it had been four hundred years before by the Spaniards. That the topic of indigenous violence in Yucatán continued to preoccupy Ancona can be ascertained in the pages of his *Historia de Yucatán*, published more than twenty years later in 1889. In the introduction to that text, Ancona writes,

Hay una [disensión] que pone a la Península en el riesgo de ser borrada del mapa de la civilización. Los descendientes de los mayas [ . . . ] empuñan el estandarte de la rebelión y cubren de sangre y de ruinas el suelo de la patria. Examinaremos las causas de este levantamiento [y] condenaremos sus tendencias bárbaras e inhumanas. (I, 12)

Almost four decades after the Guerra de las Castas Ancona still perceived racial conflict as a threat to white Creole civilization in Yucatán and to the survival of the concept of a Mexican nation. Given the passionate intensity with which he expressed this belief in *Historia de Yucatán* so many years later, it is easy to understand his praise for the Spanish conquest, colonization, and pacification of the Maya in *La cruz y la espada*. In this context, Ancona's glorification of the conquest in *La cruz y la espada* may be seen as a claim of continuity with an heroic Spanish past that is constructed vis-à-vis a present in which the Mexican nation is under attack from within – by rebellious Indians – and from without – by French invaders. He explicitly contrasts that glorious past with the inadequate present, referring to “las costumbres y hazañas de esa época portentosa que se diferencia tanto de la nuestra como la edad viril de la vejez” (I, x). Yucatecan Creoles can and should learn from the heroic example that the past sets; from the example of the Spanish conquest they can

overcome the threat of emasculation at the hands of both rebellious Indians and French invaders.

Ancona positioned himself in *La cruz y la espada* as a Yucatecan writer and intellectual because Yucatán had established itself by that time as a viable political and economic entity distinct from the new Mexican nation. Geographically separated from the rest of the country by dense jungles and by the Gulf of Mexico, after independence Yucatán only reluctantly became part of the federalist Mexican nation. When Santa Anna attempted to impose a centralized government, Yucatán rebelled in 1835 and installed its own government, complete with a Yucatecan army, navy, and flag.<sup>7</sup> The Yucatecan secessionists fought off Mexican military efforts to retake the peninsula and did not agree to rejoin the Mexican republic until 1846. Under the terms of the agreement of reincorporation, Yucatán was guaranteed control of its own state affairs, its own state militia separate from the Mexican army, and special import-export duties. But when war broke out between Mexico and the United States, Yucatán declared its neutrality and reclaimed its status as an autonomous territory in an effort to maintain its lucrative trade in sisal fiber with New Orleans. Indeed, it was only when the Guerra de las Castas exploded in 1847 that Yucatán reconsidered the question of its autonomy. Before uniting with Mexico once more, however, Yucatecan diplomats first petitioned the United States for annexation and for aid in ending the Maya rebellion. When the United States declined to send troops to suppress the Maya rebels and take over Yucatán, the peninsula turned instead to Mexico City and rejoined the federal union in 1848. Yucatán's history of autonomy made it possible for Ancona to envision a Yucatecan identity that was a viable alternative to the identity as a Mexican that he also at times would claim for himself. In *La cruz y la espada*, Ancona defined himself as a Yucatecan author both in terms of his subject matter – the conquest of the Maya – and his viewpoint. He valorized the successful conquest of the Maya precisely because, as a native of Yucatán, he wanted to reenact symbolically in the present the conquest of the rebellious Indians whom he felt threatened the region's Creole society.

Nonetheless, when Ancona wrote *Los mártires de Anáhuac* four years later, he came to see this story of conquest from a very different perspective. By 1870 the political situation had changed: the French had been expelled and the liberals had returned to power. Instead of combating external forces, Mexico had to deal with internal dissensions between liberals and conservatives that threatened any nascent consensus. It is in this context of internal turmoil that Ancona wrote *Los mártires de Anáhuac*, his now scathing critique of the Spanish conquistadors. Hence, in the later novel he rejects the earlier Spanish model and turns instead towards the indigenous peoples of Mexico as potential sources of national identity and specificity. For this purpose he singles out the Tlaxcaltecs, who in *Los mártires de Anáhuac* have established an independent republic and are therefore allies, not vassals, of Moctezuma. "El



pueblo de Tlaxcala era: sobrio, laborioso, indómito y amante, sobre todo, de su independencia y sus instituciones" (I, 189). Throughout the second novel Ancona praises the natives' courage, honor, and desire for independence as they struggle against Spanish imperialism. In his search for attributes that mark a difference between the new Mexican nation and its Spanish colonial past, he locates this difference in the indigenous roots of Mexican history and constructs a parallel between Aztec resistance to the Spanish conquest and Mexican Creole resistance to foreign imperialism, turning now to the very paradigm he had refused to employ four years previously.

Ancona attempts in *Los mártires de Anáhuac* to concoct a vision of the past in which indigenous history can function as a model for incipient Mexican nationalism. He is able to use the Aztec empire as the basis for such a model in a way that he could not use the example of the Maya for several reasons. Ancona himself, first of all, was physically and culturally removed from the scenario of the conquest of the Aztecs. Moreover, while the Maya remained a potentially rebellious force in Yucatán, the far-off Aztecs of Tenochtitlán were thoroughly dominated by the conquering, powerful Spaniards and did not present an active threat to white hegemony. The fact that the Aztec empire had been eradicated by the Spanish conquistadors made Aztec history, now safely neutralized by conquest, available for Ancona's use in his project of establishing a foundation for Mexican Creole identity. The eradication of the Aztec empire enabled Ancona to idealize native history, in particular Tlaxcaltecan history, and to employ an abstract, decontextualized vision of Aztec life and virtues that he could not with the Maya, who confronted local Creole culture with their difference regularly and even, as we have seen, violently. Ancona could not idealize the Maya because they continued to pose a threat to the existence of white culture in Yucatán; but he could do so with the Aztecs because, ironically, they had been brought under control by the same conquistadors whom he now critiqued so fiercely in *Los mártires de Anáhuac*. In the later novel Ancona was able to assume the stance of a Mexican intellectual responding to issues of nation-wide importance, while in *La cruz y la espada* the regional problems that occupied his attention caused him to identify primarily as a Yucatecan writer.

Both novels, then, constitute coded responses to the political and cultural problems Ancona perceived in his own time. By turning towards selected moments in the Mexican past, Ancona was able to address contemporary issues as refracted through the prism of history. The use of history in novel form enabled him to create a particular version of it that could function as an originary moment for a nascent Creole Mexican identity. Although *La cruz y la espada* and *Los mártires de Anáhuac* are radically different texts in terms of their perspective on the conquest, Ancona's underlying project remains the same. In both texts, he creates narratives about specific historical events that he uses in turn as exemplary lessons about the nation, its past, and its future

for his contemporary Mexican readers. Whether he is appealing to a Spanish racial inheritance that can be positioned against foreign influence as he does in *La cruz y la espada*, or recuperating an idealized vision of indigenous culture as a mark of the difference between the Spanish colonial past and the Mexican Creole present as he does in *Los mártires de Anáhuac*, Ancona engaged in the imaginative recreation of historical moments to fulfill his aim of constructing a version of Mexican identity required by contemporary circumstances. Hence, such versions of national identity were necessarily contingent upon Ancona's own shifting responses to provincial and national issues that were themselves filtered through his view of himself as alternately a member of the Yucatecan elite or a Mexican intellectual and politician. The project of nation-building and consolidation carried out in his texts is made more complex by the very fact that Ancona's own self-definition was not stable but rather was inflected incessantly by his need to juggle his different regional and national roles. Ancona's changing stances and the ways those changes played themselves out in his novels demonstrate that in nineteenth-century Latin America identity is a mutable category and that the process of constructing national identity or identities continually responds to and is shaped by social and political pressures at the most immediate levels of social experience.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Kessel Schwartz summarizes various critical approaches to the problem of the novel's authorship in *A New History of Spanish American Fiction*. Most critics have attributed the novel to a Mexican author because of the detailed knowledge of Mexican indigenous history that the novelist displays. On the other hand, Luis Leal and Rodolfo J. Cortina have recently published a new critical edition of *Jicoténcal* in which they argue that the Cuban Félix Varela is the author of the novel.

<sup>2</sup> See David Bushnell and Neill Macauley, "Mexico in Decline (1821-1855)", in *The Emergence of Latin America in the Nineteenth Century*, 55-82.

<sup>3</sup> References to the introduction are taken from the two-volume edition published in 1866 by the Librería de Rosa y Bouret in Paris, while all other references are taken from the edition of *La cruz y la espada* published in 1959 in Mérida by Editorial Yucateense "Club del Libro".

<sup>4</sup> The historical Cortés had sexual liaisons with three of Moctezuma's daughters, two of whom were killed in the Spanish retreat from Tenochtitlán and one of whom survived into the 1550s and married another Spaniard. However, the only extant information about the two daughters killed during the retreat – like Geliztli – is their names after conversion: doña Ana and doña Inés. Their nahuatl names have not been preserved, nor is it known whether their relationships with Cortés were voluntary or forced. See Hugh Thomas, *Conquest: Moctezuma, Cortés and the Fall of Old Mexico*, especially 313, 594, and 622.

<sup>5</sup> The historical context to the Guerra de las Castas, the war itself, and its aftermath are thoroughly described in Nelson Reed's *The Caste War of Yucatán*.

<sup>6</sup> See Reed, 128-29 and 179-80.

<sup>7</sup> See Reed, "The Ladino World" (3-34), and David Bushnell and Neill Macauley, *The Emergence of Latin America in the Nineteenth Century*, especially "Mexico in Decline."

#### WORKS CITED

- Ancona, Eligio. *La cruz y la espada*. Paris: Librería de Rosa y Bouret, 1866 (2 vols.).  
 ———. *La cruz y la espada*. Mérida: Editorial Yucateca "Club del Libro", 1959.  
 ———. *Historia de Yucatán desde la época más remota hasta nuestros días*. Yucatán: Gobierno del Estado de Yucatán, third ed., 1917 (4 vols.).  
 ———. *Los mártires de Anáhuac*. México: Imprenta José Batiza, 1870.  
 Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 1991 [1983].  
 Bushnell, David and Neill Macauley. *The Emergence of Latin America in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Oxford UP, 1988.  
*Jicoténcal*. Filadelfia: Imprenta de Guillermo Stavely, 1826 (2 vols.).  
 Read, J. Lloyd. *The Mexican Historical Novel: 1826-1910*. New York: Instituto de las Españas en los Estados Unidos, 1939.  
 Reed, Nelson. *The Caste War of Yucatán*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1964.  
 Schwartz, Kessel. *A New History of Spanish American Fiction*. Florida: U of Miami P, 1972.  
 Sommer, Doris. *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1991.  
 Thomas, Hugh. *Conquest: Moctezuma, Cortés and the Fall of Old Mexico*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993.  
 Varela, Félix. *Jicoténcal*, ed. Luis Leal and Rodolfo J. Cortina. Houston: Arte Público Press, 1995.