

Article

## The Struggles of Solidarity: Chicana/o-Mexican Networks, 1960s–1970s

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**Abstract:** Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, members of the Chicana/o Movement reached across class, borders, and ideologies to proclaim a political solidarity with the Mexican Left. Both, Chicana/os and Mexican activists expressed a narrative of political solidarity that encompassed a perceived shared experience of oppression and struggles for liberation. I contend, however, that both groups saw the source of their oppression and forms of resistance through different lenses. Chicana/o activists identified racism, discrimination, and cultural erasure with oppression, and they retrofit Mexican nationalism with political radicalism. In contrast, Mexican activists celebrated Marxist ideologies as radical political resistance against an increasing authoritarian government and associated Mexican nationalism with state repression and political manipulation.

**Keywords:** Chicana/o history; Mexican history; social movements; 20th century; Mexican Americans

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### 1. Introduction

It was in the global moment of Third World liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s that Mexican and Chicana/o activists, politicians, and intellectuals set out to re-envision new forms of transnational solidarity. These young activists imagined a Mexican nationalism that proclaimed unity across borders despite a long history of Mexican American exclusion from Mexican historical, political, and cultural narratives. While young urban Chicana/o activists were alarmed by racial

discrimination and cultural erasure, urban students from Mexico were opposing an increasingly authoritarian government whose legitimacy rested in an idealized revolutionary past. While Chicana/os adopted Mexico's state-sponsored revolutionary nationalism to their own cultural nationalism in order to resist cultural erasure and racism, Mexican leftists identified those same ideas with government repression. Whereas Chicana/o usage of Mexican nationalism was a radical assertion to demand equal citizenship in the context of the United States, the same expressions of Mexican nationalism were contested between the Mexican state and its political dissidents who looked to Marxist ideologies as a political alternative.

The central argument of this article is that while Mexican and Mexican American communities became disjointed by competing nationalisms and political identities, the historical global moment of Third World liberation movements allowed both sides to re-envision a sense of political mobilization. Despite desires to build international solidarity centered on an imagined sense of common struggles and origins, the long seated emotional, ideological, and cultural walls between them continued to separate these communities. Throughout this work, I use the terms like Chicana/o, Mexican American, and Mexican, which require clarification. The plethora of labels used to identify the diversity of identities, regions, and historical processes within communities on both sides of the border is confusing, even for those within the communities. For people in the United States the labels include: Mexican, Mexican American (non-hyphenated), Mexican-American (hyphenated), Indo-Hispano, Tejano, Nuevo Mexicano, Californiano, Chicano, Chicana/o, Chican@, Xican@, Hispanic, and Latin@. Each of these labels represents a specific historical moment and at times specific political identity or challenge. In the case of the general term Chicana/o, its etymology continues to be debated. In the 1960s, however, it became a signifier of political consciousness and cultural identity for young Mexican Americans [1,2]. Before the 1960s politicization, the term Chicano was a pejorative that indicated people of Mexican descent living in the United States Southwest of lower social class status. They were contrasted to middle-class individuals who commonly identified as Mexican-Americans, with or without a hyphen [3]. Furthermore, the presence of Mexican immigrants with different levels of U.S. and Mexican acculturation further complicated the use of general labels like Mexican American, Chicana/o, or Mexican.

A similar situation occurs with the label of "Mexican", which indicates a nationality. It is an identity, however, commonly associated with specific racial, linguistic, and cultural traits that have been continuously promoted, adopted, and adapted by people on both sides of the border, but especially by the Mexican state under the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutionalized Revolutionary Party, PRI). The label of Mexican also obscures racial, ethnic, linguistic, local, and regional diversities within Mexico. People in Mexico like those in the United States also self-identified by their region or town of origin such as "Regiomontano" (Monterrey), "Guerrerense" (Guerrero), "Oaxaqueño" (Oaxaca), or "Chilango" (Mexico City) to indicate specific cultural and political identities. Throughout this article, I use the labels of Mexican American (Chicana/os) and Mexicans as general terms for people on both sides of the borders, a strategy used by the participants of these movements themselves. As activists moved across the U.S.-Mexico border, their identities became generalized. For instance Tejanos and Californianos who crossed into Mexico became Mexican Americans (Chicana/os), and when Chilangos and Oaxaqueños cross into the United States, they all became Mexican.

Furthermore, the intellectual and political exchange that took place between Chicana/os and Mexicans included a large variety of groups and individuals from both sides that represented a

multiplicity of ideological and regional strands. For instance, Chicana/o groups who visited Mexico, especially Mexico City, included university students from California and Colorado, labor activists from Texas, political organizers from New Mexico, and artists mostly from the U.S. Southwest. These groups themselves presented the Chicana/o struggles to their Mexican audiences in general terms, which reinforced the idea that all Mexican Americans (Chicana/os) had a similar experience with oppression despite their geographical location or social status. In the case of Mexican activists, intellectuals, and politicians who collaborated with Chicana/os for the most part they came from Mexico City and its surrounding semi-urban areas like Cuernavaca. This meant that the problematic and ideas presented by Mexican activists and intellectuals to Chicana/os were shaped in great part by the political activism taking place in Mexico City. However, that is not to say that Mexicans from rural areas did not connect with Chicana/os, but their collaboration was more sporadic at this time.

## 2. Part I: Asserting Political Needs and Desires

For Mexican Americans, a sense of national identity and political subjectivity evolved through experiences of ambiguous belonging. At times Mexican Americans were seen as valuable “patriotic Americans” and economic subjects for the United States, while at other times they were despised for their cultural and racial otherness. Although, Mexican Americans had been organizing to end discrimination by advocating for assimilation, they were able to make only modest advances. By the 1960s, young Mexican Americans were seeking alternatives to assimilation and began contesting the discrimination, exploitation, and cultural erasure that their communities had been enduring for over a century in the United States.

Influenced by aspects of the Cuban Revolution, the long history of African American activism, Third World ideas of political struggle, and their own traditions, they forged a movement known as *El Movimiento Chicano* (Chicana/o Movement). Without a unifying political objective or origin, young Mexican Americans conceived the Chicana/o Movement as a peaceful undertaking to advance the political desires and needs of their communities. After decades of persistent psychological, emotional, and political barriers erected around people of Mexican descent by a narrow U.S. nationalism built on imagined ideas of racial purity and cultural homogeneity, Chicana/os proclaimed their own imagined Mexican and Indigenous cultural values as superior to those of Anglos. By using aspects of Mexican history and nationalism that exalted a glorious Mexican past, they forged a counternarrative that allowed them to reconsider their political subjectivity.

Chicana/o cultural nationalism emerged to fulfill a psychological need and political desire to upend the pervasive ideological, cultural, and emotional walls created by U.S. white supremacy while promoting political unity across diverse regions, social classes, and political subjectivities. At the 1969 Denver Youth Liberation Conference, hundreds of Chicana/o youth debated the manifesto *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* and asserted the ideological centrality of Chicana/o nationalism. In so doing they began to realize a new political subjectivity. The emergence of Chicana/o nationalists seeking to carve out a sovereign territory and political identity from a society that excluded them was expressed through the idea of the “Nation of Aztlán”, which was conceived of as the mythical Mexica (Aztec) place of origin from which they migrated southward to what is now Central Mexico. Chicana/os self-proclaimed

their indigenous ancestry as part of their search for a political identity and declared the U.S. Southwest (which had formerly been Mexico) the mythical homeland of the Mexica.

Chicana/os rooted their claim to sovereignty based on a longstanding residence in the areas of the U.S. Southwest prior to European colonization and a claim to a Chicana/o identity through a blood lineage. They asserted that at least one of their ancestors was of Mexican-Indian blood and lived in the U.S. Southwest, an area that was within hundreds of miles from Tenochtitlan (today Mexico City) prior to European domination. For Chicanos the percentage of native blood was not relevant to their claims to be indigenous, but the growing awareness of historical and cultural heritage that evolved through the Chicana/o Movement, led to a new sense of pride and political awareness. Chicana/os were identifying more closely with their native roots than with their other ancestors. This new sense of political radicalism based on their self-proclaimed indigenous ancestry led to a new political radicalism that demanded the right to self-determination, nationhood, sovereignty, and reparations from the U.S. government for crimes committed against Chicana/os and their ancestors. They declared that while Europeans immigrants came freely to the United States, their ancestors did not chose to be invaded or cross the border. Some Chicana/o radicals declared that they owed allegiance neither to the United States nor to the Mexican nation. They asserted “indigenous right” to sovereignty under “international law”.

Chicana/os felt that their dual cultural identity gave them a legitimate claim to promote a political project that retrofitted Mexican nationalism to demand U.S. citizenship. That said, the use of cultural nationalism within the Chicana/o Movement did not go uncontested, especially by groups who subscribed to more internationalist ideas like Marxism, which saw cultural nationalism as inadequate to eradicating inequalities among Chicana/o communities. The strongest challenge to cultural nationalism, however, came from Chicana feminists. Chicanas recognized that “cultural nationalism also served as a regulatory apparatus to discipline deviant subjects who do not fit within those boundaries...imbedded in the critique is a challenge to the ways in which culturalist arguments were used to support and give historical weight to male dominance, supremacy, and sexual politics” [4]. In other words, the argument against Chicana/o cultural nationalism was not just about the narrow ideological construction that limited the formation of international solidarity movements but also about the ways that nationalism operated to justify heteronormative behaviors.

Although, the complexities of the Chicana/o Movement cannot be reduced to cultural nationalism, nonetheless, it was a central analytical framework for activists to understand their oppression and frame their resistance. In the context of the United States, the retrofitting of Mexican state-sponsored nationalism was meant to resist white supremacy and provide a sense of cultural pride and unity to resist decades of oppression. The rejection of assimilation was at the center of Chicana/o nationalism, which ranged from extreme militants advocating separatism to those fostering cultural essentialism.

The notion of *mestizaje* (the mixing of indigenous and Spanish ancestries) served as a central strategy to challenge assimilation and promote, in the United States, indigenous ethnic pride. More important, *mestizaje* stood as a radical and celebratory character for Chicana/o politics in direct defiance of the U.S. notion of racial miscegenation, which white supremacy conceived as a detrimental attribute. Although, the Spanish colonial project had been more tolerant than their British counterparts towards racial mixing (*mestizaje*), nonetheless, mestizos held a lower rank than Europeans in the racial and social hierarchies of the New World. In the twentieth century, the idea of *mestizaje* re-emerged following the Mexican Revolution of 1910, at a time when the Mexican state and its political elites

struggled to bring about national unity. Mexican philosopher, politician, and first secretary of public education (1921–1924), under Álvaro Obregón, José Vasconcelos re-imagined the idea of *mestizaje* through the notion of *Raza Cosmica* (Cosmic Race) [5].

Vasconcelos was a contradictory figure. On one hand he condemned the Holocaust and Nazism in Europe while at the same time was a staunch anti-Semite who used ideas of racial-superiority in his promotion of *mestizaje* [6]. He suggested that the mestizos (Cosmic Race) had been called to be the leaders of the world [7]. In the context of the struggles for civil rights, *mestizaje* became a central component of the Chicana/o political platform in the 1960s. Chicana/os embraced *mestizaje* as a political strategy to challenge forced assimilation of their communities into Euro-American culture. Ironically, in Mexico Vasconcelos' idea of a "cosmic race" was an endorsement for a Hispanic *mestizo* identity that privileged European culture and transformed the "Indian" into an idealized source of national pride [8]. Both Chicana/o and Mexican ideas of *mestizaje* rested on hierarchical ideas of race and ethnicity despite their advocacy for ethno-racial inclusiveness. Chicana/os wrestled with the paradox of resisting discrimination and essentialism in the United States, while at the same time they retrofitted Mexican state-sponsored ideas about Mexicanness, which valued a certain kind of historical amnesia and ethno-racial exclusions for the sake of national unity.

### 3. Part II: Chicano-Mexican Relations

Inspired by movements of decolonization and national liberation in the Third World, Mexicans and Chicana/o activists participated in new forms of political solidarity across national borders. Internationalism and third world consciousness served as new ideological platforms for Chicana/o activists, many of whom coordinated cultural and political exchanges and travelled to Mexico for the first time. This new consciousness coincided with the political turmoil of the Mexican Dirty War, which took place under the one-party regime of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI) against urban and rural political dissidents [9].

The 1970s were a formative decade for Mexican–Chicana/o relations, which led to the Mexican state's reconsideration of its political and cultural sovereignty beyond its national borders. Chicana/o political activism was organized to address issues of discrimination, equal access to education, political participation, police brutality, the Vietnam War, and regaining control of the Southwest, which was lost in the Mexican-American War. Building on the long historical legacy of community activism of other communities of color such as African Americans, young Chicana/os took on more confrontational strategies. In 1967, in East Los Angeles, 18-year-old David Sánchez established Young Chicanos for Community Action (YCCA), which soon became known as the Brown Berets [10]. The Berets demanded an end to police brutality, equal access to education, and the liberation of the Southwest from Anglo domination.

Distinguished by their militaristic brown uniforms and use of paramilitary watch patrols that resembled the Black Panthers in style, the Berets claimed to represent "street youth" from East L.A. (*el barrio*) as the "Liberation Army" of the Chicano people [10]. The group was influenced in part by ideals from third world liberation movements, but despite their resemblance to the Black Panther Party, the Brown Berets did not follow a Marxist trajectory [10]. On the contrary, their ideological perspective focused

on cultural nationalism, linking their political struggle to nationalist movements fighting for self-determination and autonomy in the Third World [11].

The Brown Berets led thousands of Chicana/o students to walk out of East Los Angeles high schools in March 1968. The students demanded bilingual education, more Latina/o teachers, better facilities, and the revision of textbooks to include Mexican American history [12]. The walkouts, otherwise known as the “Blowouts”, inspired a chain of similar protests among Chicana/o high school and college students across the Midwest, West, and Southwest. Their actions prompted a backlash of school administrator disciplinary measures, police violence, and the arrests of leaders under criminal conspiracy charges. Chicana/o and Mexican American organizations responded with rallies in support of the students and their demands. Their responses shaped the Chicana/o Movement and its claims for self-determination.

The East Los Angeles Blowouts were the equivalent of the student movement in Mexico City, whose watershed event was the student massacre in Tlatelolco 10 days before the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City. Similar to the Mexican student movement, Chicana/o student-led Blowouts in Los Angeles inspired young Chicana/os throughout the Southwest and Midwest to stage walkouts and similar protests. While the success of the Blowouts helped to anchor the rhetoric of self-determination in the Chicana/o Movement, the devastation of the Tlatelolco massacre became the perpetual focus of the Mexican left’s rhetoric against the Mexican state. Both the Blowouts and the Tlatelolco student massacre had enormous political repercussions within their communities, but while the Blowouts were a source of inspiration, Tlatelolco was a cautionary tale of the oppressive power of the state. The tragic death of dozens (probably hundreds) of students in Tlatelolco made them into martyrs, while the use of police brutality and arrests of Chicana/o students made them into heroes. Unlike the apathy of Mexican civil society for the excessive use of violence against students, the police force against and detention of Chicana/o students generated large support across most of the Mexican American community.

While the Chicana/o Movement was taking shape across the United States and the Mexican state was increasing its repression against political dissidents, the Vietnam War and other Cold War struggles continued to affect the Third World. The use of minorities as cannon fodder gave thousands of young Chicana/os a better understanding of how racism, U.S. foreign policy, and Third World liberation movements were interconnected, and Chicana/o opposition towards the Vietnam War grew. Activists argued that “Chicanos and the Vietnamese were both members of the Third World in that both were non-white people suffering from the exploitative nature of U.S. imperialism and capitalism. [Therefore] ...the Chicano claim to the land was an anticolonial struggle similar to what the Vietnamese were waging” [13]. As Chicana/os drew parallels with the cultural, political, and territorial struggles of Vietnam, they also rejected ideas from early generations of Mexican Americans who promoted American patriotism, whiteness, and the value of military service as strategies to end with racial segregation [13].

Mexican students became aware of the Chicana/o Movement gradually. Their attention had initially been to promote the Cuban Revolution and to a lesser extent a better understanding of conflicts in Africa, Asia, and struggles against racism in the United States. Nonetheless, in response to the U.S. occupation of the Dominican Republic (1965), the war in Vietnam, and increasing racial upheavals that were polarizing the United States, Mexican students and intellectuals, especially those on the Left, became increasingly critical of U.S. imperialism, its reliance on military force, and the continued strength of racism in everyday life. Both Mexican leftists and Chicana/o activists were disillusioned with their

societies and endorsed the need for more radical forms of political mobilization. Both idealized revolutionary political mobilization, although neither was clear in how to achieve it.

Throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, Mexican and Chicana/o activists travelled across Mexico, Europe, and the United States sharing ideologies and experiences. In the course of their political battles, they learned about each other's struggles, mutual experiences of repression, and the proliferation of political movements by marginalized communities across the globe. Their awareness of shared experiences generated the conditions for political solidarity between Mexican and Chicana/o activists.

As the Chicana/o Movement emerged in the United States in the 1960s and began to capture the attention of Mexican activists, the Mexican government also became interested in knowing more about Chicana/o political upheavals. The Mexican government guarded against outside influences that could exacerbate domestic political instability. The primary intelligence gathering institution in Mexico, the *Dirección Federal de Seguridad* (Federal Security Directorate) or DFS, conducted a study about Chicana/os titled, "Political and Social Investigation of Current Principal Problems in Mexican-American (Chicano) Communities" [14]. The data for the study were gathered from the mysterious *Centro Cultural Mexicano-Americano*, a place where Mexican American university professors from various disciplines contributed to the analysis of Chicana/o communities [14]. The report addressed a series of questions about the nature of the racial, cultural, and ethnic identity, social status, and diversity within Mexican American communities. The recognition of regional, economic, and political diversity did not prevent them from using the labels of "Chicano" and "Mexican Americans" as synonymous for all the people of Mexican descent living in the United States. While the study focused on the issue of the nature of the Chicana/o community and their struggles as an ethnic, racial, and cultural group, nonetheless, it missed the local nuances of the communities. The use of the generic labels "Mexican Americans" and "Chicanos", however, was not restricted to people in Mexico; Chicana/os themselves presented their movement as the embodiment of the experiences of their entire community.

Reading like a Marxist analysis of class oppression, the report argued that "Mexican-Americans, although they identified as part of the proletariat, are not an oppressed social class, but rather an oppressed *ethnic group*" [14]. The implication of identifying Chicana/os as an "ethnic group" rather than a "social class" suggested that a proletarian revolution could be connected with Chicana/os. The report concluded, "Mexican-Americans have ideals, material influences, and socialist dreams; but the most important motives that frame their activities are...poverty, social exclusion and persecution" [14]. The report by the DFS provided a broad understanding of the nature of the Chicana/o Movement's aims, but the use of Marxist analysis to characterize Chicana/os seemed to have been a litmus test to assess the potential of Chicana/os aligning with Mexican communists.

Besides the DFS, throughout the late 1960s and 1970s Mexican periodicals informed Mexican audiences about who the "Chicana/os" were, their struggles, and their conditions in the United States. The common denominators across most of these articles were Chicana/o experiences with racism and violent discrimination by "Yankee imperialists", the effects of the War of the American Invasion or as it is known to most U.S. citizens, the Mexican American War, on their community, and their unbreakable connections with Mexico. In an article headlined "*CHICANOS: EXTRAÑOS EN 'EL PARAISO'*" (Chicanos: Foreigners in "Paradise"), the author described the Chicana/o's connections to Mexico in part to "The pride in their Indian blood and its dignity is the umbilical cord that unite [Chicana/os] with the Spanish speaking raza'..." [15]. Reports on racial discrimination against and discussions of

Chicana/os framing their connections with Mexico through their indigenous and geographical origins were common in Mexican periodicals. The leftist Mexican journal *Por qué?* reported: “They call themselves ‘La Raza’. They are proud of being the Mestizo race from Indian and Spanish and they have also the honor of being the most hated national minority by the North American ‘anglo’...because they carry on their shoulders the hatred of the North American for the Spanish” [16]. *Por qué?*, typical of much of the independent press, supported the struggles of the Chicana/o Movement by describing its historical background, supporting the Chicana/o use of cultural nationalism, and recognizing Chicana/os as part of the Third World.

[Chicana/os] are of Túpac Amaro blood, of Quatemozin, of Quetzalcoatl and Jerónimo, of Joaquín Murrieta, of Benito Juárez, of Emiliano Zapata and Francisco Villa, have resisted dissolution...isolated in the vast West, dedicated to agricultural work, the Hispano-Americans did not have general contact with revolutionary propaganda, leftist groups from industrial cities, with exiles, and students of the “third world.” Therefore, the movements of “Chicanos” are in many cases in a primary stage of their ideological anti-imperialist struggle [16].

On the one hand, the article lent aid to Chicana/os in their struggles and encouraged the Movement to make connections with Mexico and the rest of Latin America. On the other hand, the description that the Chicana/o Movement was isolated from “revolutionary propaganda” created an image of the Chicana/o Movement as consisting of rural peasants. This inaccurate and condescending description of the political activism of Chicana/os was an example of Mexicans’ limited understanding of Chicana/os. *Por qué?* explained why the Chicana/o emphasis on indigenous and revolutionary identities was revolutionary and connected to “more revolutionary” struggles taking places among other groups. The editors clearly expressed a preference for “advanced revolutionary ideology”—Marxist, Maoist, Trotskyist, or other theoretical ideas of revolution—over the cultural nationalism of Chicanos who evoked a romantic past.

More conservative Mexican commentators harshly criticized and despised Chicana/o expressions of “Mexicanness.” Such was the case of an article that appeared in *El Nacional* about the distortion of the Spanish language among Chicana/os in the United States.

For those of us [Mexicans] who learn the [Spanish] language in our homes...for many generations...it is sad to view with impotence its death on the other side of the border, although, Chicana/os defend it with their tooth and nail. But what can they do? Nothing. Poor illiterate in their great majority! It would be different were they intellectuals...If instead of being Chicanos they had been Germans from Sudetenland or the Volga region; then they would be a pistol pointing at the heart of the United States. But they are not, not even a sling, an arch, or the ax of the Homo erectus of the caves. The end of the Spanish language in [the United States is looming]...First, the impoverishment of their vocabulary will diminish the possibilities to express ideas. And let’s not say elevated ideas! Second is the reduction of the space for communication. Third, the borrowing of words from other languages [or pochismos]...and fourth...crack! the total break [17].

The working class and rural origins, the Spanglish, and the Indianness that Chicana/os embraced with pride and used as a resource for political mobilization were the same qualities that Mexican elites used to denigrate Indians, the working classes, Afro Mexicans, Asian Mexicans, and Arab Mexicans. Ironically, most politicized Chicana/os who tried to reconnect with Mexico were university students. However, Mexico's urban middle and upper classes enforced a high linguistic bar against their countrymen and Chicana/os as well.

Mexican intellectuals strongly influenced exchanges between Mexicans and Chicana/os. The work of Mexican sociologist Jorge Bustamante, who conducted his graduate work at the University of Notre Dame at the height of the Chicana/o Movement in the 1960s and 1970s, focused on Mexican immigration to the United States [18]. He played a leading role in bringing attention to issues affecting undocumented migrants to Mexican scholars and institutions like UNAM and later to President Luis Echeverría [19,20]. In the late 1960s, while carrying out research at Notre Dame, Bustamante posed as an undocumented migrant to get firsthand experience of the lives of migrants crossing into the United States. Throughout the 1970s, at the height of the Chicana/o Movement, he published scholarly articles both in English and Spanish in the United States and Mexico: *Los Mojados; The Wetback Story* (1971), *"Don Chano": Autobiografía de un emigrante mexicano* (1971), and *El espalda mojada: informe de un observador participante* (1973) [21]. In 1972, Bustamante returned briefly to Mexico where he taught a class titled "The Sociology of U.S. Minorities-Los Chicanos" at UNAM, its first course on the Chicano Movement [22–29]. In the early 1970s, Mexican university students expressed a pronounced interest in learning about the Chicana/o Movement and establishing intellectual, artistic, and political collaboration with it.

In 1975, Octavio Paz, Mexico's poet-diplomat and Nobel Literature Prize winner moved away from his infamous 1950 essay "The Pachuco and Other Extremes". Echoing the enthusiasm among intellectual circles for the Chicana/o Movement, he wrote "...the Chicano movement has impressed Mexicans and they follow it with great deal of attention. Naturally at times we do not have all the information that we should have...And consequently, I believe that although the Chicano movement is seen with interest, it is not as well known as it should be" [30]. In the 1950s, Paz had criticized the Pachucos for their distortion of Mexicanness; however, in 1973 Paz had a more affirmative attitude towards Chicano Mexicanness when he commended them for their ability, unlike Mexican urban dwellers, to preserve their Mexican values [29]. Furthermore, Paz complimented Chicano activism and recognized its internationalism, which he saw as organized "not under aesthetic or social principles, but under political principles" [31]. Along similar lines and because it repossessed Mexican nationalism in service to social transformation rather than at the service of state elites, Mexican writer Carlos Monsivais acclaimed the Chicana/o Movement.

In 1977, Monsivais wrote the prologue to an edited volume of articles about Chicana/o history *La otra cara de México: el pueblo chicano* (The Other Mexican Face: The Chicano People) [32], in which he celebrated the politicization of Mexican nationalism by Chicana/os and Mexicans living in the United States. While criticizing the political apathy of Mexican civil society, he also recognized the need for solidarity between Mexicans and Chicana/os.

To comprehend the Chicano process is a need of the first order for Mexico's incipient, weak, and chaotic civil society. The variety of reasons range from culture to history, from geographic fatalism to racial origins, from shared to discarded myths, from the economy to the folklore, from our ancestors to

the braceros. Nothing could be more destructive than to proceed with these politics of indifference, contempt, resentment, or mockery, which have historically been a distinctive sign of our treatment towards the Mexican-American or Chicano community [33].

In their effort to connect with Mexico, Chicana/o activists attended intellectual conferences, traveled in Mexico, and organized cultural exchanges. The experience of Chicana/os in Mexico, however, was far from the cultural and political ideal of “Mexico” that they had imagined. In 1971, a number of Chicana/o professors and graduate students attended a ten-week institute in Mexico City at which they became disillusioned. “...Chicanos experienced numerous *rechazos*—feelings that they were out of place and that Mexican society was not what they had described to their students” [34]. They expected to find a pristine rural and ideal Mexico. Instead, the Mexico City of the 1970s was a modern burgeoning capital filled with rigid class structures and social and economic disparities, with people dressing and acting more like “gringos” than the Aztecs of the mythological Mexico of Chicana/o nationalism. Chicana/os attending the institute felt alienated in Mexico City. “[Chicanos] see a [Mexican] society that economically, politically and socially is almost a carbon copy of the United States...The subordination of Chicanos, like that of lower class Mexicans, exists not simply because of their race or culture, but because of the capitalist system in which they find themselves—a system which uses racial and cultural issues as means of economic exploitation” [35]. There was a dichotomy in Mexican attitudes towards the United States. On the one hand, Mexicans were prompt to criticize the United States and its policies, while at the same time they consumed and adopted its fashions, ideas, music, and language. The author pointed directly to the problematic construction of a Chicana/o cultural nationalism that uncritically generated romantic ideas and expectations about Mexico and Mexicans.

#### 4. Conclusions

By the 1960s, Mexico was struggling with the emergence of political militancy among its youth, who saw Marxist tenets as blueprints towards a new social order. In the United States the fear of homegrown communists became entangled with political activism and race relations. At the time, when the United States hoped to stop Communist expansion and “[c]ivil rights groups had to walk a fine line, making it clear that their reform efforts were meant to fill out the contours of American democracy, and not to challenge or undermine it” [36]. Like Mexican activists who were influenced by Third World liberation and calls for socialist revolution, young Mexican Americans were also influenced by internationalist calls for liberation and gave birth to the Chicana/o Movement [37]. While the Mexican Left readily used Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideologies, made calls for a socialist revolution, and challenged Mexican nationalism, the Chicana/o Movement mixed Marxism with cultural nationalism to assert its political voice in the United States.

Cultural nationalism rooted in the cultural, historical, and political legacies of Mexico and the United States served Chicana/os as a tool to recover a sense of origin, belonging, and unity. In contrast, Mexican activists criticized the use of Mexican nationalism by the ruling party, PRI, as a tool of oppression. At one level, the in-between status of the Chicana/o Movement stood in contrast to other “nationalist movements in history [that emphasized] racial ‘purity’ as the basis for identity; [instead] new Chicana/o identities were premised on the kind of ‘race mixing’ or amalgamation that had horrified racist thinkers” [11]. These new Chicana/o identities not only rejected the ideas of racial

purity, but they pushed the national boundaries of their politicization beyond national borders by connecting with the struggles of the Third World. At another level, however, Chicana/o cultural nationalism rested on the Mexican state's ethno-racist construction of *mestizaje*, which privileged European whiteness and disregarded indigenous identity.

Activists on both sides of the Mexico-U.S. border made pragmatic choices about the strategies, rhetoric, and goals of their political activism, such as their identification with oppression, claims against their political systems, and claims of political solidarity with other groups experiencing oppression across the globe. Local traditions as well as international forces like the Cold War also influenced the strategies and objectives of political activists, leading to ambivalent conjuncture and disruptions in the search for Mexican and Chicana/o political solidarity.

In the United States, Chicana/o activists used racial and ethnic struggles as their framework for political positions and strategies and to connect their struggles with those of oppressed nations across the globe. Their use was a major factor in distinguishing Chicana/o political activism in the United States from that of the Mexican Left. The experience of Chicana/o activists with racial discrimination encouraged them to articulate diverse political ideals and strategies centered on a "strategic deployment of key features of Mexican and Mexican American history and culture in order to fashion individual and collective subjects capable of asserting agency and demanding self-determination" [38].

Despite the support and advocacy of Mexican intellectuals, rigid Mexican class barriers, which served to disguise issues of racial and ethnic discrimination, hindered the acceptance of Chicana/os, the large majority of whom came from working class households that left Mexico in search of work and better opportunities. Their families spoke Spanish with less "refinement" than educated Mexicans. Mexican American experiences of class oppression, police repression, and racism were important experiences that connected Chicana/o political radicalism with its Mexican counterpart, but the working-class origins and cultural nationalism of Chicana/os generated criticism and rejection by many Mexicans.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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