A brief comparison: Mexican and Peruvian National Identities*

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Abstract
Most Latin American countries, if not all, have struggled with issues of national consciousness, identity formation within unifying political systems where some countries have struggled more than others in fostering one common goal: national identity or nacionalidad. Can one speak about a Latin-American identity? Are there Latin-American uniformities that identify its people other than language? This chapter compares the Mexican and Peruvian national identities.

Keywords
Mexico, Peru, Octavio Paz, Ciro Alegria, Jose Carlos Mariategui

Introduction
In Latin America the Hispanic eccentricity is produced and multiplied, more so in countries with ancient and brilliant civilizations such as Mexico and Peru. (Paz 1990)¹

Most Latin American countries, if not all, have struggled with issues of national consciousness—identity formation within unifying political systems—where some countries have struggled more than others in fostering one common goal; national identity or nacionalidad. Can one speak about a Latin-American identity? Are there Latin-American uniformities that identify its people other than language (Except for Brazil)? One important aspect that has been identified as a Latin-American uniformity is the strong indigenous heritage that most of the territory seems to have shared a long history. However, it

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is this indigenous heritage that has divided the roots of what we know now as Latin America. Octavio Paz states; “this consciousness of being separate is a constant feature of our spiritual history” to refer to the everlasting duality crisis of identity that has characterized Latin-American thought and history. Perhaps in regards to indigenous empires and territory, Mexico and Peru can be identified as the two Latin-American countries where the strongest roots and identity heritage were implanted.

The Inca Empire was the largest empire in the American continent and probably the world, with a social structure dated back to the eleventh century. The Aztec empire can be traced back to the fourteenth century; it was located mostly in central and southern Mexico. These two civilizations established the roots of identity for what we know recognize as Latin-America. Most historians would agree that these two similar civilizations have shaped their own history through a circumstantial betrayal. Although this point can be debated from a historical perspective, in questions of identity, it remains to be strongly relevant. In Peru, the internal quarrel among Huascar and Atahualpa only facilitated Pizarro’s endeavor to control the entire population. Within different conditions, yet similar perspectives, the Mexican empire was symbolically defeated when La Malinche “gave herself” to the conqueror Hernan Cortez. To this day, these two anecdotes, each in their respective territory, remain palpable in a form that still provokes sentiments of amoral feeling. In understanding that amoral sentiment in each society, one must proceed through the cultural development and civilization procedure of digesting the birth of Latin-America through rape.

National symbols, territory, sovereignty do not suffice the shaping of identity for an individual in society. According to Epstein (1985), “not all people are conscious of nationality,” in particular indigenous people living in remote areas where sovereignty is difficult to understand. However, in the case of Peru and Mexico, one can ask how notional consciousness is understood by citizens that are not in the country’s periphery.

This chapter will briefly analyze the concept of national identity in Peru (peruanidad) and Mexico (mexicanidad) through the thoughts of Alegria and Mariategui, in the case of the first, followed with Paz for the latter. It is important to state that the three thinkers that have been chosen for this document represent great cultural value for each country ever since the nineteenth cen-

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2 Ibid.