Weaving Nationality: The Mexican Rebozo

1519 – 1850

AnnahCelestya Lucia Sanchez

August 2025

In April 1791, Spanish soldiers blocked women wearing rebozos, *mujeres de paño de rebozo,* and men in cloaks or blankets, *ni hombres de capote ni de frazada,* from entering the cathedral in Mexico City.[1] A rebozo is a shawl-like length of material, a flat rectangle, between 1.5 to 3.5 meters in length, sixty to ninety centimeters wide with finger woven fringe called *rapacejos*. (fig. 1) It is widely argued that the rebozo emerged in the aftermath of the Spanish conquest of MesoAmerica (1519-1821) when Catholic clergy imposed European modesty standards upon the indigenous population. Scholars have varying theories on the exact origin of the rebozo, but they agree that it represents broader syncretization of Spanish dress and pre-existing indigenous textile technologies and practices. This process occurred in the context of racialized colonial sumptuary laws that attempted to regulate miscegenation and solidify nebulous racial categories, resulting in a 'mestizo' dress. Moreover, the indigenous cultural practices, and textile infrastructure pre-dating colonization meant that in introducing a new garment practice connected with religion, the Spaniards created a situation ripe for a syncretic practice in the process of making and wearing.

Indigenous culture was and continues to be extremely diverse, with hundreds of distinct cultures before 1519; across these cultures, however, is an overarching connection between textile production, femininity, and cosmology throughout Mesoamerica.[2] With possible Eastern influences due to the Manila Galeon, the following generations of mestizos with indigenous mothers and grandmothers, would pass on weaving techniques, design motifs, rendering a distinct, syncretic modesty garment for women of New Spain.[3] So why would compliance with

[1] Gámez, "El Rebozo" 127.
[2] Snyder, "Weaving Identity,"5.

[3] *Ibid,* 34.

the Catholic dictate that requires women to cover their hair in church bar worshippers from entry?

Some of the literature states that rebozos were used *"como una protección para delinquir,"* as protection for criminals.[4] Archival sources consulted do not provide any documentation of a reported robbery around this time period perpetrated by a woman wearing a rebozo. Of course, it is possible, maybe even probable, that crimes like this did occur. Robberies were common in Mexico City at that time. However, this reveals that rebozos in this instance, were associated with a level of criminality that superseded the association with modesty.

Spanish authorities used gendered and racialized expectations of criminality to prosecute "illegal behavior." Indigenous men were frequently blamed for criminal behavior, regardless of their actions, because Spaniards so closely associated them with deviance. Additionally, only the lower classes wore rebozos in public. Whereas economic and social elites preferred to wear rebozos at home, using modesty garments, such as the mantilla, as wealth and racial signifiers while going to church.[5] Categorizing the use of rebozos by class and race reveals how the criminal system of late the colonial period perceived rebozos and the women who wore them in public spaces.

In the roughly 200 years from the first directives by Catholic missionaries for women to cover their hair, the syncretization and production methods that defined the rebozo also associated it with deviance, when on the wrong body at the wrong time. During this period the rebozo's origins and associations with indigenous/Spanish syncretism embodies the affective ambivalence between colonizer and colonized created by the casta system. This mimicry stoked

[4] Gamez. "The Rebozo," 127.
[5] Ibid. 128

elite anxieties regarding identity and subverted attempts to regulate the unstable Other. As time goes on, *el rebozo;* its making and wearing, becomes an assertion of mestizo identity, ontologically deviant by its "infection" with indigeneity. During the 19th century, this mimicry practice of the rebozo would make it uniquely apt to function within the emerging hegemony of mestizaje where the Other is civilized; consumed and incorporated into it.

Part I: Viceroyalty to Independence

The Spaniards and elite fixation of miscegenation was rooted in the belief that pure Spanish ancestry placed individuals at the highest social strata, with *Peninsulares*, those born in Spain, above American-born Spaniards, *criollos.* Below these were individuals born of miscegenation: indigenous and Spaniard as Mestizos, and anyone with African blood as lowest, and mixed-race black people designated as Mulattos.[6] This racial hierarchy established an "affective ambivalence," as identified by Karli Snyder, utilizing Homi Bhaba's theory of colonial identity. This formulation of identity for the colonizer, Self, is dependent on the subordinate, Other, that encompasses the complexity of coloniality. Wherein these constructed identities engender "mutual conditioning within each group" and the Other is unstable.[7]

Sumptuary laws attempted to prevent any confusion or crossing of class and race lines, regulating this affective ambivalence. The 1582 Royal Audiencia decree banned non-indigenous people from wearing indigenous dress, with exceptions for women married to indigenous men.[8] Indigenous people were also separate from colonial law of mixed race people, mestizos and criollos as subjects of the *Republica de Indios en las Indias*. Before this ban in 1582, due to this

[6] 'Mulatto' is pan-american term, becoming a racial slur in the 19th and 20th centuries. Within this context, the author does not find it particularly useful. Mixed-race and black identity is addressed throughout this paper, but it is not the focus. In this instance "mixed–race" will refer to the class of people with African and European ancestry.
[7] Snyder "Weaving Identity," 31.
[8] Gamez "El Rebozo," 92.

system of racialization, individuals often sought to pass into whatever category was most advantageous.[9] Adopting indigenous dress practices enabled them to avoid economic burdens such as taxes by embodying a shift in identity to indigeneity. These sumptuary laws are characterized as attempts to stabilize the Other by Snyder, herein this first decree is designating the "Other," as indigenous.

Following this regulation, another was issued four years later, this being an early use of *rebozo* in varied forms of speech in New Spain, specifically describing deviant behavior that is related to dress. That of covering your face, hiding one's identity. Notably, here we see rebozo in its adverbial form, not a noun. This is in line with an etymological analysis conducted by Fanny Lucas in here thesis on the Tenancingo Rebozo. Wherein she describes the Mexicanization of the word rebozo to be that of going from adverb to noun.[10]

> No person shall cover themselves *(se reboce)*, but shall walk with their faces uncovered so that they may be recognized, under penalty of certain fines, and although it seems to have been proclaimed, I am informed that it is not being observed, nor are the authorities enforcing it, and because it is desirable that it be observed and enforced in this land, being a new and evil custom, I command and order that from this day forward no man or woman of any gender or status shall dare to cover themselves *(rebozar)* or cover themselves *(reboce)* with anything, but shall walk with their faces uncovered, so that they may be known and recognized, on pain of punishment for anyone who does otherwise.[11]

He goes on to describe punishments for failing to comply that are racialized and gendered. Spanish women lose their skirt and cloak, while Spanish men are fined and

[9] Snyder "Weaving Identity," 32.
[10] Lucas, "Codificacíón y Difusión," 65.
[11] Gamez "El Rebozo," 93

imprisoned. Any mestizos, mixed-race, or black people shall "lose the clothes they are wearing" and be imprisoned.[12] Notably, indigenous people are absent from this delineation of punishment. Furthermore, these coverings practice being a new "habit" shows its part of a broader dress practice, most likely growing from the imposition of modesty. As the order of 1586 attempts to regulate the Other of the colonial body, this ruling associates rebocarce/rebozo with the ability to embody other identities for mestizos, Black, and mixed-race people. Blackness is regulated further in sumptuary laws, an identity that is disregarded under Mestizaje.

In 1598, Black and mixed-race people are barred from wearing silk. Women cannot wear other valuable adornments such as *"joyas mantos ni otras joyas,"* meaning, "jeweled cloaks or other jewelry/jewels"[13] However there are subsequent writings describing the dress of Black and mixed race women in Monterrey where it is clear at least some Black women did continue to wear fibers and styles outside of their casta. Moreover, exceptions are made for free Black and mixed-race women, weakening its enforceability. In this instance, Blackness must be regulated within the castas of miscegenation because it is not European nor indigenous. Once again, the attempts to stabilize the Other and discomfort at mimicry is evident.[14]

Casta genre paintings depicted women wearing rebozos often covering the hair, rebozo loosely tossed over a shoulder while the other end hangs elegantly down the front or both ends simply hanging. (fig. 2 & 3) Similar renderings include, casually or absentmindedly resting in crook of an elbow (fig. 4) or slung over the back of the shoulders and draped elegantly across the chest instead (fig. 5) Some mode of covering garment akin to this description was worn in this

[12] Ibid
[13] Gamez, "El Rebozo," 98.
[14] Ibid, 98-99.

manner by the early 17th century, according to Gamez, with frequent appearances as a noun in archival inventories past 1650.

Therefore, the adverbial use, *reboçarse*, and *reboçado*, in this excerpt of the 1629 *Treatise on Superstitions and Customs of the Indigenous Peoples Living Today Among the Native Indians of New Spain*, by Hernando Ruiz de Alacrón could be an early landmark in this shift.

This work's intended audience would be for incoming Spanish ministers, Peninsulares, and is another early use of this word outside of continental Spanish literature and documents.

> "I would also like advise on the origin and meaning of the name *nahualli*, which can be derived from one of three roots meaning: the first, to command/mandate [*mandar*]; the second, to speak with authority [*hablar con imperio*]; the third, to hide or cover oneself [*ocultarse o reboçarse*]. And although there are reasons to accept the first two meanings, I find the third more fitting, which comes from the verb *nahualtia*, meaning to hide by covering oneself with something, which is the same as *reboçarse*, and thus, *nahualli* would mean *reboçado*, or disguised under the appearance of that animal, as they commonly believe.[15]"

Ruiz establishes that the Nahuatl word, *nahualli* has dual meanings, to have power and to cover oneself. Moreover, it can be argued that although it escapes Ruiz's notice, that these meanings are intertwined. The "disguised under the appearance of that animal" is referencing Mesoamerican beliefs of Naguals, individuals that possess the ability to shapeshift into their tonal animal counterpart. Naguals are deeply powerful individuals, their power derives from this ability to become an entirely different being, an animal, an Other. The Catholic clergy saw these

[15] Ruiz "Tratado," 13.

people as evil necromancers. When Ruiz asserts this translation, he is bringing the meaning of this word in Spain and recontextualizing it in New Spain. With the imposition of Catholic day-today practices such as covering for church, the association with spirituality likely made sense to indigenous people, where covering is a form of transfiguration of the spirit and a possession of power. In this "slippery earth" effect, "modesty compliance" of indigenous people is a performance of compliance with Catholic conceptions of modesty, while defined by a subversive, wholly separate habitus, definitionally Bhaba's mimicry that wrests autonomy from affective ambivalence.[16]

> They also tend to place idols on the stones of crosses, especially those in unpopulated areas, for two reasons: firstly, because no one will suspect the mixture [*poque nadie sospechara la mezcla] quae conventio luci ad tenebras?*, [possibly a reference to Corinthians 6:14 "Be ye no unequally yoked together with unbelievers?"] and secondly, because with that covering [*con ese reboço*], they venerate and worship the idols, often placing lit candles, incense, bouquets, and other such things in front of them, as very little has been experienced at a cross in Chilapa, the capital of this district, which was frequently visited by Indians with similar offerings, so that the rock was impregnated with this infernal pestilence.[17]

This characterization that "the rock was impregnated with this infernal pestilence" or *"estaba la peaña preñada de esta pestilencia infernal."* connects the practice of covering with spiritual autonomy. Ruiz asserts that by incorporating covered idols, a veneer of a pure and unchanged Catholic ritual and worship, indigenous people have metaphysically altered and desecrated the sacred because they continue their own practices. This axis of the pure, visible,

[16] Burkart "The Slippery Earth."
[17] Ibid. 28

unchanged, and simple with the evil, impure, uncategorized, and hidden again connects to anxieties about miscegenation "infecting" European blood. Where covering practices and the body are sites of a necessity to know and catalogue. This syncretic practice still occurs in indigenous communities today. Furthermore, the idol was probably covered in fabric as well as under the "cover" of the cross, as an idol hidden in this manner is described only a few paragraphs before in the Ruiz's.[18] Considered with the timeline of widespread use of *rebozo* as a garment in the latter half of the 17th century, this also supports reading *rebozo* as simultaneously a noun and adverb, a bodily practice of mimicry, during this period. In both cases rebozo is made synonymous with a syncretization that is threatening colonial rule. This excerpt is also the most substantial evidence of the rebozo coming from religious syncretization specifically.

The strong associations between weaving, femininity and domesticity during the Aztec era solidify this reading and root the rebozo association with gender in Indigenous culture as much as Spanish. Such as post-natal Aztec rituals for infant females that culminated in the presentation of miniature spinning and weaving tools.[19] Throughout a young girl's life she would have been educated in graduated stages on every aspect of weaving, from spinning thread in a range of weights to eventually mastering the backstrap loom. Regardless of social status, all women engaged in textile production practices. The Aztec deity, Tlazolteol, "the Great Weaver," is often depicted with a cotton headdress, showing cotton at its varying stages and weaving implements.[20]

---

[18] Ruiz "Tratado," 28. *"el idolillo que era un sapillo de piedra negro enuuelto, en un trapo,"* "the little idol, which was a black stone frog wrapped in a cloth [or rag.]"

[19] Snyder "Weaving Identity," 7.
[20] Ibid, 11.

Prior to the Viceroyalty of 1535, there were hundreds of distinct indigenous cultures that paid tribute to the Aztec empire largely through textile production, but there was not a uniform indigenous culture. The Aztec system of empire centered on economic tribute, not cultural hegemony. Cotton was a luxury fiber in pre-Columbian times, subject to sumptuary laws reserved for elites. It would become the fiber of the masses with introduction of sericulture and linen as luxury goods.

Colonial labor and production

This period between 1582 and 1821 is characterized by "parallel systems of production," "factory," and home. The production modes gave indigenous people and later, mestizos, direct access to the tools for the rebozo to emerge, wherein they fashioned the mode of mimicry and embodied it.[21] Before mechanization in the mid 19th century, all fabric was produced on either foot pedal looms, *obrajes,* introduced via colonization, or backstrap looms, *otate.*[22] The *obraje* loom was part of the Spanish colonial textile system, and as such was subject to taxes and guild restrictions. Furthermore, in 1731 the silk guilds were subject to bans from using cotton, but cotton guilds were not barred from using silk.[23] This association with cotton from before colonization would continue for indigenous home textile producers and mestizo artisans operating *obrajes,* therein *otate* production had always been and would continue to be an autonomous practice of indigenous communities. These autonomous production communities didn't exist free of colonial structures, but this level of separation allowed for indigenous textile practices to continue and develop, while influencing the mestizo dress within New Spain. This is identified by Virginia Davis as a "parallel system of production." The modesty practices imposed

[21] Davis "Resist Dyeing," 311.
[22] Ibid
[23] Ibid, 312.

by the Spaniards were adopted, but not without variation. Furthermore, indigenous people produced these modesty garments for themselves and families, whereas Spaniards imported ready-made modesty garments or followed European trends.[24]

Rebozo production folds into the two broad categories delineated by Ruth Lechuga.[25] The "classic" rebozo and the "regional indigenous rebozo," here we see two axes of mestizaje for categorizing this symbol of Mexicanidad. The classic rebozo is often produced on pedal looms within the *obraje* by artisans who were almost entirely men. Mestizo, enslaved men, as well as other forced laborers such as convicts worked in *obrajes*. It is unclear if these designations were contemporary to these production methods or if they were retroactively projected unto the rebozo once its symbolic importance grew. However, given these parallel systems of production, these designations are apt descriptors and allow researchers to analyze regional indigenous rebozos within their specific indigenous cultures. Whereas the classic rebozo, *rebozo clasico* has further syncretism in design, such as the mottled "s" ikat design method from Tenancingo, which may be be inspired by the MesoAmerican cult of the serpent deity.[26]

The pre-existing textile production of the Aztec tribute system, highly developed weaving techniques, and spiritual associations that created such conditions is defined by this autonomy over production. When global influences and resources like silk, Eastern design motifs, and possible dye methods are introduced, this syncretism allows for something singular, a situated practice, to emerge. The Spaniards are replicating pre-established dress practices of modesty where, as the castas have a process of making and wearing, their histories and practices can be literally woven into the fabric, wrought into material reality. In this way, the occult associations

[24] Gamez "El Rebozo," 89.
[25] Lechuga "Indigenous Antecedents," 50.
[26] Davis "Resist Dyeing," 311

from Ruiz become even clearer. This also adds depth to the highly attuned and sophisticated mimicry practice of the rebozo.

By the late 18th century, elites in New Spain included Peninsulares and Criollos, with some mestizos. The rebozo was an embodied practice of mimicry that became multi-functional and an accessory to an outfit rather than just a modesty practice, despite its origins as such.

For the lower classes and even poor Europeans in Mexico City and other cosmopolitan centers who had to work out of the home in shops or as street vendors, they would never leave the house without their rebozos.[27] The craftsmanship of luxury rebozos and its multi-use nature associated them with femininity across casta and class. This transcendence between gender and class in turn made them extremely ubiquitous. The rebozo began to embody a woman "of the people" of the colonial body.

For elite women, it was decidedly domestic, only wearing a rebozo in the house. For elites, mantillas were for modesty in church, while rebozos provided that function for lower classes. Out of the home, elite women demonstrated wealth and status with elaborate mantillas.

Mantillas are luxurious, black lace liturgical headdress originating in Spain around 16th century. They are a modesty garment specifically for attending mass, worn on the way to services, during, and on the way home. The style of wearing them in the colonial period is noticeable and ostentatious, a conspicuous assertion of wealth due to the amount of labor and materials it took to make lace. The association with feminine piety while being an eye-catching garment that draws the eye to the face meant many artists and writers depicted them as seductive while within the bounds of propriety, (fig.6).

---

[27] Gamez "El Rebozo," 58.

This difference in class and status makes the relegation of the rebozo to the domestic sphere a practice of what Bhabha characterizes as "reverse mimicry." This distinction of public and private is probably rooted in Spanish conceptions of femininity, wherein a woman of status was "of the house." In other words, she was beholden to her family to uphold rigid moral values of modesty and privacy. Of course, women with such high standards still dressed in a degree of modesty in the home or with other hair covering, where it wouldn't be an assertion of identity in the way it is for mestizo, indigenous, or mixed-race women. Essentially, if the rebozo is the garment non-European women need to leave the house, European women cannot leave the house wearing it.

Furthermore, Criollos and Peninsulares' rebozos would have an entirely different relationship to production than mestizo artisans or indigenous production communities. A unique facet of this reverse mimicry is the commissioning of commemorative rebozos. These rebozos would be specifically woven on an *obraje*, allowing for wider weft threads than could be achieved on a backstrap loom. Negative space would be woven into the design; thereafter embellished with a city scape, folk scenes, and/or naturalistic elements. (fig. 7) There is some dispute if the embroidery were done by the women themselves, as needlework was a feminine accomplishment of the elite, or if the embroidery was also commissioned.[28] It is likely that both occurred. Considered in conjunction with similar paintings (fig. 8) where the colonial body, the public, are narrativized and regulated, the reverse mimetic practice can be read as an attempt to embody what it means to be of New Spain from within the confines of her social status.[29] It belonged to the owner, so luxurious and delicate she could only wear it a few times. It is an assertion of right

[28] Ibid, 120.
[29] Carrera. "Imagining Identity," Chapter 4

to land or colonial society. Even still, this reverse mimicry practice contains syncretic imagery of indigenous and early colonial codices.[30] (fig.9)

Women wearing rebozos are even depicted on commemorative rebozos like the rebozo in Parham Park, West Sussex and at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (fig. 7) (fig. 9). This is some of the few, if only depictions of the rebozo either by or for some of the people who wore them. It is a fascinating dialogic between the classes.

Furthermore, these works are dated among growing tensions between Peninsulares and Criollos leading up to Independence and thereafter. In this context, the reverse mimicry is a reconfiguration of Self/Other amid rising criollo nationalism, *Criolloismo*.[31] These tensions would result in the expulsion of Peninsulares between 1821 and 1837. The criollos sought a Self in the relation to colonial Other in which they hoped to wrest from the Peninsulares. When the reality of affective ambivalence resulted in "mutual conditioning among the groups" of lateral and reciprocal practices of rebozos, and well everything.[32]

Part II – Post Independence: Constructing Mexicanidad

Following the Independence in 1821, Mexico entered a period of extreme political and economic instability as elites scrabbled over control of a country with vast natural resources and

[30] Sayer, "Costumes of Mexico," 50 – 51.
[31] Ibid 120
[32] Snyder "Weaving Identity," 31

an unestablished independent presence in a modern economy. This period of liminality between colony to nation state was taking place amid the Romantic era of literature and art, wherein the narrativized Traveler-Reporter categorizations of the "castas" of the late 18th century continued and were built upon by Costumbrismo works of art and literature.[33] With the ever-burning anxiety of miscegenation, these works were another attempt to narrativize and regulate the "Other" through the articulation, visualization, and reification of archetypes based on the voyeuristic fantasies and imagined narrative from these European traveler reporters. Moreover, Costumbrismo works emerged as Mexicans reckoned with the crumbling colonial articulations of Self/Other while influenced by the voyeurism of European artists and consumers of these works, reinforcing colonial archetypes or personifications.[34]

Amid these massive cultural shifts, waves of regulation to the textile industry attempted to establish a foothold in the global market. Among these was the 1834 ban on imported "rebozo cloth." Lucas asserts that this ban essentialized and defined the rebozo as Mexican, moreover, it is a national commodity.[35] The rebozos shift from an embodied practice of mimicry for the colonial body into a noun through the combination of cultural myths and industrialization amid an emerging system of Mestizaje.

Frances Calderon De la Barca's *Life in Mexico*, originally published in 1843 is a collection of letters De La Barca, the wife of a government minister, penned from 1839-1842 detailing her life in Mexico City and her travels throughout Mexico. She makes numerous references to rebozos that adequately capture the cultural space in the decades following independence.

---

[33] Moriuchi, "Mexican Costumbrismo," 42.
[34] Snyder, "Weaving Identity," 31.
[35] Gamez, "El Rebozo," 64.

On numerous occasions De la Barca associates the rebozo with the deviance of lower classes, and "the greatest cloak for all untidiness, uncombed hair and raggedness, that ever was invented."[36] She characterizes it as "in itself graceful and convenient" but that this ability to cloak engenders an "indolence of the toilette" even among the elite.[37] Upon the wrong body, this covering belies criminality. In this she includes the *sarape,* a male equivalent to the rebozo, that these garments create opportunity for "concealing large knives about the person, as also for enveloping both face and figure so as to be scarcely recognizable, is no doubt the cause of the many murders which take place amongst the lower orders, in moments of excitement and drunkenness."[38] Considered in conjunction with the 1791 case of both garments creating cause for barred entry to church, the case remains that these syncretic garments maintained associations with the colonial body. The Other was established early in the colonial period. The volume of references to the rebozo captures its utter ubiquity at this point, describing all manner of women wearing them, nannies, rancheras and of course, Poblanas. The Romantic, sexualized archetype of a mestiza woman was described in a feast day celebration, captivating Calderon de la Barca.

By the mid 19th century, the rebozo was a garment synonymous with miscegenation, which is becoming increasingly prescribed as Mestizaje. *Poblanas* by Carl Nebel (fig.11) depicts the archetype of *La China Poblana*, a beautiful Mestiza, independent by virtue of her status. She is free to work and be in public spaces, signaled through the group of women smoking and chatting. To the European audiences of Traveler-reporters, her desirability is rooted in her personification of exotic Other due to her mixed heritage. Her costume originates from the

[36] De la Barca, "Life in Mexico," 150
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

women of Puebla, over time becoming a national dress costume as opposed to the mestizo communities of Puebla. Her rebozo is an essential accessory, a unique result of miscegenation as is mestiza herself, its ubiquity rendering it instantly recognizable. Its colors and drape framing her attractive face make it flirtatious and coy.[39] Through this imagery, the *China Poblana* and rebozo mutually define each other as embodiments of *la gente* or "the people."

Calderon de la Barca herself, being from Scotland and only living in Mexico for a short while, considers dressing as a *China Poblana* for a costume ball with government elites, much to the excitement and anxiety of her social circle as this information quickly spreads.[40] Beforehand, she had extensively cataloged the dress of *Poblanas* in a parade during a feast day, speculating on their enormous monetary value. She confesses her admiration for the beauty of the costume on numerous occasions. Upon hearing of her intention, she is visited by two women from Puebla who teach her how achieve the hairstyle and nuances of the look, who were "much pleased at the idea of [her] going in a *Poblana* dress."[41] She also receives an exquisite version of the costume from another woman of society for this event.

However, upon hearing of her intention for her costume she was visited by the Mexican ministers of War and Interior as well as the Secretary of State who told her that by no means could she go to the ball dressed this way. She then receives letters from unintroduced known women in society who express this same warning. Astonishingly, she receives another letter from an elderly busybody character of society who tells her that "the dress of a *Poblana* is that of a woman of no character. The lady of the Spanish minister is a lady in every sense of the word.

[39] Moriuchi, "Mexican Costumbrismo," 42.
[40] Calderon de la Barca, "Life in Mexico," 70.
[41] Ibid

However much she may have compromised herself, she ought neither to go as a *Poblana,* nor in any other character but her own."[42]

These diametrically opposed reactions between the community people around de la Barca and the government and social elites, combined with the extremity of her social circle's opposition highlights, are indicative of a deeply unstable political climate grappling with a post-colonial identity crisis. Her race and sociopolitical position as the wife of a minister make her intention to embody an archetype "of the people" entirely out of the question. This would have been a gross transgression of the social order which is wholly unacceptable amid numerous popular uprisings while elites fight over political dominance in order to control capital, resources, land, and industry. This period is characterized by this unknown; what will represent and define the Mexican nation?

In the mid-19th century, we see the nascent stages of Mestizaje; imaginary and constructed, it is predestined outcome where the Other is finally conquered, civilized by establishing a mestizo hegemony.

The word *mestizaje* literally means miscegenation, a descriptor of the phenomena of racial mixing. This *mezcla*; mixing, results in syncretic dress practices of mimicry that threatened the very colonial structures that created them. Mestizaje is a 20th century ideology and social framework that structuralizes an imagined version of Mexico wherein the violent and brutal "original sin" of colonialism results in "*La Raza,*" a new race of mestizos that are a mixture of the European and Indigenous. It operates on an axis of civilized and powerful European on one end with the Romantic, crafty while lazy, and magical Indigenous on the other. This framing

[42] Ibid, 71.

specifically and purposefully rebukes the deviant Other in the form of ‘untamed’ indigeneity and the very existence of Blackness.

It cannibalizes, to borrow from Andrade, the indigenous to create a new ‘body’ of Mestizos, Spaniard and indigenous in one, woven together so to speak. In turn, the existence, autonomy, and culture of indigenous people is in a way, antithetical. Mestizaje is ritual of miscegenation. If defines its transformation into Self, the dominant group, through an integrated mimicry of the same social inequalities that defined and created it, much as Criolloismo sought to do with reverse mimicry before it.

Moreover, Mestizaje justifies and maintains a Capitalist class system of gross wealth inequality through the exploitation of indigenous people and poor Mestizos. It is the pretense for stealing Indigenous land and resources by abusing already inadequate legal and political protections for Indigenous groups. It justifies the brutally violent maintenance of this structure as maintaining peace and protecting Mexican society from the dangerous and rebellious Indigenous. It entirely excludes and erases the contributions of Black Mexicans from history and culture, selecting for the right kind of indigenous people who integrate into mestizo hegemony.

Before 1850, the narratives, imagery, and myths of La Raza are being created through archetypes like La China Poblana. This archetype inherently carries the voyeuristic and perverse projections of Europeans coming to Mexico during the late colonial period, and is in part defined by her rebozo, at once an instrument of seduction and an embodiment of an essential Mexicanness. Still, despite these transformations, it remains a situated bodily practice of dress, an embodiment of identity created by the actual women who came before La China Poblana, and one that will outlive her through the continued production of rebozos by indigenous and mestizo artisans and the wearing of rebozos by *Mexicanas* and Mexican Americans.

Figures

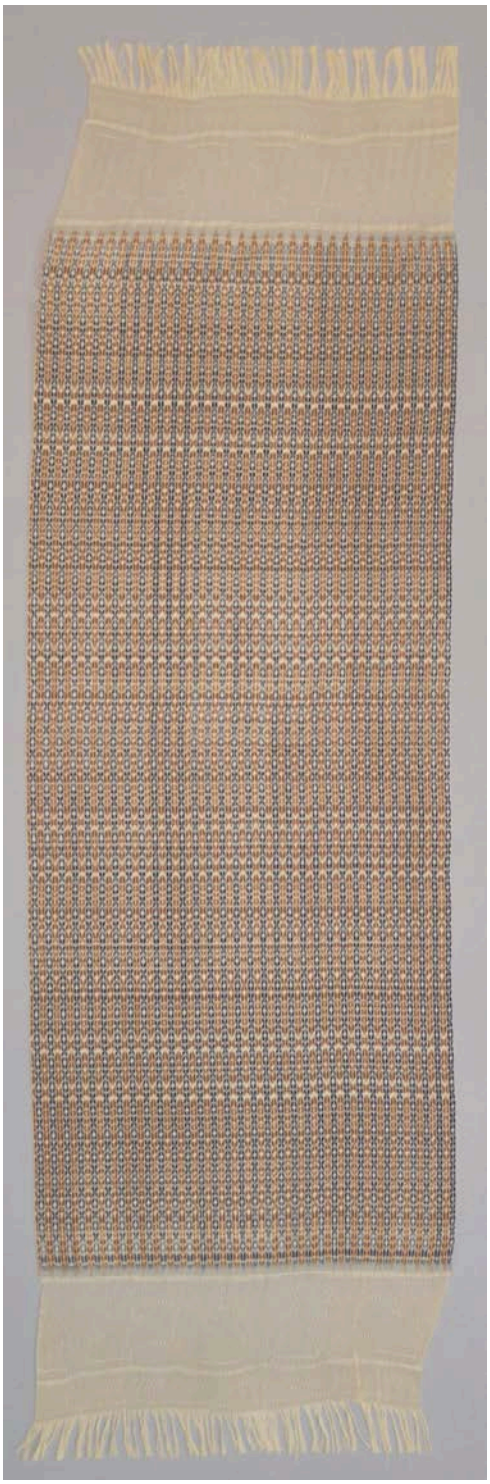


Figure 1 Rebozo 1980s. Toluca de Ledro. 231 cm x 69 cm Chloe Sayer Collection British Museum



Figure 2 Pierre-Frederic Lehnert, Gente Del Pueblo, Plaza Mayor y Catedral de Mexico 19th century. lithograph and water color, 33cm x 44cm



Figure 3, August Wahlen, Femme de Puebla 1844. Lithograph



Figure 4 Manuel Serrano, El baile circa 1850. oil on canvas, 45 x 56 cm



Figure 5 Juan Rodriguez Juárez, Dama Con Rebozo 18th century. oil on canvas



Figure 6 Carl Nebel La Mantilla.Traje por la Manana, 1836. Lithograph, color.



Copyright Parham Park Ltd - 2005

Figure 7 Rebozo Santa Maria Del Rio, 1790. Silk with gold and silver. Collection at Parham Park, West Sussex, England.

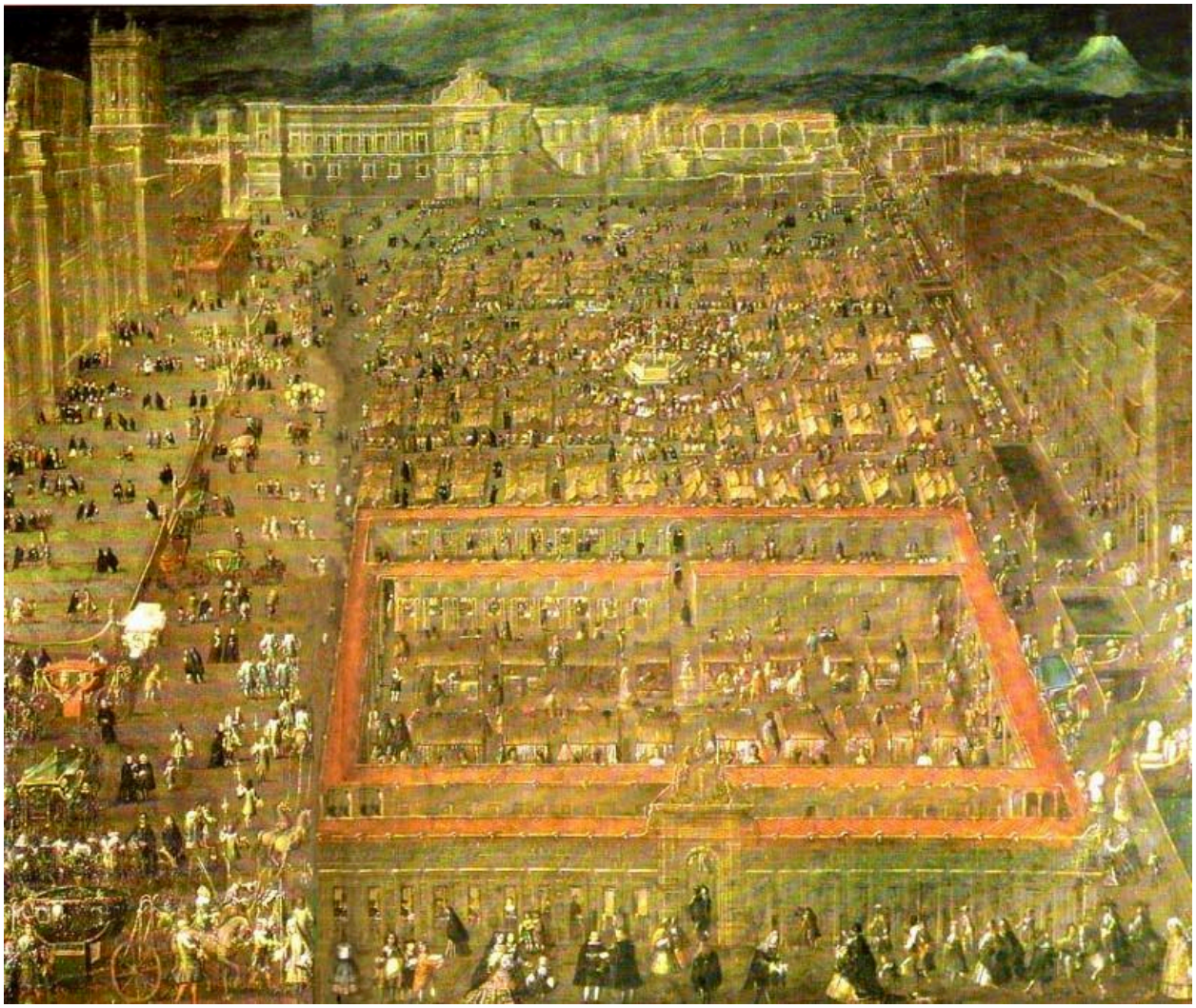
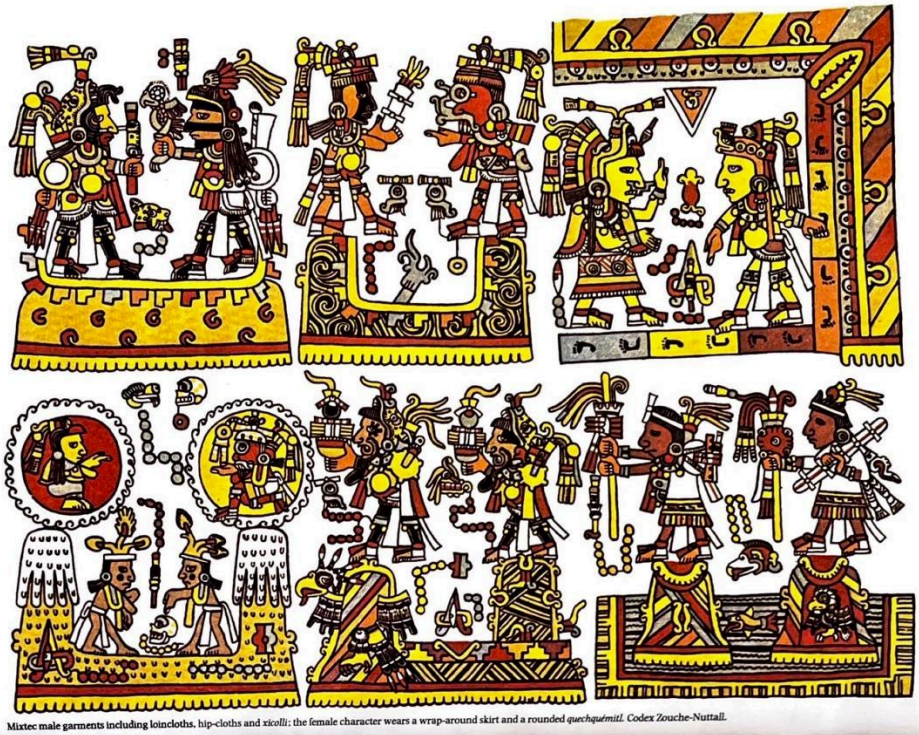


Figure 8 Cristóbal de Villalpando, View of the Plaza Mayor of Mexico City, c. 1695, oil on canvas (Corsham Court Collection, Wiltshire



Mixtec male garments including loincloths, hip-cloths and *xicolli*; the female character wears a wrap-around skirt and a rounded *quechquémitl*. Codex Zouche-Nuttall.



End section of a silk-embroidered linen *rebozo* from the mid-18th century depicting life in Mexico City. W. 28½ in (27 cm); L. 87 in (242 cm). Parham Park.

Figure 9 Scan of Costumes of Mexico, Chloe Sayer 1985. pg 50 - 51



Figure 10 Rebozo 18th century. Silk embroidered with cotton, silk, and metallic thread Philadelphia Museum of Art



Figure 11 Carl Nebel, Poblanas, 1836. lithograph, color. Library of Congress

Bibliography

Burkhart, Louise M. *The Slippery Earth: Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989.

Calderon de la Barca, Frances. *Life in Mexico*. University of California Press, 1982.

"Chapter 4: Regulating and Narrating the Colonial Body." In *Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings*, by Magali Marie Carrera. University of Texas Press, 2021. https://doi.org/10.7560/712454.

Davis, Virginia. "Resist Dyeing in Mexico: Comments on Its History, Significance, and Prevalence." In *Textile Traditions of Mesoamerica and the Andes: An Anthology*, edited by Margot Blum Schevill, Janet Catherine Berlo, and Edward B. Dwyer. University of Texas Press, 1991.

Entwistle, Joanne. "Fashion and the Fleshy Body: Dress as Embodied Practice." *Fashion Theory* 4, no. 3 (2000): 323–47. https://doi.org/10.2752/136270400778995471.

Gámez Martínez, Ana. "The Rebozo: Historiographic Study, Origin and Use (El Rebozo: Estudio Historiográfico, Origen y Uso)." Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México, Ciudad México.

Lechuga, Ruth. "Indigenous Antecedents of the Rebozo." In *Rebozos de La Coleccion Robert Everts (Rebozos from the Collection of Robert Everts) (Coleccion Uso Y Estilo) (Spanish and English Edition)*. Artes De Mexico, 1997.

Lucas Estrada, Fanny. "CODIFICACIÓN Y DIFUSIÓN DEL REBOZO DE TENANCINGO DESDE EL PROCESO DE DISEÑO" M.A (Maestría en Diseño), Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México, 2018.

Moriuchi, Mey-Yen. *Mexican costumbrismo: Race, society, and identity in Nineteenth-Century art*. Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018.

Ruiz de Alarcón, Hernando, and Elena MA Garza S. de la. *Tratado de las supersticiones y costumbres gentílicas que hoy viven entre los indios naturales desta Nueva España: escrito en 1629*. Cien de México. Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1988.

Sayer, Chloë. *Costumes of Mexico*. 1st ed. University of Texas Press, 1985.

Snyder, Karli. "Weaving Identity and Resistance in Colonial New Spain: Colonization, Women, and Textile Art in Colonial Mexico." *Ampersand: An American Studies Journal* II, no. 2 (2023). https://sites.bu.edu/ampersandjournal/2023/09/06/karli-snyder/#_edn94.