

# The Role of Republican Spain and the Spanish Civil War in Reaffirming Mexican Hispano-American Identity, 1931-39

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The Spanish Civil War (1936-39) was, to varying degrees, a domestic and foreign-policy issue in each of the Spanish-speaking nations of the Western hemisphere, but in none more so than in Mexico. By 1936 it was the only Latin American country to have had a social revolution and under leftist president Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40) it was the only in the region to give military aid and diplomatic support to the Spanish government during the war.<sup>1</sup> At first glance this aid and support is surprising considering that Mexico was the setting for the most developed challenge to *hispanismo* at the national level in Latin America since independence. One political/cultural expression of this was *indigenismo* – the championing of the indigenous half of *mestizo* identity over the Hispanic half. This process had been underway since the 1920s and was a strong movement by the 1930s.<sup>2</sup> Revolutionary leaders denigrated the Spanish colonial legacy and associated it with what they saw as the evils of clericalism, aristocratic oppression, and political conservatism. After the revolution, criticism of Spanish tradition was prominent among government officials and their supporters, especially leftist intellectuals and working-class organizations.<sup>3</sup> In many cases disdain for Spanish tradition translated into distrust of and bigotry against Spaniards, maligned as *gachupines*, on both sides of the Atlantic.

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<sup>1</sup> Mexico and the Soviet Union were the only two nations that had had major revolutions by the 1930s and likewise were alone in supplying formal aid Spain during the war. Mexico refused to follow either French and British non-intervention proposals or neutrality put forth by the United States arguing such stances gave tacit support to the Nationalists and that neutrality was not a proper policy in a conflict between an elected government and a military junta in revolt. Other Latin American governments acted with relative indifference toward the conflict.

<sup>2</sup> *Indigenismo* goes back much farther in Mexican history than the 1920s, but for the purposes of this study it is treated in its post-revolutionary version.

<sup>3</sup> T.G. Powell, "Mexico," in *The Spanish Civil War, 1936-39: American Hemispheric Perspectives*, ed. Mark Falcoff and Fredrick B. Pike (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 53.

When the Spanish Republic was established in 1931, it changed the negative image many Mexicans had of Spain. It offered a version of an acceptable *país hermano* against which all the ills that had hence characterized the former colonial metropole could be contrasted. As such it came to be embraced and incorporated into the way many Mexicans viewed themselves both as a nation and as individuals. Mexicans could finally identify with this ‘other’ progressive Spain and cite it as a source of many of their values. The military revolt led by General Franco was therefore understood as not just a fascist assault on a legitimate civilian government, but also as the resurgence of a belligerent tradition and retrograde conservative values; everything that the Mexican state was actively rejecting as it decided the place of *hispanismo* within its own national culture. The defense of the Republic during the Civil War was thus for many Mexicans as much a personal endeavor as a political one.

This essay analyzes the Spanish Civil War from the point of view of post-revolutionary Mexico’s quest for national and cultural identity. Based largely on memoirs and correspondence produced by Mexican participants in the conflict, it argues that the Spanish Civil War was an opportunity for many Mexicans to (re)connect to the Spanish half of their *mestizo* Mexican identity. To this end, it aims to shed light on heretofore overlooked cultural motivations for support of the Spanish Republican government by Mexicans.

Besides well-known political and ideological notions of ‘socialism’, ‘anti-fascism’, the defense of democracy, and ‘revolution’ which, either together or separately, served to motivate most foreigners who participated in the Civil War, Latin Americans had the additional impetus of cultural and linguistic ties to Spain. Mexicans were doubly exceptional in that their country was the only one where a revolutionary government was in power and where the long-presumed virtue of Spanish traditions within Hispano-American culture was being aggressively challenged. In the process, much of what *hispanidad* represented was scorned. Nonetheless, an affinity for Spain and a longing to maintain a connection to the

Hispanic half of their mixed heritage existed even among many Mexicans who promoted *indigenismo*. Spain's transition to what was viewed from Mexico as a modern progressive republic provided that opportunity. As T.G. Powell explains, “[m]any Mexicans greeted the new Spanish Republic enthusiastically because its liberal-left government (1931-33) appeared committed to social programs similar to those of the Revolution[...]<sup>4</sup> In other words, Spain was redeemed precisely because it had become more like Mexico and less like its old self. As Octavio Paz – who traveled there in 1937 during the height of the war – explained, “for us the Spanish Civil War was the conjunction of a Spain open to the outside world.... *For the first time, the Hispanic tradition was not an obstacle but rather a change toward modernity* (italics added).”<sup>5</sup>

For many years now historians have examined Mexico’s role in the Spanish Civil War. These studies have tended to focus on either Mexico’s political, military, and diplomatic support for the Republic both before and during the war, or on the experiences of Spanish Republican exiles in Mexico after the war’s end.<sup>6</sup> Within this second focus, a few recent studies have examined the question of national identity within the broader context of the shared Mexican and Spanish historical legacy. For example, Francie Cate-Arries argues that “if Mexico as Cortes’ Conquered Native Other defined the Spanish nation as Empire in the

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<sup>4</sup> Powell, “Mexico,” 55.

<sup>5</sup> Octavio Paz, *Itinerario* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993), 51-52. “Para nosotros, la guerra civil española fue la conjunción de una España abierta al exterior... Por primera vez, la tradición hispánica no era un obstáculo sino un cambio hacia la modernidad.” I have included the original text in footnotes for most translated quotations except those that are direct translations of short passages or from well-known sources.

<sup>6</sup> For examples from the first group see, Louis Elwyn Smith, *Mexico and the Spanish Republicans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955); T.G. Powell, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981); José Antonio Matesanz, *Las raíces de exilio: México ante la guerra civil española, 1936-1939* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México; Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1999); and Mario Ojeda Revah, *México y la guerra civil española* (Madrid: Turner Publicaciones, 2004). For studies on Republican exiles in Mexico see, Patricia Fagen, *Exiles and Citizens: Spanish Republicans in Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973); Ascensión H. de León-Portilla, *España desde México: Vida y testimonio de transterrados* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1978); and Dolores Pla Brugat, *Els exiliats catalans: Un estudio de la emigración republicana en México* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia; Libros de Umbral, 1999). For obvious reasons works on Mexico dominate the literature on Latin America and the Spanish Civil War. Nonetheless, a few decent studies exist that take a hemispheric approach. See Falcoff and Pike’s collection cited above; also Geraldo Gino Baumann, *Los voluntarios latinoamericanos en la guerra civil española* (San José C.R.: Editorial Guayacán, 1997).

sixteenth century, four hundred years later post-revolutionary Mexico again functions as a vehicle of self-formation in the imagination of the exiled Spanish writers.”<sup>7</sup> Like Cate-Arries’ article, this study is principally concerned with the (re)evaluation of national identity that took place due to the renewed relationship between the former Colony and Empire enabled first by the Mexican revolution and then by the conflict in Spain. Importantly, the impact of this relationship was felt on *both* sides of the Atlantic: just as “Mexico” served to mend a “shattered postwar Spanish Republican exile identity” with the “revitalizing embrace of a new transnational community of Hispanic solidarity,” the defense of the Republic during the Spanish Civil War was for Mexicans as well “a vehicle of self-formation” that revitalized, if briefly, *hispanismo* as an integral part of *mestizo* Mexican identity.<sup>8</sup> By positioning “Spain” within the self-reflecting gaze of revolutionary Mexico, this essay addresses a heretofore neglected cultural aspect of what was a mutually sustaining relationship between post-revolutionary Mexicans and Spanish Republicans. Just as the historical circumstances that reunited Spain and Mexico during the 1930s reshaped Spanish exile identity, so too did they impact Mexican notions of *lo mexicano*.

This phenomenon is here considered within two separate frames of analysis. The first deals with the socio-political environment in post-revolutionary Mexico into which the Spanish Civil War was integrated. The second looks at the experiences of Mexicans who, conditioned by this environment, went to Spain in solidarity with the Republic during the Civil War. In synthesis, these considerations invert the focus of the dominant historiographical paradigm by explaining the Spanish Civil War’s role in Mexico rather than Mexico’s role in the Spanish Civil War.

### ***Indigenismo, Hispanismo, Hispanophobia, and Spain’s Place in Mexican Identity***

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<sup>7</sup> Francie Cate-Arries, “Conquering Myths: The Construction of ‘Mexico’ in the Spanish Republican Imaginary of Exile,” *Hispanic Review* 68 (Summer, 2000): 225. See also, Sebastiaan Faber, “Between Cernuda’s Paradise and Buñuel’s Hell: Mexico through Spanish Exiles’ Eyes,” *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 80 (2003): 219-39.

<sup>8</sup> Cate-Arries, “Conquering Myths,” 225.

In 1950, thirteen years after traveling to Spain as a member of the *Liga de escritores y artistas revolucionarios* (LEAR), famous Mexican poet and intellectual Octavio Paz wrote *El laberinto de la soledad*, his most influential treatment of Mexican cultural identity. It is a highly useful tool for understanding the history of *mestizaje* in Mexico and, though written well after the Spanish Republic was vanquished by Franco, it is relevant to this study because it traces the roots of the problem of Mexican identity back to the first encounter between Spaniards and Amerindians. The continual polemics of Spain's place in Mexican identity addressed by Paz in 1950 were revitalized by the Mexican Revolution and the period of renewed Mexican contact with Spain during the 1930s.

One example from the book is the binary paradigm of La Malinche/Hernán Cortés. Mexico's indigenous half is personified by La Malinche – the corrupted name that the female Indian *Malinali* or *Malintzin* has come to be known by – who, through her relationship with the conquistador Cortés, was the mother of the first *mestizo*; and as such is the figurative mother of Mexico.<sup>9</sup> Her legacy is a negative one – that of the docile, traitorous, and submissive (female) Indian – the details of which, apocryphal or not, have had far reaching implications for Mexican identity. It is the source of the derogatory adjective *malinchista*, meaning “sellout” or “traitor.” Likewise her legacy is juxtaposed with the Hispanic half of the Mexican identity; that of the conqueror who dominates La Malinche (and, thusly, all indigenous Mexicans). According to Paz, this first encounter led to a nation born of a violation and created a legacy of a people who desire to live closed off from the outside world and from their past.<sup>10</sup> Self-deprecating shouts of *¡Viva México! ¡Hijos de la Chingada!*, express this anguished origin: “With this shout we condemn our origin and reject our hybridism. The strange persistence of Córtes and of La Malinche in the imagination and

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<sup>9</sup> There is, however, no historical evidence that La Malinche actually bore Cortés' child.

<sup>10</sup> Octavio Paz, *El laberinto de la soledad y otras obras* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 98-111.

sensibility of modern Mexicans reveals that they are more than historical figures: they are symbols of a secret conflict that we have yet to resolve.”<sup>11</sup>

While for Paz this conflict remained unresolved in 1950, during the 1920s and 30s, attempts were made to resolve it through *indigenismo*. Although peripheral to this study, it is worth mentioning that the merits of this movement and its success are still debated by scholars.<sup>12</sup> It is sufficient here to understand that by 1931 it bore significant weight in debate around Mexican cultural and national identity. However, as will be shown, after 1931 the Spanish Republic, and its later defense during the Spanish Civil War, were major influences on this process that brought *hispanismo* back into the discussion in a more positive light than it had had in Mexico’s recent past.

During the Cárdenas *sexenio* (1934-1940), *indigenismo* shifted from a merely assimilationist movement, as it had been during the 1920s, to a radical reassessment of national identity characterized by, according to Alexander Dawson, “a growing assertion of the inherent values of Indian cultures, and later of Indian values themselves.”<sup>13</sup> The idealized Indian was a political model not just a cultural icon; a model of the revolutionary Mexican and a central member of the nation.<sup>14</sup> President Cárdenas, literally the central member of the nation, even named his son “Cuauhtémoc” after Mexico’s last Aztec ruler and leader of the last viable rebellion against the Spanish. The converse of this was the denigration of the Spanish socio-cultural legacy in Mexico. This was nothing new to Mexico, but it was applied with renewed vigor in the 1920s and 30s where, for example, public education and government supported labor federations became prominent vehicles for the mass-dissemination of hispanophobic rhetoric. In short, as Mexican leaders forced their nation’s

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 111.

<sup>12</sup> For a brief summary of the parameters of this debate see, Alexander S. Dawson, “From Models for the Nation to Model Citizens: Indigenismo and the ‘Revindication’ of the Mexican Indian, 1920-40,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30 (May 1998): 282-83.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 283-84.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

identity through the sieve of *indigenismo*, its Hispanic attributes were increasing filtered out and discarded.

Of course this privileging of the Indian over the European could not, in a few years, replace centuries of Spain's preeminence as a source of culture. Hispanism and Hispanophobia were complex and interrelated issues. For example, Elena Garro, who was married to Paz and accompanied him on his 1937 LEAR trip, remembered a curious scene where Mexicans, having heard of war in Spain, turned up at the embassy to enroll in the Spanish army. When asked by embassy functionaries (rhetorically, it would seem) which side they intended to fight for, the answer was: "Whichever, all we want is to go kill *gachupines*." Once in Spain, she related this and other anecdotes – such as her childhood memories of hometown "gritos" of "¡Viva Mexico!...¡Viva!" immediately followed by "¡Mueran los gachupines!...¡Mueran!" – to her Spanish comrades.<sup>15</sup> Though Garro does not say so explicitly, it is plausible that her purpose in sharing these stories, both while in Madrid and later in her memoir, was to contrast her love of Spain with the popular hispanophobia of her countrymen; her rejection of which was implied by her solidarity with the Republic. By doing so, she demonstrated her discomfort with the extirpation of *hispanidad* from Mexican identity and, therefore, the Republic's role as a solution to this dilemma. In a broader sense, these examples also attest to the deep-rooted bias against Spaniards in general, even among the very same people who had enthusiastically made the Spanish cause their own.<sup>16</sup>

Anti-Spanish sentiment persisted even as Mexico opened its arms to tens of thousands of Spanish Republican refugees. As Sebastiaan Faber explains, newly-arrived *peninsulares* found it difficult to reconcile how they understood their nation's legacy with "its representation in the grand narrative of Mexico's national history. Even the most progressive

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<sup>15</sup> Elena Garro, *Memorias de España 1937* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1992), 7.

<sup>16</sup> Perhaps Paz's critique is applicable here as well: Mexicans who ridiculed Spaniards while nonetheless identifying with the *causa española* were merely engaging in the same self-rejection they had always practiced. "El mexicano y la mexicanidad se definen como ruptura y negación." (*El laberinto*, 112.) In any case, it would still exemplify Spain's place in Mexican Hispano-American identity.

Spaniards had never thought of Hernán Cortés as anything other than a national hero. The Mexicans, in turn, did not know any better: all Spaniards were bloodsuckers or *gachupines*, the villains of their history books.<sup>17</sup> Although *indigenismo* was not in and of itself anti-Spanish, it was foreign to the exiles who “had a hard time accepting the prominence given to Mexico’s indigenous heritage in the nationalist discourse of the revolutionary regime.”<sup>18</sup> Though it is important to recognize this anti-Spanish facet of Mexican nationalism, which had been present since independence, it must be emphasized that it did not impede either Mexican support for the Republic or Spain’s renewed place in Mexico’s national identity. Rather, it further demonstrates the complexity of the approach to *hispanidad* in post-revolutionary Mexico.

In contrast to these popular expressions of anti-Spanish sentiment, conservative middle- and upper-class Catholics (many of whom were Spaniards living in Mexico) who had always venerated Spanish tradition continued to do so. The leftist view of this class as a domestic enemy, in turn, fueled much of the anti-Spanish rhetoric in Mexico. This rhetoric found its way into the public school curriculum under the direction of the Marxist-dominated Secretaría de Educación Pública. Another Marxist, labor leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano, wrote regular columns in *El Universal* denouncing Mexico’s Spanish colony and Hispanophile Catholic church as obstacles to proletarian interests.<sup>19</sup>

Yet these same left-wing groups and labor unions were some of the Republic’s biggest supporters in Mexico. Néstor Sánchez Hernández, who at seventeen left his home in Oaxaca for Madrid as a volunteer, recalls that “a powerful railway union” helped subsidize his trip because he, according to the union, “believed in the Spanish cause and wanted to go to

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<sup>17</sup> Faber, “Between Cernuda’s Paradise and Buñuel’s Hell,” 221.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> For examples of both anti-Spanish questions in public school examination books and Lombardo’s relationship to the Mexican press, see Powell, “Mexico,” 53.

defend Madrid.”<sup>20</sup> As Powell relates, “[i]f the Revolution had generally heightened such anti-traditional, anti-Spanish feelings, it had also made widespread sympathy for Spain’s new Republic possible in Mexico.”<sup>21</sup> Mexicans saw the struggles and goals of their revolution in those of the Republic, which reinforced Spain’s place in Mexican identity. Sánchez cites his emotion after viewing a ballet depicting the heroism of Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata in Mexico City’s National Stadium as a principle motivation for his decision to fight in Spain: “that marvelous ballet [...] so moved me that it reinforced more than ever among my most elemental ideals the intention of someday running toward wherever liberty and justice of man was threatened, so as to join the fight for their defense.”<sup>22</sup> The artistic (i.e. cultural) representation of his own history, of what he understood as *lo mexicano*, connected him to the defense of Spain.

Still others in Mexico embraced their Hispanic heritage as a bulwark against alleged plots to “dehispanize” Mexican culture.<sup>23</sup> One interesting proponent of this was Blanca Trejo, a Mexican journalist who traveled to Spain during the Civil War. In her answer to a letter writer who had asked her the significance of the Republican cause, she responded:

You know that I have carried the drama of the Spanish people in my soul and that because of this I have been saddened, because to feel it, it is not necessary to be a communist but rather to have a capacity of heart. Heart! The organ that encourages our being and where the racial, historical, and idiomatic unity that Spain gave us meets; the origin of that which the politics of the “Bad Neighbor” attempts to separate us from, dehispanoamericanizing us in order to focus our attention and contain our interests and feelings on the cold blunt mercantilist reality of *Yanquilandia*.

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<sup>20</sup> Néstor Sánchez Hernández, *Un mexicano en la guerra civil española y otros recuerdos* (Oaxaca: Carteles Editores, 1997), 95.

<sup>21</sup> Powell, “Mexico,” 53.

<sup>22</sup> Sánchez, *Un mexicano en la guerra civil española*, 86. “...aquel maravilloso ballet...me emocionó tanto [sic] que fincó más aún en mis elementales ideales el propósito de algún día correr hasta donde la libertad y la justicia para los hombres estuviera amenazada, para sumarme a su lucha por defenderlas.”

<sup>23</sup> Powell, “Mexico,” 52.

Trejo concluded her impassioned critique by lamenting that the United States threatened to stab the “heart of [Latin] America which is the same as the heart of Spain!”<sup>24</sup> Trejo’s reflections are important because, besides demonstrating that Hispanism was multi-faceted and applied for different purposes, they also confirm the role of the Spanish Civil War – in this case experienced first-hand – in reaffirming Hispanic identity in Mexico. It would be much more difficult to imagine this stance had the Republic never existed to shatter the traditional image of Spain. Trejo does not lament the “demestization” of Mexico. Nor does she mention indigenous identity as being threatened by *yanqui* imperialism; both of which may have been her focus in the absence of an acceptable version of Spain to make Hispano-Americanism worthwhile. Instead, *hispanidad* is here the essence of Mexican identity. That Trejo directly relates its defense with the “drama of the Spanish people,” that is, the defense of the Republic, again demonstrates its role in “rehispanoamericanizing” Mexican identity.

Also important is her use of human anatomy, the heart, to symbolize the connection between Mexico and Spain. *Hispanidad* is vital to Mexicaness, just as the heart is vital to human life. The one is subsumed in and sustains the other, and any attempt to remove it will destroy the whole body. Another example comes from Alfonso Reyes, who Powell describes as “[o]ne of Mexico’s most prominent liberal Hispanists,” who “concluded that Spain’s many problems could be solved by the moderate left.”<sup>25</sup> In 1932 Reyes wrote, “When I turn my eyes to my land, I see it, and I understand it as such a natural prolongation of Spain! Going to Spain was for me entering more into Mexico. The two loves are fused within me and nothing

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<sup>24</sup> Blanca Lydia Trejo, *Lo que vi en España* (Mexico City: Editorial Polis, 1940), 9-10. “Tú sabes que el drama del pueblo español lo he llevado en el alma y que por eso me he vuelto triste, porque para sentirlo, no precisa ser comunista sino tener capacidad de corazón. ¡Corazón! Víscera que alienta nuestro ser y en donde concurre la unidad racial, histórica e idiomática que nos dio España, matriz de la que pretende desligarnos la política del ‘Mal Vecino’ deshispanoamericanizándonos para enfocar nuestra atención y encuadrar nuestros intereses y sentimientos en la fría y contundente realidad mercantilista de Yanquilandia. ¡Puñalada trapera asentada al corazón de América que es el corazón de España!”

<sup>25</sup> Powell, “Mexico,” 52.

will be able to separate them.”<sup>26</sup> For Reyes, the two countries are physically connected with each other as well as incorporated into his being. As seen here and again below, the theme of physical connection with Spain is prevalent in the Spanish Civil War narrative produced by Mexicans.

Finally, after 1931 there was an obvious symmetry between the progressive political goals of the revolutionary Mexican government and its Spanish counterpart which motivated the former’s political, military, and diplomatic support for the latter. Before the war, the Mexican government had been alienated from the international status-quo owing to its “revolutionary” reputation. It was alone in a region where governments led by conservative oligarchs were the norm. The ruling Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR) was criticized for its leftist rhetoric and attacks on Catholicism among other things. Spain found itself in a similar situation after 1931 and the two countries made natural allies.<sup>27</sup> These political ties, as is obvious, made cultural ties easier and thus reinforced Spain’s prominent place in post-revolutionary Mexico.

The Republic was the wildcard that allowed Mexicans who were so inclined to untangle the convoluted knot of *indigenismo*, Hispanism, and Hispanophobia. It made these three seemingly paradoxical currents compatible. Mexicans could simultaneously elevate their indigenous past, hate Spanish tradition, and love Republican Spain. As the examples of Sánchez, Garro, and Trejo show, this took different forms, but for each the common denominator was the Republic experienced in the context of post-revolutionary Mexico. The former colonizer had been bisected into two clearly demarcated versions; one acceptable, one not. Even in the face of vestigial anti-Spanish bias expressed by some of the very people who ardently supported it, the Republic allowed Mexicans to reaffirm their Hispano-American identity without contradicting their continued rejection of Spain’s socio-cultural legacy.

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 55.

## Mexicans in Spain During the Civil War

With the outbreak of war in 1936, Many Mexicans went to Spain in various capacities: as doctors and nurses, as volunteer combatants and pilots, to offer technical help or to propagandize for the Republic. Almost all were motivated by an ideological affinity with the Left somewhere between liberal Republicanism and revolutionary socialism. As Powell explains, “PNR liberals admired and identified with Spanish liberalism; Mexican radicals...saw hope for a proletarian victory over bourgeois capitalism in Spanish extremism.”<sup>28</sup> To be sure, a few went for less ideological and more practical reasons such as the search for adventure or to escape domestic problems, but these were exceptions to the rule.<sup>29</sup> While solidarity with the Spanish Republic came from a variety of national, political, and cultural sources, the Mexican version was, to reiterate, unique because it came from the only country with both a Spanish colonial legacy and a left-wing revolutionary government.

Mexican intellectuals and artists had a particularly strong affinity for Spain. As mentioned, many traveled there during the Civil War, most as members of the LEAR, and participated in the Second International Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture – a gathering of prominent early twentieth-century antifascist intellectuals.<sup>30</sup> During July and August of 1937 famous Mexicans such as composer Silvestre Revueltas, Paz and Garro, artist Juan de la Cabada, and author José Mancisidor toured Spain and promoted what came to be known as “culture-as-weapon.”<sup>31</sup> Their goal was, according to Paz, to “manifest the active solidarity of the artists and writers of Mexico with the Spanish people.”<sup>32</sup> This objective was realized through the *acto*, a ritualized multi-genre performance that combined aesthetic and

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>29</sup> One opportunistic pilot, Luis Monter Cerrillo, apparently went to Spain for no other reason than to escape his wife and four children. See Ojeda Revah, *México y la guerra civil española*, 307 n.1.

<sup>30</sup> See Manuel Anzar Soler, “El segundo congreso internacional de escritores para la defensa de la cultura (Valencia-Madrid-Barcelona-París, julio de 1937)” Julio de 1937,

<http://www.bib.uab.es/human/exposiciones/exili/1937/aznar.asp> (accessed April 21, 2009).

<sup>31</sup> Carol A Hess, “Silvestre Revueltas in Republican Spain: Music as Political Utterance,” *Latin American Music Review* 18 (Fall/Winter 1997): 281.

<sup>32</sup> Octavio Paz, *Itinerario*, (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993), 62. “Manifestar la solidaridad activa de los artistas y escritores de México para con el pueblo español.”

political expression.<sup>33</sup> These were often sponsored by one or more political organizations and featured political speeches interspersed among music, theatre, and poetry. According to Hess, “one of the most salient aspects of the *acto* seems to have been its rally-like atmosphere, in which emotions of an already receptive public might be whipped up to the point of frenzy.”<sup>34</sup>

Along with *actos*, Mexican intellectuals participated in other ways that reinforced themes of cultural solidarity and brotherhood between them and their Spanish comrades. During the Congress, Mexican and other Latin American delegates signed a manifesto expressing that by “working for Spain’s triumph, they worked for the triumph of Hispano-America.”<sup>35</sup> In 1937, famed Mexican muralist Daniel Siqueiros, who had fought during the revolution and eventually became a coronel in the Republican army, lectured on “Art as a Tool of Combat” where he presented modern Mexican art as a metaphorical representation for Spain’s struggles.<sup>36</sup> The Spanish paper *Mono Azul* published notices commemorating the contribution of Mexican intellectuals to the Republican cause and declared itself in solidarity with the LEAR’s publication *Frente A Frente*.<sup>37</sup> *Mono Azul* was printed in Madrid and often carried poetry and other writings produced by anonymous soldiers in the trenches. It was founded in August, 1936 by a group of young Spanish intellectuals including Rafael Alberti. Importantly, it printed excerpts of Mancisidor’s book *De una madre española*, a romantic version of the Republic’s defense of Spain. Mancisidor also published his article *Somos tan españoles como los españoles*, the title of which is illustrative of the central argument of this work.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Hess, “Silvestre Revueltas,” 278.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>35</sup> “...al trabajar por el triunfo de España, trabajaban por el triunfo de Hispanoamérica.” Quoted in Ojeda Revah, *México y la guerra civil española*, 186.

<sup>36</sup> Hess, “Silvestre Revueltas,” 284. Siqueiros, *Me llamaban el coronelazo* (Mexico City: Editorial Grijalbo, 1977).

<sup>37</sup> Baumann, *Los voluntarios latinoamericanos*, 165; Alicia Azuela, “*El Machete* and *Frente a Frente*: Art Committed to Social Justice in Mexico,” *Art Journal* 52 (Spring 1993): 82.

<sup>38</sup> Baumann, *Los voluntarios latinoamericanos*, 165. For information on *Mono Azul* see Eduardo Mayone Dias, “Los Romances de la Guerra Civil de España: ¿Literatura Comprometida?,” *Hispania* 51, no.3 (September 1968), 433-34.

Silvestre Revueltas gave concerts as part of *actos* where he showcased his works such as *Homenaje a Federico García Lorca*, *Caminos*, and *Janitzio*. On 19 September 1937, true to the format of an *acto*, his music was performed in conjunction with poetry read by Alberti and Paz. Alberti and Revueltas became acquainted during their time together in Spain and the former had been friends with Lorca, whose murder by a Nationalist firing squad had affected the Mexican composer greatly. In addition to the forum he provided Mexican intellectuals in *Mono Azul*, Alberti also published reviews of Revueltas' concerts in the socialist periodical *La Voz*. These reviews focused more on Revueltas' politics than on his music and thus reinforced both "culture-as-weapon" and Mexican-Spanish solidarity. Revueltas' music was deemed a weapon that, by inspiring "revolutionary anger," could be wielded against the enemy. He is credited with universalizing Mexican music, further cementing fraternal bonds between his homeland and his host country.<sup>39</sup> As these few examples show, emphasizing a shared *hispanismo* was a priority for Mexican intellectuals in Spain during the Civil War.

At the same time Mexicans reinforced their *hispanidad* through opposition to the Nationalists. In fact, they had been resisting this version of Spain since before the elements of Spanish military had revolted, even before the Republic existed. The very traditions that had alienated Mexico from its Hispanic roots were represented by the Nationalists and personified by Franco. Before 1931, because the Republic – the acceptable alternative version of Spain – did not exist in any practical form outside the minds of idealistic liberal reformers, rejecting traditional Spain meant rejecting *hispanidad* in its totality; a process that was painful for many. Solidarity with and defense of Republican Spain allowed Mexicans to completely reconfigure this concept. Rejection of the traditional Spain was now an *affirmation* of Hispanism. It was for the love of Spain, and, thus, a love of themselves as Hispano-Americans, that Mexicans hoped to conquer their enemies. This sentiment was succinctly

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<sup>39</sup> Hess, "Silvestre Revueltas," 286-87.

expressed by Ramón P. de Negri, the then Mexican ambassador in Spain. In a cable sent from his office to president Cárdenas on 10 March 1937, he wrote:

With the army, with the aristocracy, with the Church, with Spanish feudalism, which made Mexico and all of America a land of conquest, a colony for the exploitation of man; Which left us *latifundismo*, religious fanaticism, political oppression, a lack of culture and its consequences, the Mexican cannot have any other relation except one of hatred. The Mexican people must feel the Spanish cause to be theirs now more than ever.<sup>40</sup>

The significance of this is that what Negri saw in Spain was not the European problem of fascism, or the more general issue of an assault on democracy. He did not include either in his list of Spanish evils. Instead, for him the Spanish Civil War was a *Mexican* problem. The ills he listed were those that Mexico had suffered and overcome yet which persisted as objects of Mexican hatred. This hatred was also self-directed; Franco represented the traditional Spain – the Spain from whose 300 years of colonialism emerged a fractured Mexican *mestizo* identity – that post-revolutionary Mexicans rejected, but could not escape, within themselves. To be sure, Mexicans were fighting for republicanism, revolution, and worldly abstractions such as ‘freedom,’ ‘socialism,’ and ‘democracy.’ Yet they also saw something else; they saw in the Republic the destruction of the shameful traditional Spain and the creation of a new *país hermano* which they could proudly embrace and which afforded the opportunity to reinvent and revitalize their own identity as a nation of Hispano-Americans. As Negri’s statement shows, the “Spanish cause” was also very personal for Mexicans; they were fighting for themselves.

Another example of this is the transformation of how Madrid was conceptualized by

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<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Baumann, *los voluntarios latinoamericanos*, 166.

Mexicans after the war began. The defense of Madrid symbolized the entire Spanish Civil War for many sympathetic to the Republican cause. Long scorned as the literal epicenter of Spanish imperialism, what to Bolívar had symbolized an evil stepmother (*madrastra*), and from which had emanated all injustice and oppression in Latin America and Mexico, it was now *la ciudad martir*.<sup>41</sup> Revueltas echoed this sentiment in letters to his wife written while in Spain with the LEAR. The most salient example of this is his letter of 27 July after his first excursion to Madrid, at the time under siege by the Nationalists, in which he wrote, “What excitement I had upon arriving in Madrid! With what joy we set off [for the city], knowing full well the danger...but with souls full of faith and of love, with the desire to be closer, to touch, to feel the heroic heart beat of this people [town?], so full of generosity, so brave, so honorable.” This is followed with three sentences describing the countryside between Valencia and Madrid. Apparently the mere act of writing the city’s name triggered the subsequent fit of sentiment written in parentheses immediately following “Madrid”: “Beloved City! My heart embraces your pain; smiling city; I wish to share your tears and exalt in your triumphs. I want to have you within me, unblemished city!”<sup>42</sup> Just as Trejo used the imagery of a Spain incorporated into the anatomy of Mexico, Revueltas expressed his longing to experience Madrid with his own corporal symbolism. In both cases the use of these literary techniques underscores the deeply personal place Republican Spain occupied in Mexican identity.

Sánchez idealized Madrid much the same way, though he expressed himself with less flare.<sup>43</sup> Like Trejo and Revueltas, he wrote of a physical connection to the Spanish conflict

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<sup>41</sup> Ojeda Revah, *Méjico y la guerra civil española*, 189.

<sup>42</sup> *Silvestre Revueltas por él mismo* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1989), 98. “¡Que ilusión tenía de llegar a Madrid! Con qué alegría partimos el camarada Lucio y yo, a sabiendas del peligro, a sabiendas de todo, pero con el alma llena de fe y de amor, con el deseo de estar más cerca, de palpar, de sentir latir el corazón heroico de este pueblo tan lleno de generosidad, tan bravo, tan recto.”; “¡Amada ciudad! Mi corazón quisiera abrazar tu dolor, ciudad sonriente; quisiera llorar con tus lágrimas y exaltarme con tus triunfos; quisiera tenerte dentro de mí, ¡ciudad sin mancha!”

<sup>43</sup> Though he wrote of his experiences decades later which possibly tempered his recollection of his enthusiasm while Revueltas wrote from the “heat of the moment.”

and the defense of Madrid. Upon learning of the Spanish Civil War, he writes that “I immediately felt within myself the secret longing to run to Spain and join with those who defended Madrid... Madrid was my obsession and I longed to arrive in its trenches with a rifle...and to be accepted as a volunteer.”<sup>44</sup> Thus Madrid, which for so long had been seen as a source of malevolence, was now viewed as a source of inspiration and pride for Mexico. Mexicans had had to fight against Madrid to separate from Spain in order to forge a national identity in the first place. During the Spanish Civil War however, Mexico struggled alongside Madrid, which by then symbolized a bridge to Mexican identity, not an obstacle.

The Spanish Republic was Spain’s first democracy and the object of much of the world’s hopes and revolutionary aspirations during the Spanish Civil War. In Mexico it changed the way many Mexicans conceptualized Spain and, as Hispano-Americans, how they saw themselves. Mexicans participated in the defense of the Republic during the Civil War at home and in Spain, and wrote passionately of the revitalized significance this experience had for them. Just as Spanish Republican exiles were in many cases renewed by their contact with Mexico after the war, the Spanish Civil War revitalized Hispanism in Mexico where, since the Revolution, it had been moribund as a cultural influence. In other words, as Spaniards found a new place in Mexico, Mexicans found a new place for Spain – the idealized Republican version – in their national and cultural identity.

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<sup>44</sup> Sánchez, *Un mexicano en la guerra civil española*, 93. Once he actually arrived in Spain, however, he spent little time in Madrid and took no part in its defense. Instead he participated in the famous battle of the Ebro where he was wounded in combat. Interestingly, he served in an international brigade comprised mostly of polish volunteers. According to Siqueiros, this was the only case of a Latin American serving in anything other than a Spanish brigade. See Siqueiros, *Me llamaban el coronelazo*, 358; Sánchez, *Un mexicano*, 144.

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