Spring 2017

Reframing the Ofrenda, An Analysis of Material Culture through the Death Cult of Mexico

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Reframing the *Ofrenda*

An Analysis of Material Culture through the Death Cult of Mexico

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
Of Bard College

By
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Annandale-on-hudson, New York
May 2017
Acknowledgments

A thank you to:

my Mamá for teaching me compassion and giving me endless support through all my endeavors.

my Papá for teaching me about the importance of my culture, ancestors, and respect for the Earth.

my friends for inspiring me on a daily basis.

Joshua Velette for supporting and pushing me to break the boundaries of my insecurities.

Christian Crouch for introducing me to the world of material culture and changing the way that I see my surroundings.

Susan Aberth for being honest from day one and inspiring me to reach new levels of excellence.

Tabetha Ewing for inspiring me to further my historical understanding of the world and to never let the boundaries of gender roles hold me back.

Aileen Pasloff for introducing me to new ways of navigating about my surroundings, through flamenco.

Miles Rodriguez for introducing me to Latin American history and broadening my understanding of Mexican identity.

Nicole Caso for introducing me to Latin American women’s voices which allowed me to find my voice.

To all the inspirational badass women in my life, you help me shape my dreams.
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**Introduction**

The manner in which cultures approach death reveals a complex understanding of societal structures and historical comprehension of origin. Claudio Lomnitz-Alder in *Death and the Idea of Mexico* writes about the emergence of historical studies that took a perspective on the analyzation of death which exposed that “…deathways provided new and untapped sources for the study of every aspect of social life; tombstones, mourning rituals, representations of death and burial provided fresh perspectives on practically every key theme of modern European history, from the origins of capitalism to the history of secularization.”¹ Lomnitz later adds that through the observance of burial exchanges, restrictions in relation to proximity to death and dying, and the comprehension of death post-death provides a deeper understanding on topics of gender ideology, sympathetic magic, territoriality, and the uses of material culture in construction social hierarchy.² Lomnitz’s study in *Death and the Idea of Mexico* dissects the theme of Death in Mexico by analyzing its origins in European and pre-Columbian societies. And its application in the development of the Viceroyalty of New Spain into the independent nation of Mexico. This study inspired the further analyzation of the material culture found in Mexico’s *Día de los Muertos*’ central ritual the *ofrenda*.

Mexico’s *Día de los Muertos*, also translated to “Day of the Dead”, is celebrated on the Catholic calendar during November 1 and 2, the day is devoted “to the souls of the faithful, not those of the unfaithful.”³ Elizabeth Carmichael and Chloë Sayer write that some Mexicans view it as “traditional” and others see it as “unashamedly modern.”⁴ The authors conclude that is both,

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² Lomnitz-Adler, *Death*, 12.
³ Ibid.
interweaving the two together and that Mexicans of all backgrounds must make decision of partaking. By choosing to join they engage in Mexican popular culture. Urban settings and large towns are where the festival is celebrated with most exuberance. Where in comparison the rural towns ceased to have the same fervor and exclude the commonly seen skeletal images of urban displays. Carmichael and Sayer write that even though the dates in which it is celebrated note it’s relation to the Christian feast of All Saints’ and All Souls’ Day, it’s celebration in Mexico barely reflects it supposed Catholic counterpart. The authors later conclude that regardless of the festival’s communal aspects, at its core it is a familial celebration and ritual. It is a time for families to visit the tombstone of lost loved ones and commemorate their memory with the food, flowers, and celebration. In both public communal and private familial celebrations, the ofrenda is central to these festivitities. It is an altar where traditional and modern items are transformed into the sacred.

This paper will attempt to dissect the ofrenda by the material culture it is comprised of, specifically four totemic items that played a large role in the development of the Mexican nation: La Virgen de Guadalupe, La calavera, maize, and chocolate. What does it mean to have these materials at the forefront of a public or private ofrenda, which itself is at the center of Día de los Muertos? How did symbolic materials and images ascend to their place as affirmatively Mexican? Singular analysis of each item and its application in death related rituals could reveal the ways in which they were politically or religiously appropriated.

The first chapter takes a look at La Virgen de Guadalupe. Her image is found in most rural and urban ofrendas. She tends to take the central location in the ofrenda as a way of

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5 Carmichael and Sayer, Skeleton at Feast, 7.
6 Ibid, 9.
7 Ibid, 10.
8 Ibid, 14.
9 Ibid.
signifying her role as the “watchful mother” (refer to figures 7, 8, 12, 15, and 18). If she is not present in an ofrenda there must always be a symbol of Catholic origin to makes the altar holy. Lomnitz writes that she was Mexico’s first national totem. The chapter will outline her ascension to totemic status and the historical factors that contributed to the appropriation of her image. A main theme that will be analyzed is her duality as being a colonial enforcer of Catholicism and also a contradiction to the religion by being a vessel in which indigenous could continue their idolatrous beliefs in pre-Hispanic deities like Coatlicue and Tonantzin. This dichotomy also reveals the contradictions in the Catholic church and common attitudes towards indigenous. Later Mexican identity theorist Octavio Paz in Labyrinth of Solitude invokes the tool of national memory to ascribe the contemporary Mexican identity as originating from the initial violation of the Spaniards onto the indigenous through the concept of “Hijos de la chingada,” in his chapter Sons of La Malinche. He defines the chingada as being symbolically represented by La Malinche, an indigenous girl given to Cortes as a slave who assisted in the conquest by being his translator. Paz then invokes the myth that she produced the first mestizo by being raped by and also willingly giving herself to Cortés. Paz later places Guadalupe in opposition to La Malinche invoking the same dichotomy that is seen between Mary and Eve in the Bible’s genesis. Through this chapter I further my analysis from my previous study “The parallels between Machismo and Spanish/European Law, reflected in Maria de Zaya’s Disenchantments of Love and court cases in Mesoamerican Voices” in which traced back the origins of “machismo” to the roles Roman Catholocism set out from women in Spain and then later on in Mexico. I further this argument in chapter one and orient the argument towards the parallels between the

10 Lomnitz-Adler, Death, 41.
12 Paz, Labyrinth, 86.
13 Ibid, 86.
Mary and Eve in relation to how Guadalupe was applied as an enforcer of Catholic model for women’s behavior and how this model would be kept a constant for the Mexican woman. Paz’s analysis is historically incorrect and to an extent enforces indigenista ideas that the mestizo was the truest representation of the Mexican. With the acknowledgement of her history and her application as a tool that invoked Catholic gender roles her application in ofrendas can be better understood. When her image is enacted in and outside of Mexico by Chicanos and Mexicans it is to identify a connection to culture and national identity.

The second chapter covers La Calavera, whose story differs greatly from Guadalupe’s but reasons for its creation stem from the same history that Guadalupe stemmed from. La Calavera is a depiction of playful skeletons administered anonymously by Jose Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913) in the political publication “El Calavera.”14 Surrealist Breton would later attribute his depictions as “black humor.”15 His dark humored skeletons made a commentary on the disparities between classes and races seen during his time. The image did not reach totemic status until its administration by modernists like Diego Rivera. Rivera was the father of modernism16 and Posada by the 1950s would be associated as the maternal uncle of Mexican modern art.17 The travails of the calavera will help better understand not only it’s ascension to both totemic status and its place in urban ofrendas but also how the disparities between classes and races created an atmosphere which the confrontation with death was a constant resulting in one of the citizens using a skeleton as a vessel to claim the corruptness of the stratified society. The continuation of the calavera in the hands of the modernists better depicts the ways in which wielders of totems gain power through asserting the image of it. In a way by asserting it’s image

14 Carmichael and Sayer, Skeleton at Feast, 58.
15 Lomnitz-Adler, Death, 413.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid, 417.
as a modernist it is similar to elites asserting their status through material culture. It makes a 
commentary on how outwards displays of visual representations define identity.

The final chapter analyzes two important foods, *maize* and chocolate. Their significance 
is also representative of the importance of the use of food in *ofrendas*. If the *ofrenda* is central to 
*Día de los Muertos* food is central to the *ofrenda*. *Ofrenda* translates to “offering” and the main 
offering is the food that the deceased loved one held close to them. All the other items in the 
ofrenda are placed either are religious symbols that transform to the altar to a sacred state, 
decorative aspects which incite cultural identity, and images that identify who the *ofrendas* 
dedicated to. The food and drink is the offering. Religious images allow the offering to cross into 
the scared sphere able to connect the living to the dead and the dead to the divine. The presence 
of *maize* and chocolate in *ofrendas* are a testament to their historical journey through pre-
Columbian cultures to contemporary Mexicans. Food in generally are culturally reflective but do 
not explicitly reveal their applications and impact in history, landscapes around them, and 
cultural identity. By distinguishing *Día de los Muertos* as a primarily familial ritual passed down 
it is even more re-enforced by the use of food at the center of the *ofrenda*. Food is a vessel to 
pass down cultural and family traditions, but no matter if the recipes come under the same name 
each family prepares it the way in which it was passed down. Recipes differ regionally and 
familial. During the spiritual conquest schools of doctrine acknowledged the family as a private 
space in which culture was deeply rooted, thus they removed young men apart from their 
families and denied contact.\(^\text{18}\) *Maize* and chocolate verify that the domestic sphere was a place in 
which culture could not be completely annihilated. One of the leading historians on Chocolate 
Marcy Norton negates colonial ideology that colonizers civilized the indigenous and that the top-
down model of society did not hold truth in the Viceroyalty of New Spain in her article *Tasting* 
\(^\text{18}\) Carmichael and Sayer, *Skeleton at the Feast*, 38.
Empire: Chocolate and the European Internalization of Mesoamerican Aesthetics. Inspired by Norton’s work in chocolate history Martha Few further analyzed the use of chocolate by women in witchcraft and as a social distinguisher of women’s misbehavior in her article Chocolate, Sex, and Disorderly Women in Late-Seventeenth- and Early-Eighteenth-Century Guatemala. Both articles exemplify the failures of evangelization and how women were able to take agency in their position as central domestic figures. An analysis of food provides an insight to women as cultural intercessors and the ways that they were able to have autonomy of themselves even within a patriarchal society that set out a strict role they had to fill.

The ofrenda offers a deep insight to the construction of the now Mexican identity when cultural artifacts come together in one space in a celebration with the central theme of Death. The material cultures presented also make a commentary on the intricacies of Mexican identity and despite efforts to unite Mexicans under one identity, to assert control of the nation, the diversity within the culture could never be eradicated. Mexicans are as diverse as all the differing ofrendas but share one thing in common and that is their shared experience of the historical travails of the inhabitants of Mexico.
La Virgen de Guadalupe

La Virgen de Guadalupe’s image can be seen throughout Mexico and across the border into the U.S. By enacting her image the user establishes a connection to Mexican culture. Her totemic image incited the idea of *mexicanidad*. Lomnitz defines “national totems” as figures of collective filiation and claims the Virgin of Guadalupe was Mexico’s first. In the printed account of her initial appearance she is associated as being “Immaculate Virgin Saint Mary” under the name Guadalupe. Like previous Marian figures before her she was seen as an intercessor between God and the citizens of Central Mexico and would soon represent Mexico’s spiritual autonomy. By this interpretation of her image her invokes the motherly saint watching over as she takes her place at the center of many *ofrendas* (refer to figures 7, 8, 12, 15, and 18). To further understand her place in the *ofrenda* we must understand her initial introduction into Mexico, how her application was used, and what commentary her present makes on gender roles in the Spanish Americas. D.A. Brading writes, “…the changes in the way the Virgin has been presented and interpreted reflect the equally profound changes wrought in Mexican society across the centuries.” Brading’s interpretation furthers the reason why Guadalupe represents the Mexican identity, even though her appropriation as a figure and historical reflectiveness is not acknowledged by most who enact her image as a sign of their Mexican identity. Brading’s title *Mexican Phoenix* alludes to her being the Phoenix rising from the ashes of the Apocalypse of the conquest as reflection of the Mexican rising from apocalypse of the conquest bringing in a new

19 Lomnitz-Adler, *Death*, 41.
21 Lomnitz-Adler, *Death*, 41.
era. Others relate her to being an instigator of the Apocalypse due to Cortés’ application of the image Mary to watch over his conquest of Tenochtitlan. Guadalupe is the intercessor in which all citizens pray to in times of need, in particularly in times of death. She is the Virgin mother who listens to all of her children no matter their class or race. The image of Guadalupe has come to encompass Mexican history, *mexicanidad*, and reveals the Catholic churches’ corrupt construction of women in the colonial context.

*La Virgen de Guadalupe’s* image was not prevalent nor totemic in 1519, when the Spanish militaries conquest lead by Cortes began, although Mary was an ever present image in the conquest. Patricia Harrington writes that Mary must have been associated with death and destruction due to Cortes’ troops carrying small banners and images of Mary with them during the conquest of 1519-1521 and placing the statues on native temples after they had been ceased, as a form of cleansing the temple. The Spaniards saw Mary as aiding them on their conquest and thus making her both a bringer of destruction and life. Both Spanish and Indigenous feminine saints and deities brought life and death. “In the Valley of Mexico a cluster of goddesses existed, all related to maternity…. all of them earth-mother goddesses were associated with fertility and horrifying death, the earth as both womb and tomb of life.”

Brading asserts that Mary was identified as a Woman of the Apocalypse by her role in the antithesis of Jerusalem and Babylon where she symbolically signifies the Catholic Church by

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birthing Jesus while maintaining her virginity in the midst of the Apocalypse similarly to the way that the Church births recently converted individuals saving them from idolatry. Mary as an apocalyptic figure does not bring death in the direct way the goddesses of Mesoamerica does, Mary rebirthed and evangelized as the Church in the presence of the Apocalypse. It was God and Christ who were more feared since Christ was depicted as sacrificed on the cross in turn referencing plague and judgement and God was a remote and brooding eminence; where Mary was the intercessor to soften the harsh judgements of the holy trinity where God is the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. 27 Guadalupe would also take on the role as intercessor, but in the Mexican context she would not only soften the harsh judgements of God, she would be soften the judgements placed upon the subordinate groups under colonial systems. In a stratified society like Colonial New Spain it is not surprise that a saint that listened to all citizens of every cast, race, and gender would grow popular after she entered the public sphere.

Mexico’s Virgin of Guadalupe also was a vessel of cultural continuation for Mesoamerican deities by breaking the traditional Marian saint role. Marian saints in Roman Catholicism did share the duality of being life and death giving they were not revered in the same way that feminine deities did in Mesoamerican religions. Irena Lana states that the term “goddess” does not adequately encompass the significance of Tonantzin and related figures because they were honored elements of nature or sacred energies representing creation and/or destruction, sexuality, and motherhood within a Nahua religious cosmology. 28 Lana later on remarks on Aztec and folklorist Señora Angelbertha Cobbs statement that Tonantzin “connotes a


human mother as well as mother earth”… she was associated with both “indigenous feminine energy of the ‘agricultural and human fertility,’ as well as the energy of creation-destruction that has ‘military associations’ further links Guadalupe to indigenous, non-dichotomizing conceptions of duality.”²⁹ By the associations made by some indigenous groups that Guadalupe also embodied the goddess Tonantzin allowed her to present a “non-dichotomizing conception of duality,” thus culturally continuing indigenous ideas of feminine deities and idolatrous practices. The differing ways in which the two cultures characterized their feminine deities represented the cultures treatment of women. The two differed greatly, yet shared similar themes that would allow synchronization into La Virgen de Guadalupe.

When Spaniards arrived in New Spain they were faced with interpreting the indigenous groups in relation to themselves. They were idolatrous and believed deeply in their deities, they went against Catholic tradition yet also had similar structures in play in their society. Jacques Lafaye makes note of Gómara, Cortés’s chaplain writing that, “the Conquest of the Indians began when the conquest of the Moors had ended in order that Spaniards may always war against the infidels.”³⁰ Gómara’s remarks reflect a theme that would carry on through out all of the colonial era, the Christian Spaniards would always see the indigenous as idolatrous users and had to “war” against this and prove that Catholicism was the true and chosen religion. Historian Eric R. Wolf presents the differing views toward indigenous during initial contact,

... against the background of the bitter theological and political argument which followed the Conquest and divided churchmen, officials, and conquerors into those who held that the Indian was incapable of conversion, thus inhuman, and therefore a fit subject of political and economic exploitation; and those who held that the Indian was human, capable of conversion and that this exploitation

²⁹ Lara, Goddess of the Américas, 100.
had to be tempered by the demands of the Catholic faith and of orderly civil processes of government.\textsuperscript{31}

Spanish society derived from Roman Catholic orthodoxy, thus colonialism and spiritual pursuits were one in the same, and everything was in relationship to the Catholic faith. If the indigenous were in fact incapable of conversion this negated their acceptance into society and would justify their exploitation, similarly to how the Africans were seen in their association to the Muslim Moors. Though if indigenous were seen capable of conversion it meant that they were a whole new expanse group of people to enforce the Christian faith and prove the strength of the Church. Lafaye explains how the indigenous were understood to be capable of salvation, Isabella the Catholic by the end of the fifteenth century had liberated the Indians brought by Columbus and demanded that all Indians were capable of salvation.\textsuperscript{32} The conquistadors could not question the monarchy from the mainland. Once indigenous were seen as capable of conversion religious conquest would commence. Even before the religious conquest priests all orders were on a mission of imposing conversion by placing saintly images upon recently conquered pre-Hispanic temple.\textsuperscript{33} The goal of the priests of all orders, Dominican, Franciscan, and Augustinian was to eliminate and replace the religion of the indigenous, though it was near impossible to erase deeply embedded traditions.\textsuperscript{34} There were both similarities in religious structures and large cultural barriers that proved to make conversion difficult. Peterson understands the Virgin of Guadalupe as a fusion of the imported European mother of God with native mother goddess.\textsuperscript{35} Desperation to effectively and efficiently evangelize the indigenous led to “syncretic solutions”

\textsuperscript{31} Wolf, \textit{The Virgin}, 37.
\textsuperscript{32} Lafaye, \textit{Quetzalcóatl}, 39.

\textsuperscript{34} Restall, Sousa, and Terraciano, \textit{Mesoamerican}, 174.

\textsuperscript{35} Peterson, \textit{Symbol of Conquest}, 40.
which were successful but also “undermined the Christian Orthodoxy.”

It was during this time that La Virgen de Guadalupe appeared to the indigenous man Juan Diego in 1531. She appeared to him on the hill of Tepeyac, which was the former temple to Indian goddess Tonantzín, “Our Mother” in Nahuatl. She came to him asking for her message to be delivered to the Church. He returned to her the following day being denied by the Church, she tells him to gather roses in his cloak and deliver them to show the truth in his claim. Once again he proposes his story and when he lets loose the cloak there appeared an image imprinted of the olive-skinned Virgin of Guadalupe amidst the group of roses. The image that appeared on Juan Diego’s cloak also known as the “tilma.” (Refer to figure 11). Once Diego presented his truth to the Catholic Church they acknowledged the story and associated the saint that presented itself with the Guadalupe of Extremadura. The church agreed to build a Church at the site of Tepeyac. Once a site for pilgrimages devoted to the mother-goddess Tonantzín. The once idolatrous associated sacred hill would be transformed into a holy space for the Virgin of Guadalupe, though it was hard to break the connection between the area and it’s historical sacredness. The apparition story is questionable due to its first recorded Nahuatl account was in 1649 when the apparition occurred over a century ago in 1531. Priests of all orders educated themselves in order to better evangelize the population. Many stories Catholic stories were printed in Nahuatl to assist in the evangelization process. The century difference puts into question the accuracy of the story and it’s conversion to a printed copy signified that it was distributed by the Church who had only one

36 Ibid, 40.
37 Restall, Sousa, and Terraciano, Mesoamerican, 197.
38 Harrington, Mother of Death, 25.
39 Restall, Sousa, and Teraciano, Mesoamerican, 200-201.
40 Ibid, 200-201.
41 Ibid, 196.
42 Ibid, 174.
goal in mind which was to convert indigenous. There are not enough records to truly understand Guadalupe’s following during the time that followed shortly after the apparition, so it cannot be assumed that her heavy following was solely based off her appeal to both Spaniards and Indigenous. The development of modernization and the printing press made possible the spread of the story during the second half of the seventeenth century, two publications of different but similar apparition stories were published one in Spanish and one in Nahuatl.\textsuperscript{44} The Catholic Church was the first to appropriate her image to better accomplish their agenda of evangelization of the New World. Though the Catholic’s Church’s efforts were not the ones that elevated her to Patron Saint of Mexico.

Catholics and indigenous related differently to the symbolism presented in the tilma (refer to Figure 11). Harrington makes an observation on how the indigenous may have had resonance with the Guadalupe image in relation to indigenous icons,

\begin{quote}
For the Indians, it was natural to place a goddess above one of her primary symbols, the moon. If the Spaniards had destroyed the solar cult of Huitlizpochtli and human sacrifice, this new incarnation revealed that the lunar goddess had overshadowed the solar god for a time and ushered in a new age. It was a new age of war, death, and disease, which the mother goddess ever announces with her wailing at the crossroads. But it was an age also of birth and survival, which the goddess guaranteed by her guardianship of the cyclical processes of fertility and growth. Standing over the moon, symbol of her reign, and wearing the star skirt of the mother goddess, bearing the flowers of divinity, Guadalupe watched over death, and illness and assured the Indians that these aspects of life not need to lead to despair. They were protected in the shade of the mother goddess.\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

Indigenous ideas of the duality of female deities encompassed a much wider span of themes than Christian female saint. They were not limited to the female identities set out by the Catholic

\textsuperscript{44}Ibid, 196.
\textsuperscript{45}Harrington, \textit{Mother of Death}, 35.
Church; they were able to encompass all facets of life. While the indigenous population was in the face of “war, death, and disease” Guadalupe would enable them to see the dualistic side of it, out of the apocalypse she would watch over them and bring in a new cycle. The celestial symbols and flowers resonated with the indigenous.

Yet Spaniard’s and creoles found similar commonalities in Guadalupe that they saw in their prospective religions. Her hands are pressed together in the form of praying. Her cloak is draped around her body in a similar way that many other Marian figures and the Virgin Mary herself are depicted. The symbolism of the painting had direct reference to the Book of Revelation and represented the millennial religious and social aspirations of the Spanish and creole populations of New Spain. The Spanish and the creole saw Guadalupe as a symbol that legitimized their presence in the New World. Her apparition exemplified the continuation of the “chosen” religion of Roman Catholicism and Guadalupe’s apparitions was proof that New Spain was the chosen land that belonged in the Catholic order and later could be seen as the new patria for creole population. Favrot Peterson’s description of the Guadalupe attributes her oval face and regular features are decidedly those of the Renaissance Virgin Mary but that her ashen skin tone and black hair are ethnic signifiers of indigenous authorship of the painting. Her voluminous dress, and aquamarine shawl over a rose tunic, protectively shields the woman, eliding her sex and reinforcing her demure virginal state, the colors would later be used by artists as a way to improvise with the Mexican national colors of red, white, and green. A commonality that both Christian saints and indigenous deities in Mesoamerica shared was their representation in figural form and rituals that were revered in interactive, humanized contexts: dressed, petitioned,

48 Favrot-Peterson, Visualizing, 107.
processed, and honored with offerings that were often edible.\textsuperscript{49} This provided another reason why synchronization and conversion could be achieved. Though indigenous and Spanish population resonated with the image of Guadalupe from different perspectives they were still able to worship her as a united nation once her status achieved totemic status.

The Catholic Church altered the apparition story to reflect the same one in Extremadura as a way to enforce propaganda; the only differing factor in the two stories was that she came to a “lowly” indigenous man.\textsuperscript{50} The Catholic Church was one of the first players to take the image of Guadalupe to more effectively convert the indigenous populations effectively and they also saw their beloved Virgin of Guadalupe who was once a sign in Extremadura in Spain as saving them from the Moors and aiding in the Reconquista of Spain. The Marian shrine to the Lady of Guadalupe resided in the kingdom of Castile, representing the moment when a group of clerics escaped northward after the Moors had taken the city and escaped to the hills of the river in Extremadura. Later the Virgin Mary has appeared to a poor herdsman and told priests to dig in the area where they found the image and would then build a church and shrine in her honor. It was entrusted to monks called the Jeronymites, who were of close association to the Castile dynasty. The cult spread across domains of the Castilian crown and many subordinate chapels were spread to be a place for those who made the pilgrimage in seek of the Virgin’s help.\textsuperscript{51} Later legend says the King Alonso XI thanked the defeat of the moors to the Virgin of Guadalupe.\textsuperscript{52} “From 1340 to 1561, Our Lady of Guadalupe at Extremadura was at the hub of the Spanish Religious life and closely associated with the Reconquista.”\textsuperscript{53}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[49] Ibid, 113.
\item[50] Restall, Sousa, and Terraciano, \textit{Mesoamerican}, 196.
\item[51] Brading, \textit{Mexican Phoenix}, 36-37.
\item[52] Harrington, \textit{Mother of Death}, 28.
\item[53] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
conquerors came from Extremadura and may have seen Guadalupe as a sign of the perseverance of the Catholic Church against the Moors and other religions. She was a sign that Spain was chosen to continue the spread of Catholic beliefs and that she would aid them in times of strife.

The system of patronage was effectively adopted by the indigenous in the Valley of Mexico, many cities in Latin America bore the name of the Virgin for protection.\footnote{Ibid, 40.} During the seventeenth century virtually every city in Spanish America would have their own patron saint and every province would have a sanctuary with a miraculous image.\footnote{Brading, Mexican Phoetnix, 12.} There were many varying local images and regional images, the Virgin of Guadalupe would eventually triumph over all other saints and represent the entire nation.\footnote{Harrington, Mother of Death, 40.} Cornelius Conover analyzes the context of saintly devotion in Mexico city to question Guadalupe’s ascension to patron saint by claiming three arguments: the first is that the Virgin of Los Remedios allowed for Guadalupe’s intervention in 1737, the second that she was not unique or mystical but through her intercession but practical and commonplace, and the third was the imperial context of the 1760s-1780s discouraged new saintly devotions and therefore would result in the strengthening of the Guadalupe cult.\footnote{Conover, Cornelius. "Reassessing the Rise of Mexico's Virgin of Guadalupe, 1650s–1780s." Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos 27, no. 2 (2011): 251-79. doi:10.1525/msem.2011.27.2.251., 225.} During the seventeenth century Guadalupe was not among the sworn patrons of Mexico City, there were numerous other holy figures that surpassed her.\footnote{Ibid, 259-60.} In times that disaster threatened councilmen would rely on the miraculous image of the Virgin of Los Remedios.\footnote{Ibid, 268.} Though it was the miracles and failures of the Virgin of Los Remedios from 1692-1697 the public’s perception.\footnote{Ibid, 259-60.} In the 1730s, the Mexico City council stopped experimenting with saints and began to invoke instead,
different invocation of the Virgin Mary, such as Guadalupe and Loreto. The 200-year anniversary of the apparition of Guadalupe in 1731 made her cult highly visible during the time of transition.\(^{61}\) It was then in 1737 that the epidemic of *matlazagua*/typhoid fever that put the three Virgins to the test.\(^{62}\) In 1737 the city council voted to recognize Guadalupe as a celestial protector of Mexico City but it was only after recognizing her as patron and promising to promote her as universal saint of all of New Spain that the plague relented.\(^{63}\) She had proven herself among all the other saints to be the protectress. Her true growth in devotion was during the 1746 festivities that commemorate her as patron saint would lead to her becoming the premier holy figure of New Spain ten years later. Conover states that there was more documentation during this time making it more precise to track her growth.\(^{64}\) It was not only the three contributing factors that aided in her ascension that Conover discusses but the later addition of specific players who would use her image to set forth a symbol to help align the citizen of Mexico under one banner.

Bourbon bureaucrat’s choice in cutting funding towards “existing devotions in the Spanish Empire” prevented “adoptions of new saints.”\(^ {65}\) Bourbon political reforms altered the church’s position in public life and the crown lost power for legitimating more religious symbols, as well as material changes of the time, to weakening the corporate community and district ties in some regions leading to a growing sense of membership in large groups such as “Indians” and “Americans.”\(^ {66}\) Conover notes Brading in *The First America: The*

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\(^ {61}\) Ibid, 271.
\(^ {62}\) Ibid.
\(^ {63}\) Ibid, 272.
\(^ {64}\) Ibid, 275.
\(^ {65}\) Ibid, 276.
\(^ {66}\) Taylor, *The Virgin*, 25.
Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots and the Liberal State 1492-1867,” arguing that Spanish bureaucrats blamed many of the ills of colonial government and society on the American-born, which not only included Mestizo and Indigenous but the Spanish born Creoles; thus making birthplace a pressing public issue. By promoting Guadalupe the creole population hoped that her supernatural wonders would promote Mexico City in the Catholic liturgy and both validate their rights within the Spanish Empire.

“For creole intellectuals, Guadalupe’s apparition was an opportune sign that the Virgin Mary had chosen Mexico as her “favored city” and Mexicans as the elect.” One of the most well known Creole patriots for appropriating her image was Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla. It was in 1810 that he declared his independence movement in the name of Guadalupe. Though even during this period people protested his appropriation of Guadalupe, exemplifying that she still did not remain representative of the Mexican nation as a whole. Independence was a primarily creole movement due to a minority of its followers and none of its leaders were “Indians,” many of them residents of Bajo which had a low indigenous population. During this time French troops has already invaded the Peninsula, imposed Joseph Bonaparte on the Spanish throne and launched an attack on the Church. The 1810 War of Independence ensued, the creoles found it expedient to side with the lower clergy of mestizos and indigenous; though Father Miguel Hidalgo envisioned a autonomous creole kingdom. Hidalgo’s successor was mestizo priest Father Jose Maria Morelos, who proposed radical program of land reform that benefited native-born groups, primarily mestizo and

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67 Conover, Reassessing the Rise, 277.
68 Ibid, 262.
69 Peterson, The Virgin, 42.
70 Conover, Reassessing the Rise, 276.
71 Ibid, 276.
72 Taylor, The Virgin, 23.
73 Brading, Mexican Phoenix, 7.
74 Peterson, The Virgin, 45.
indigenous; his programs were the first to associate Guadalupe with a more democratic definition of national privilege.\textsuperscript{75} Later on Emiliano Zapata and his agrarian rebels would fight under the emblem of Guadalupe during the Revolution of 1910.\textsuperscript{76} Zapata was in opposition to the Porfirian regime that had helped rebuild Catholic the institution and strived to re-establish its influence on the public.\textsuperscript{77} Opposed to Hidalgo, Zapata represented a more mestizo and agrarian community and was more effective in his call for a Revolution. His identity appealed to the larger population, which was compiled of poor agrarian farmers and mestizos.

Regardless of the Creole’s use of Guadalupe’s image to help to elevate her status they were not the majority. Despite the decimation of the conquest and the colonial period the indigenous race in New Spain remained the largest ethnic group. In the late eighteenth century, four-fifths of the total population was nonwhite and most were of the lower classes; these included the fast-growing group of the mestizos, individuals of mixed blood.\textsuperscript{78} Spanish wanted to replicate the stratified society, which they came from, by imposing their superiority on all other races and classes. The casta system emerged as a form of labels and specific visual characteristics that were associated with certain casts denoting class and race. The visual racism culminated in the popular styles of paintings that emerged during this time and could be seen in many rich households. The system was based an individual's access to wealth and power by their appearance which assumed ethnic background.\textsuperscript{79} In the paintings there would be certain “castes” exemplified in the field of work or setting they were “meant” to be in. Discrimination fell primarily onto the mestizo, indigenous, and those of darker complexions. Stereotypes began to

\textsuperscript{75}Ibid, 45.
\textsuperscript{76}Wolf, The Virgin, 34.
\textsuperscript{77}Brading, Mexican Phoenix, 9.
\textsuperscript{78}Peterson, The Virgin, 40.
\textsuperscript{79}Ibid.
develop including a bias against indigenous due to their historical and at times continued idolatry resulting in widespread conviction that they were predisposed to drunkenness and sodomy, victims of their own weak natures.\textsuperscript{80} In Figure 18 The Virgin of Guadalupe is placed above the casta paintings. This painting exemplifies how she was seen as the saint that watched over all castes and also how she represented the acceptance of the Catholic faith unto the citizens of Mexico. The painter Lena Menas states that his placement of the Guadalupe at the forefront of the many casta paintings presented is a signifier of the honor that God had bestowed upon Mexico by having Guadalupe choose and legitimize them.\textsuperscript{81} It also makes a commentary on how racism was systematized and visualized in the colonial period. Discrimination towards Indians occurred from the beginning of the conquest. Indigenous groups as a whole across Mexico did not find resonance with Guadalupe from the day of her apparition. It was in the nineteenth century that Guadalupe's cult gained its strength among largely disenfranchised populations.\textsuperscript{82} She became a symbolic mother that would recognize the disenfranchised population in the religious context but also a savior from colonizer’s discrimination, she did not discriminate. She would listen to their prayers and deliver miracles to all classes.

To better understand Guadalupe’s representative qualities of Mexico’s ideas of women is to understand her in relation to her dichotomous half, La Malinche, also known as La Malintzin. She was a bilingual indigenous girl given to Cortes, she aided in the conquest by being one of Cortés’ key translators.\textsuperscript{83} Irena Lara in \textit{Goddess of the Americas in the Decolonial Imaginary: Beyond the Virtuous Virgen/Pagan Puta Dichotomy} writes, “…the Spanish Christian medieval

\textsuperscript{80}Ibid, 43.
\textsuperscript{82}Peterson, \textit{The Virgin}, 39.
\textsuperscript{83}Restall, Sousa, and Terraciano, \textit{Mesoamerican Voices}, 28.
idea of the good Mary versus the bad Eve were given racialized “New World” faces with mestiza
Marian figure and the indigenous mistress of the conqueror Cortes. The concepts of “sin”,
“virgin” and “whore” were not completely translatable to the Nahuas, in the beginning. Lara
exemplifies the difference in language as a cultural barrier,

...because Nahuatl does not have a word for “virgin,” Christians
used the Nahuatl word for post-pubescent girl, ichpochtli, to mean
virgin. Moreover the closest word to “whore” in Nahuatl was
auiani (or ahuiani), “the joyful one,” that refers to “pleasure girls,”
women who provided sexual pleasure in state-controlled or
independent “Houses of Joy” and particularly in ceremonial
festivals, who were not associated with “sin” as putas were within
a Spanish moral system.

Cultural synchronization was easily achieved in some spheres of society and religion, there
were large language and cultural barriers in which religious converters would settle for similar
terms to get ideas across, which may have not been well received. Throughout the colonial
period, there would be a constant back and forth between colonizers and the colonized on how
to properly be “civilized,” the addition of creoles, mestizos, and African slaves would
complicate this further. A new generation of mestizos and creoles became familiar with the
terms by way of upbringing and the consistent enforcement of religious ideals through law.
Some indigenous groups, like the Nahuas, did not understand certain concepts in Catholicism
that were central ideas in defining women in society, in contrary some Catholic ideas of
sexuality completely contradicted Mesoamerican definitions. Lara’s observations exemplify the
problems in the mass conversions of the religious conquest and the differences in cultural values
presented difficulties. Her observations are one factor that contributed the construction of a
united Mexican identity. Though Guadalupe and La Malinche are the most well known symbols

84 Lara, Goddess of the Américas s, 99.
85 Ibid, 103.
of the dichotomous idea of the whore and virgin, due to their involvement in the creation of Mexico, many feminine icons would precede them with the same attributes. Their symbolism in relation together would be a constant theme in the construction of women, but the comparison would not be made until later in the late 20th century when Octavio Paz verbalized it.

Critically acclaimed writer on Mexican identity Octavio Paz defines *La Chingada*, as a Mother forcibly opened, violated, or deceived; giving the name to the Mexican as “*hijos de la Chingada*” who are the offspring of this violation.\(^{86}\) Malinche takes on the role of becoming the symbol of *La Chingada*, she is reflective of the indigenous women who were fascinated, violated, or seduced by the Spaniards.\(^ {87}\) By these actions she is betraying the indigenous people by being a traitor to her own people and abandoning her children for the Spanish conquistador. The verb *chingar* implies an idea of failure.\(^ {88}\) *Las Chingadas* are failures when it comes to their duty as women, Malinche is a traitor to her race and a failure to her children. The word *chingada* is feminine and receives the action of the masculine *chingón*.\(^ {89}\) Paz writes, “To the Spaniard, dishonor consists in being the son of a woman who voluntarily surrenders herself: a prostitute. To the Mexican it consists in the fruit of violation.”\(^ {90}\) Mexican’s shame not only stems from Spanish Catholic ideals of sex but also from the perceived idea that the conquest was solely defined by the symbolic tale of *La Malinche*.

Taylor analyses Paz’s critique and concludes that he sees neither Malinche or Guadalupe as separate national symbols but that their dichotomous relationship is what creates the

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\(^{86}\) Paz, *Labyrinth*, 79.
\(^{87}\) Paz, 86.
\(^{88}\) Ibid, 76.
\(^{89}\) Ibid, 77.
\(^{90}\) Ibid, 80.
conditions for the Mexican psychic state of solitude.\textsuperscript{91} It can be argued that Guadalupe can be seen on her own as a national totem of Mexico, but there is truth that when understanding the state of Mexican identity it is crucial to understanding the dichotomy between the two since they reflect their European counterparts Eve and Mary, but they are unique in themselves in the Mexican context. Guadalupe when juxtaposed to Malinche, like her Marian counterparts, had escaped sin through the Immaculate Conception she encompassed Catholic ideals. Like Mary she was representative of the Church and she would rebirth and save the souls of the indigenous population, maintaining her virginity, in the face of the Apocalypse. She was the “good” mother that would come to aid the forsaken mestizo children. Lara claims that the dichotomous pair’s “...status as iconic good and bad mother was affirmed as they became symbolic tools in perpetuation of the nationalist Mexican identity. Guadalupe was crowned the Patron Saint of New Spain and the Queen of Mexico in the mid-eighteenth century, while Malinche became known as \textit{la Chingada} after the Mexican Revolution, the violated, “fucked” mother of the first mestizo.”\textsuperscript{92} Both the symbols are of passive nature, Guadalupe is pure receptivity for those who need her and pray to her,\textsuperscript{93} while Malinche is seen as a passive figure with no agency in her relation to Cortes. The condition of the Chingada, according to Paz, makes a larger commentary on Mexican woman identity,

Her passivity is abject: she does not resist violence, but is an inert heap of bones, blood, and dust. Her taint is constitutional and resides...in her sex. This passivity, open to the outside world, causes her to lose her identity: she is the Chingada. She loses her name; she \textit{is} no one; she disappears into nothingness; she is Nothingness. And yet she is the cruel incarnation of the feminine condition.\textsuperscript{94}

\textsuperscript{92} Lara, \textit{Goddess of the Américas}, 99.
\textsuperscript{93} Paz, \textit{Labyrinth}, 25.
\textsuperscript{94} Paz, 25.
Through Paz’s lens Guadalupe was an unattainable goal for Mexican women because they were a reflection of *La Chingada* and as women they were born in sin and could only hope that them and their children could be saved by the Virgin. Paz continues his argument stating that by claiming the identity of “hijos de la chingada” Mexicans deny their origins and deny their hybridism which makes Cortes and *La Malinche* in the Mexican’s imagination more than historical figures but symbols of a conflict yet to be resolved.95 The symbolic and both historical event, according to Paz, had created a nation of self-hating and conflicted individuals unable to deal with the trauma of their past and as a result they present a false identity to society to prevent the world from knowing the reality of their identity. Paz seems to primarily direct his argument towards Mexican men and in this discourse if men admitted to their history it would not only reveal their shame but also their vulnerability, making them no better than women. Mexican women like their Spanish descendants would bear the role of the Catholic woman through the enforcement of colonial ethos, since women are born in sin and their sex condemns them to a life of sin, the duty fell upon men to control women through the reigns of Catholicism.

The image and symbolism of both the Guadalupe and Malinche were ever changing in the hands of groups in power. Spanish and creoles once applauded her for being crucial in the success in the conquest; it was not until after Independence in 1821 once the Spaniards had lost power was her meaning inverted.96 It wasn’t truly until Paz verbally exemplified as her as a contradiction to Guadalupe that she was made a vessel to bear a “sinful woman’s” attributes. Yet the application of Guadalupe’s image also calls upon the Mary and Eve story. By Guadalupe being a Marian figure she incites the gender roles established by Mary and Eve. Without Eve

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95 Ibid, 87.
who committed original sin there would be no veneration of Mary who birthed the savior of humanity without sin. By Catholic evangelists enforcing the idea of Mary in Guadalupe’s vessel they enforced the stories of the immaculate conception and genesis. Only Mary, a virtuous woman, could birth humanities salvation and at that without sin. Application of Guadalupe as a Marian figure in the evangelization of Mexico would replicate that of Mary’s. Guadalupe would bring salvation to the indigenous from idolatry. By asserting national memory, Malinche posed as the perfect contradiction to Guadalupe. This assertion and agreement among Mexicans in contemporary Mexico exemplifies the successes in evangelization. Mexico now views Guadalupe and Malinche through Catholic eyes. Her myth of being the mother of the first mestizo legitimizes her as an Eve figure by placing her at the beginning of the creation of Mexico. This view was only certified in the mind of Mexican nationalists who view the mestizo as the true Mexican. According to Paz Malinche’s sin would be being raped and bringing shame to the nation. Guadalupe’s salvation came in different forms. Spanish saw her salvation to the indigenous through evangelization. Creoles saw her salvation in the form of choosing Mexico asserting their rights to Independence from imperial powers. Only a virtuous Marian figure is capable of performing salvation. The image, symbolism, and perceived identities of Mary, Eve, Malinche, and Guadalupe exemplify society’s control of women’s identities by appropriating them for maintaining and obtaining power. It could be speculated that the users of the images were primarily men, since the application from Roman Catholicism that was a male dominated institution. The application of these beliefs would be seen in every aspect of the social sphere, in particularly food, later exemplified in the final chapter.

This brings us to her place and role in Mexico’s *Día de los Muertos* “Ofrendas.” Now that she had reached her title of patron saint of Mexico, she reflected Mexican national identity
by being a symbol Mexicans held near and dear. Her presentation in *ofrendas* is essential as a religious and Mexican figure, virtually all *ofrendas* carried her image and if they did not it was necessary to have a religious icon whether it be a Marian figure, the cross, or another saint.

*Ofrendas* are unique to Day of the Dead but they also derive from religious altars. Kay Turner defines altars as,

> The age-old task of religious art has been to bridge the division between the sacred and mundane, the spiritual and material, the Self and the Other. We now live in a time when this division is at its most extreme, but, from the very beginnings of human consciousness, a particular religious art form has assuaged the terror of separation by creating a special site to serve the human desire for relationship with unseen gods and spirits. We call that place an altar, a place set apart to house the images of powerful sacred beings, who by their presence there can be called upon for help and comfort. An altar makes visible that which is invisible and brings near that which is far away, it marks the potential for communication and exchange between different but necessarily connecting worlds, the human and the divine.  

Turner is referring to home altars and the significant role they can play for women. The altar of the *Ofrenda* harbors the same ritual meanings altars do and more. Through it families can breach the divide between the living, the dead, and the divine. The assembling of an altar is ritualistic and the use of religion iconography is a call to the divine and allows the items placed in the altar to take on a sacred nature. The model of an altar Turner describes she ascribes to women’s home altars in varying areas, so even though the *ofrenda* may have originated from both Catholic and pre-Columbian traditions they still could share the commonalities in which altars are used in religion as ritual. Turner further explains that through engaging the Divine at a self-created sacred place women can make the altar an instrument of communication, a

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channeling device for integration, reconciliation, and creative transformation. One of the figures she presents (refer to Figure 3) exemplifies a Mexican American woman’s altar with the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe looking over her personal altar. The altar is strewn with flowers, candles, and other varying religious images. Personal altars provide a much more intimate form of connection to the Divine in comparison altars that are shared by families and the public. In this way women can take the power into their own hands and worship in their own creatively free way. The Mexican-American woman could possibly using the image of Guadalupe as a way of connecting to her mexicanidad and through her faith Guadalupe watches over her children regardless of distance. For families, the ofrenda offers a bridge of communication to the divine, it is a shrine first and foremost for their deceased loved one but death in Mexico always included Guadalupe, for she listened to everyone’s prayers especially in times of grief. Once Guadalupe had ascended to her place as patron saint of Mexico and Queen of the Americas she became one of the main saints that Mexicans identified and would pray to, particularly in times of desperation. There are two examples that show her presence in the death cult of Mexico. The first was seen in a famous style of painting called “votives” from Spain that were re-created with Guadalupe in place of the varying saints used. Votives were a form of paintings that depicted the painter’s crisis and above would be the image of the saint that aided them. It was a formal “thank you” from the painter to the saint for answering their prayer. In Figure 9 The Virgin of Guadalupe is watching over the scene of Spaniards lost out as sea, below the picture is a message from the painter thanking Guadalupe for listening to their prayers. Many of these votives depicted near death experiences of loved ones, of themselves, or crises that could result in death such as agricultural failings, abuse, and travel malfunctions. Her second presence that exemplifies her importance in the death cult of Mexico is as a figure on the

\[98\text{Turner, 27.}\]
ofrenda, she was there as a sign of patronage to her, but also as a prayer to her to aid the deceased loved ones on the other side. Kay Turner’s understanding of the importance of altars for women can be seen in Figure 7 where several images of Guadalupe overlook a home ofrenda covered in marigolds, the five generation of women in the family stand by the altar. The image illustrates how ritual is passed down orally through generations and women are one of the main cultural bearers. Other images of saints, marigolds, fruits, and other varying personal objects are placed around all holding their specific significance within the family, culture, and region. ofrendas were legacy and tradition as seen through Figure 7. Día de los Muertos is seen by many as an essential Mexican holiday and at the center are the ofrendas, culminations of images and objects in which Mexican national identity has been defined through. Guadalupe’s images are preserved through family legacy and tradition in the construction of the ofrendas. With all this said ofrendas also bear personal materials that only resonate with the creator of the altar, some specific to their identity, family’s identity, and the identity of the deceased loved ones. In Figures 7, 8, 12, 17, and 20 Guadalupe looks over in public and private scenes. Figure 7 has her at the back of the home altar assembled by four generations. She appears in multiple pictures but she overlooks the scene. The women made a well thought out choice of having her at a point where she can watch over both the ofrenda and the family. Through the presence of the four generations Carmichael’s and Sayer’s analysis that ofrenda is a familial tradition is certified. Not only that but it is a scene that represents women composed it together and through this they continue culture by teaching each other their values. Both Figure 8 and 12 has Guadalupe in a more colorful and larger image but keeping to tradition place at the center. Figure 17 is not a families ofrenda but an artist’s rendition of what an ofrenda appears as. At the center Guadalupe is represented as a colorful and more indigenous rendition of her image having dark skin and the
dress that is red. Figure 1 does not have the image of Guadalupe but what appears to be a pictorial depiction of Mary giving birth in the Apocalypse. Mary holds baby Jesus in the midst of people dying in flames while being saved by angels. To an extent the placement of this image also relates to Guadalupe in relation Brading’s analysis of Guadalupe as a woman of the Apocalypse as well.

The ofrenda tradition encompasses culture and history of both Mexicans as a whole and Mexicans on the individual level. It is important to acknowledge what Guadalupe’s presence means to the user who deploys her image. She is a symbol of Mexico’s construction and a symbol used by many to unify. Guadalupe deriving from Mary puts her in opposition to Eve and Mexico’s perceived traitorous woman La Malinche makes a commentary on the Catholic’s impact on the development of the construction of the Mexican woman. Her resonance within mestizo and indigenous communities exemplified the stratified society Spain had created whose citizens resonated with a saint who could save them from the discrimination enacted upon them through systematized ways. Guadalupe’s role as a symbol demonstrates the ways in which certain historical players with their own agendas and movements enacted symbolism as a way to create a united front. Favrot-Peterson proposed that Guadalupe’s meaning was re-interpreted by different ruling parties primarily in time when existing sociopolitical institutions were changing.\(^9\) She became an image that was enacted during times of change and was even used an image to push change and propaganda of particular groups. It is important to take into account her history and importance in Marian devotional culture, for the creoles she was the Mexican Virgin Mary. The Virgin Mary was seen as being the only mortal to have escaped the sins of Adam and Eve, thus the child she carried was a promise of redemption and the source of

\(^9\)Peterson, The Virgin, 39.
a new beginning.\textsuperscript{100} Both cultural groups of the creoles, mestizos, and indigenous resonated with the same Marian message that Guadalupe represented salvation. Indigenous groups understood a new beginning as liberation from colonial powers and proof that she had chosen indigenous people by appearing to Juan Diego, a poor indigenous man who like other indigenous people were on the outskirts of society.\textsuperscript{101} Regardless of the influence and wealth indigenous groups acquired in the seventeenth and eighteenth century they were still blocked from social recognition and power by the economic, social, and political order.\textsuperscript{102} A result of the veneration of the Guadalupe as a indigenous saint, \textit{mestizo} and indigenous people could make a critique of the existing social order.\textsuperscript{103} Harrington states that through Guadalupe the indigenous were able to keep Mesoamerican deities alive, such as Tonantzin.\textsuperscript{104} Taylor proposes that for the creole and Spanish population Guadalupe symbolized acceptance and legitimation of colonial authority, Guadalupe as an intermediary in religious terms also reflected the colonial structure of using intermediaries, such as legal intermediaries to appeal to a higher authorities\textsuperscript{105} Yet she also signified the acceptance of colonial and Catholic rule. We cannot solely understand Guadalupe’s image to what it represents now, it must acknowledge individual players who enacted her image: creoles, Catholic Church, Hidalgo, Zapata, women, mestizo, and indigenous. Along with the historical events that led to her ascension and that perhaps without them she would never have made it to “Patron Saint of Mexico. “She is not solely her present identity as being the “indigenous” Virgin Mary, her image is now seen as quintessentially Mexican by her participation through the creation of the Mexican identity. Peterson remarks it is important to

\textsuperscript{100}Taylor, \textit{The Virgin}, 20.  
\textsuperscript{101}Taylor, 20.  
\textsuperscript{102}Wolf, \textit{The Virgin}, 37.  
\textsuperscript{103}Taylor, 20.  
\textsuperscript{104}Harrington, \textit{Mother of Death}, 30.  
\textsuperscript{105}Taylor, \textit{The Virgin}, 20.
understand that her image is associated with colonial institutions, gender discrimination, passivity of the Catholic Church; she is both a symbol heralding freedom and a signifier of submission. In her duality she also represents the duality of the Mexican identity. Harrington describes Guadalupe as a symbol of Mexican faith and hope, an expression of Mexican realism about the inevitability of death and the Mexican certainty of a new birth. The meaning can be applied to her image when administered in the ofrenda during Día de los Muertos. She is placed alongside (refer to figures 7, 8, 12, 17, and 20) all the varying objects both Spanish, indigenous, and mestizo. Almost always she is placed watching over the altar scene, just the way faithful Mexican see her watching over them.

106 Peterson, The Virgin, 47.
107 Harrington, Mother of Death, 48.
Throughout history the skeleton has been used as a common image to represent death. They can be seen in Roman Catholic depictions of death and as well as pre-Columbian depictions seen on temples and tzompantlis (skull racks). There is something unique to the skeleton’s found in Mexico on November 1 and 2. The skeletons found in Mexico’s Days of the Dead (Dia de los Muertos) celebration can be referred to as calaveras and hold a much deeper significance to the Mexican nation than simply just death. Lomnitz writes, “The days of the Dead celebrated in the Catholic calendar on November 1 and 2 are devoted to the souls of the faithful, not to those of the unfaithful.”

His remarks make a commentary on the importance of dedication to faith. Those who adhere to their faith will be rewarded with a “good death,” and thus their souls are saved. The Church had a pretty strong hold on it’s faithful through the fear of what would happen to the “unfaithful.” Nowadays Dia de los Muertos to the Mexican people exemplifies the cultural syncretism that occurred during the Spiritual Conquest. There has been much controversy on the legitimacy of the claim that Dia de los Muertos has deep roots in pre-Columbian traditions. This question of legitimacy has come from those who question Mexican modernists appropriation of the idea of the indigenous to enforce their ideas of Mexican Nationalism. Some have claimed that Mexican modernists were just performing cultural continuity and refusing to let Mexican’s history erase the history of that of the pre-Columbian nations. Stanley Brandes analyzes friar Diego Durán’s observance of the holiday and it’s relation to the claim of its indigenous roots in the holiday,

108 Lomnitz-Adler, Death, 16.
Mexico’s Days of the Dead had been recognized as a deeply indigenized celebratory practice from very early on. In one of the few sixteenth century descriptions of the indigenous feast, for example, the Dominican friar Diego Durán speculated that the indigenous celebration of All Saints’ and All Souls’ Day was in fact a front for continued observance of the month long Aztec festivals dedicated to dead children and dead adults.\(^{109}\)

Understanding the holiday now through its historical origins can only be speculation since it’s birth can never truly be known. We can point to primary sources like that of Friar Diego Duran who gives an explicit example of the holiday’s indigenous roots, but when thinking of other aspects of the holiday, not all can be traced and defined. What can be known on the holiday is its progression and transformation. In particular, is \textit{Dia de los Muertos} shining star \textit{la calavera}.

In the first chapter, we understood the image of \textit{La Virgen de Guadalupe’s}, the first totemic symbol defined by Lomnitz, role in the \textit{ofrenda} is defined. Lomnitz sees the second totemic symbol in Mexico as the iconic \textit{calavera}. In the \textit{ofrenda} it can be seen as sugar skulls, figurines, skeletal depictions and in \textit{papel picado}. Though the \textit{calavera} also occupies other spaces outside of the \textit{ofrenda}. It is said that the dead come back to the land of the living on \textit{Dia de los Muertos}, thus the living must welcome them back with their favorite food and materials. The offerings usually consist of food and a picture favored by the deceased. The \textit{ofrendas} were originally constructed for the private space of the home and through time have moved to the public sphere and have occasionally taken on political meaning. The presence of the \textit{calavera} in the \textit{ofrenda} affirms its image as an icon of Mexican culture, however like \textit{Guadalupe} the \textit{calavera} importance was constructed. Key players such as Jose Guadalupe Posada in the revolutionary period and Diego Rivera in the post-revolutionary period used and repurposed its image under their own goals on making a commentary of the state of Mexico. In understanding\(^{109}\) 

\(^{109}\) Ibid, 45.
Mexican identity through these two artists we should also take into consideration one of the most prolific writers on Mexican identity, Octavio Paz. Many scholars debate whether Paz has any relevance in contemporary Mexico, but at the time he was seen as the first to articulate the image of the “Mexican.” Paz claims that all questions of Mexican identity lie in its history, “...the character of the Mexican is a product of the social circumstance that prevail in our country, and the history of Mexico, which is the history of these circumstances, contains the answer to every question.”\textsuperscript{110} This brings into question the idea of memory and how Mexico’s National memory of the past plays into it’s Death cult. One of the most distinguishable characteristics of Mexican culture is its familiarity and closeness with death reflected through their treatment of skeleton image.

It is an understatement to say that the birth of the Mexican Nation was violent. Matthew Restall, Lisa Sousa, and Kevin Terraciano write on the Spaniards expeditions in the 1510’s from Cuba to Mexico, specifically Hernán Cortés’ expedition which was, “Motivated more by the desire for profit than a commitment to spread Christianity, Spaniards under Cortés initiated a bloody war against the Mexica and their allies as they made their way from the Gulf Coast to Mexico-Tenochtitlan.”\textsuperscript{111} Conquistadors greed led to atrocities committed upon indigenous bodies; such as slavery, rape, hacienda, encomienda, repartimiento, and outward violence from war. Friars of varying orders had their own propaganda to uphold, which centralized around the conversion of indigenous to Catholicism. Octavio Paz and various other authors have seen this encounter of the conquest as an abuse and rape upon the people and land. Paz outlines this idea through the phrase “hijos de la chingada,” roughly translating to “children of the violated.” As mentioned in chapter one Paz makes comparison to how dishonor in Spain was be a son of a

\textsuperscript{110} Paz, \textit{Labyrinth}, 71.
woman who voluntarily surrenders and for the Mexican it was to be “the fruits of violation.”

According to Paz Mexico was born out of violation dishonoring the citizens of Mexico. In the phrase *hijos de la chingada*, *hijos* references the children/citizens of Mexico and the *chingada* embodies symbolically the violation of the indigenous feminized land where Malinche embodies the concept because of her participation in the conquest as conquistador Cortes’s slave. According to Paz Mexican’s cannot escape the national memory of the violation of the conquest which defines their character and they will live a life trying to hide their dishonor. The critique defines only the feminine capable of receiving violation and the masculine is always violator. Paz traces all his ideas to this first encounter, where the development of the “Mexican Identity” all began and would continue to hold importance. Lomnitz looks into the development of the dynamics of the conquered and the conquerors, and it’s transformation into the modern era. Lomnitz writes,

> Indeed, what is perhaps most intriguing about Mexico as a modern nation is that is had defined itself as a nation of enemies. Enemies who procreate. Enemies who must recognize that they cannot entirely eliminate each other. Foreign wars that fracture the national public rather than unify it. Creoles who fear being cast as foreign Europeans; Indian who constantly face exclusions. The nation’s official protagonist, the mestizo, is represented as issuing of the national community, the weakness of the Mexican state has meant that justice has often been delivered through informal channels.

Lomnitz fleshes out and to an extent negate Paz’s idea that all Mexicans were a unified ashamed group. There were many varying groups within the colonial system were victim to both Spanish imperial powers and foreign powers resulting in a society so stratified that the result was a “nation of enemies.” Paz’s assumption that Mexico is solely a nation of mestizos (mixed-blood of Spanish and indigenous) takes on the *indigenista* narrative, he does not acknowledge that

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112 Paz, 80.
113 Lomnitz-Adler, *Death*, 20.
Mexicans identities are far more complex and diverse than this. There were Spanish American born creoles, indigenous, afro-Mexicans, and immigrants. The presumption that they all originated from the same violation just adds to the discourse that mestizo’s are the true Mexican. To a certain extent the idea of la chingada hold truth in a different application of discrimination upon groups that were outside of the Spanish peninsulares. Although many groups rose to power during independence and the revolutions there still remained very distinct classes and races in order for groups in power could define their superiority and right to power. Lomnitz writes the results of Independence, “Today we tend to forget that Mexico once shared the imperial aspirations of its great American sisters (The United States, Brazil, and Argentina), because it was the first independent republic to taste the bitterness of being occupied by the new colonizers. And yet, like Haiti or, later Bolivia, Mexico survived the feeding frenzy of the great empires, and it did so with a flourish that shook Europe’s conscience.”¹¹⁴ Lomnitz perfectly articulates the progression of Mexico’s continuous struggle to establish itself as a sovereign state while European powers undermined their power as an established nation which had led to the French occupation soon after Independence. This also enforces the understanding of Mexico’s distaste toward imperial powers and Mexican modernists desire to distinguish themselves apart from powers that had oppressed Mexico historically, yet they also aspired to reflect the intellectuals in the same nations. Lomnitz continues to explain the Mexican nationalist condition, “...Mexican nationalism is the tentative and self-conscious cult of a survivor: a testimonial to the endurance and viability of the postcolonial condition”¹¹⁵ Mexico may have metaphorically been born out of violation but all the varying identities culminated in a cult of survivors, having endured the postcolonial condition of being “fruits of violation.” The only way to understand Mexican’s use

¹¹⁴ Lomnitz, 30.
¹¹⁵ Ibid.
of the *calavera* is to understand the history which would lead, to it’s creator José Guadalupe Posada, to birth it into existence through the penny press. One must understand the condition of the “Mexican” post-independence to understand why Posada used the concept of “death”, culminated in the skeleton, to make a commentary on the disparities in the social classes in Mexico. We must also take into account Mexican National memory. What does it mean to remember and to occupy not only the present but as well as the past? How is death re-defined and re-purposed by Mexicans?

Since pre-Columbian era throughout the conquest, independence, revolution, modern period, and contemporary Mexico death has been ever present. The inhabitants Mexico have always had to face their own mortality on a daily basis, but familiarity with death evolved through each era. The Aztecs/Mexica Empire indulged in sacrifices for the gods and ritual blood letting making them unpopular among the surrounding communities. Lomnitz writes, “The discovery of the Mexican’s familiarity with and proximity to death became both a paradigmatic image of *mestizaje* as an aesthetic project and a formulation of the guiding parameters of a political system characterized by overt class struggle and effective state mediation, a system founded on the dialectics of rape, that is, on the fertile and reproductive consequences of violent exploitation.” Lomnitz makes clear that Paz’s idea of “*hijos de la chingada*” was an idea that enforced the idea of *mestizaje* but also makes explicit that the nation was not born from but founded on exploitation. Lomnitz summarizes the common themes that weaved themselves through Mexican history, such as consistent unstable political systems which resulted in a class struggle, which Posada would make direct reference to in his depictions of *calaveras*. There is also the moment of conquest, which will never be forgotten, in Mexico’s national memory.

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Modernists enacted national memory to dissect and understand their identity by the myth which traced the birth of the first mestizo of La Malinche and Hernán Cortes, which justified the mestizo as the true race of Mexico.

Since Mesoamerica had a high indigenous population the Spanish had no need to use a large amount of African slaves and could easily enslave the already existing population at hand. The extreme conditions and illness caused the indigenous population to drop exponentially. By the 1530s, Franciscans, Dominican, and Augustinian friars were beginning to teach the art of alphabetic writing to members of the indigenous elite. The friars were on a mission to “educate and indoctrinate” the population, it was their God given duty. “The religious became involved in every enterprise possible in order to sustain their operations...They sought to learn as much as possible about native beliefs and customs in order to identify and extirpate.” The Church didn’t know the concept of “synchronization”, their only goal was to civilize and save the souls of the indigenous and extirpating their religion; if there was a similar system already in place in pre-Columbian society they saw it as a way of evangelizing more efficiently through turning these structures to Catholic ones. The goals set out by the church were simply not possible on the large population spread across a vast landscape which held deeply seeded religious beliefs, the minority of religious officials could not complete their task and their efforts would be a constant throughout the colonial period. The perceptions of indigenous people as able of conversion saved the population from being victims of pure exploitation for economic gain and would later be administered by the modernist movement. Diego Rivera saw the importance of indigenous art, “close to the earth.” It was not only Diego that used perceived ideas as a tool to unify a nation, it was also the Creoles during independence and many other movements. The varying

119 Lomnitz-Adler, Death, 415.
movements put forth efforts to construct a united identity to not only unify but to gain control over a very diverse nation that historically were made to be “enemies” by imposed imperial Spanish power. The *calavera* was thus a tool used by modernists to enforce their ideas, even though its initial application was simply a critique of the very systems put in place by the changing authorities. Since conquest, Mexico had gone through many changes of regimes and revolutions and due to its vast geography and varying cultural, political, and social classes a national identity could never be truly accomplished.

The creator of the *calavera* imagery was José Guadalupe Posada. He was born in 1852 and lived through and illustrated two violent revolutions. He died (1913) before the end of the second revolution, the mass uprising of 1910-1921.\textsuperscript{120} Congdon notes that Posada came into the world at a time when the inventive tradition of satirical newspapers was well underway in Mexico. *El Calavera*, founded in 1847, used the skeleton in modern dress as a symbol of moral, critical voice of the newspaper.”\textsuperscript{121} Posada had witnessed the severe social class disparities through the revolution. Posada saw the opportunity to make a social commentary on the development of the nation with the “equalizing” image of the *calavera*. His statement was a bold one at that. In a nation whose social class disparities were so obvious and who had to face their mortality on a daily basis dating from pre-Columbian times, to claim that death will come for everyone and everyone is equal was a courageous claim against political leaders and the whole way the system functioned.

Depicted in Figure 1 one of Posada’s most iconic images “La Catrina.” His commentary was to be said on the bourgeois Mexican women who aspired to be European and thus dressed


\textsuperscript{121} Congdon, 11.
the part in all of the highest end fashions, deriving from imperial powers that had caused set out these ideas of what qualified as “elite” and “civilized.” Posada’s use of the calavera as his model for critique highlights the ways in which material culture was used as a class defining technique. Lomnitz elaborates on the matter of dressing up calavera’s, “...Posada had used the skeleton as a sign of truth, and of a very particular truth: the universality of death proved the fundamental equality of man. The dressed-up skeleton shower up the arbitrary and violent nature of social inequality.”122 By fashioning European apparel on a Mexican woman it could seen as a statement that no matter how one dressed to fit the part or even if they were part of that class death would find them in the end and they were all subject to death. What happens when a skeleton loses their clothes or materials, it turns out they are just a pile of bones, their clothing is no longer defining their social class and social identity. They are without the materials that define their image, status, and place within society. Without the floral hat they she is just skeleton, she is just death, she is not above or below ever the lowest strata’s of the social hierarchy.

Posada’s prints not only make a commentary of the dress of the bourgeois but also other classes in Mexican society. In Figure 3 and 4 Posada depicts social scenes. Figure 1 Posada depicts people from differing classes interacting on the streets. All the figures are clearly defined by their clothing. In the foreground there is a peasant who can be defined by his sandals and linen clothing. He seems to be interacting with a woman of a higher class, you can tell by her Europeanized “sophisticated” high necked dress. In the background of the image are people of varying social classes; “la catrina”, the pope, men of higher status in top hats, and as well as soldiers with their iconic hats. Wearing a certain “lower-class” attire could also be defining and make class distinctions visually both in real life and pictorially. Figure 3 differs quite a bit from

122 Lomnitz, Dead, 418-19.
Figure 1. Posada depicts *dancing calaveras* whose attire is explicitly that of the working class with the simple skirts and hats worn by the *calaveras*. They are celebrating and drinking, partaking in a fiesta, which was once notably an indigenous attributed celebration and would later be defined by Paz in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* as a quintessential Mexican event.

Lomnitz elaborates on the power of Posada’s imagery in the Mexican context,

> The notion that people were fundamentally equal was both fascinating and subversive in a society like that of Mexico’s nineteenth century, in which human porters carried the rich on their backs, hacienda managers provided peons with their dowries and tried judges, and punished offenders, and indigenous “races” were cast as having inferior constitution and blamed for the nation’s backwardness. Moreover, these images were powerful because they presented an embodied form of equality that contrasted with the abstracted idiom of equality found in the constitutions and political proclamations.¹²³

Posada is claiming that proclamations of equality from constitutions and political leaders were false promises and that inequality was alive and well. Posada was redefining what equality meant for the Mexican people. It was a claim to call people to recognize the vast inequality in the nation through the imagery of something that was feared among many, death. Congdon explains the dilemma in which the lower class Mexicans found themselves in as well as the wealthier individuals “Mexicans on the lower economic rungs of life understand that the plans they make and the dreams they have are only possible if they have life to see them through... Nonetheless, they also know that a stable economic life will not necessarily grant anyone a long and healthy life.”¹²⁴ Mexicans of the lower economic status faced their mortality on a daily basis of survival, those who belonged to higher classes were not exempt from the “equalizer” of death. Especially with a history of assassinations of public figures and constant war, as Lomnitz said earlier that Mexico was a nation of “enemies. “One of the more iconic killings was that of Maximilian by

¹²³ *ibid*, 439-440
President Benito Juárez’s regime, his death would signal the end of a monarchy. Juárez debated the sentence of Maximillan, “but Juárez chose instead to remain true to the death sign, and to present Europe with the spectacle of its own death, just as Mexico had been forced to ponder its mortality.”\footnote{Lomnitz-Adler, \textit{Death}, 32.} Perhaps it was the equalizing justice of death that made it necessary for the assassination of Maximillan. Mexico’s outward hate for the imperial powers that continued to attempt to take control of them is reflected in their choice of assassinating Maximillan. Not only a private death but a very public death to make an example of the old ruler who reflected monarchical power. Posada was also would later create a rendition of the firing squad shooting Maximillan.

Post-revolutionary, Mexican modernist painter Diego Rivera saw Posada’s \textit{calaveras} as a perfect to tool to administer in his paintings and murals that visualized “Mexican identity” through the lenses of the \textit{indigenista} movement. Lomnitz credit Rivera has the “father of Mexican modernism.”\footnote{Ibid, 413.} Rivera took Posadas \textit{calavera} and re-purposed it, for he saw that Posada’s political use of the \textit{calavera} had resonance with the Mexican modernists. Lomnitz describes the two differing ideas of the \textit{calavera},

Posada imagery in the late Porfiriato (1890s to early in the second decade of the twentieth century) was a powerful form of urban commentary (including an early form of \textit{nota roja}, that is a crime reporting) and a sharp political critique. After the revolution, that imagery migrated, in the hand of Rivera and others to another field, that of national projects. For Rivera and others, the intermingling and cohabitation of the dead, with all their differences and contradictions, was the most potent image. The dead, in this version, collectively gave birth, through revolution, to a modern nation. These associations would in turn facilitate the emblematic usage of Posada imagery as a marker of national identity.\footnote{Ibid, 440.}
Posada’s calavera’s have been speculated only to be making commentaries on the injustices seen within the Mexican nation, but never made an outward claim to be defining the Mexican identity or national icon. Posada’s use of calaveras was his ingenious re-purposing of a religious and historical image of death and used it to mock the social hierarchy. The calavera is also the best image to contrast the bones with the material culture that defined so many social classes. What is a calavera without the clothes that define them? They are just the inevitable death that will come to us all, no matter what class they were living. Now we have Rivera and the Mexican modernists with their “national project” who saw Posada’s image’s not only holding significance in the image itself but with their author’s social class. It made sense to Rivera and others to make Posada’s imagined calavera’s a crucial element to Mexican national identity. Lomnitz references the ways in which Mexican modernism was founded on, “The second rock on which Mexican modern art would stand was so-called popular art, an art that Rivera and others valued because of its functional connection to the needs and aspirations of working people: “Indigenous aesthetics are a deep and direct expression of pure art in relation to the life that produces it: a relationship that has not been darkened by miserly cults or corrupted by theories. It is produced in a single motion [entero] and springs from the natural fount of art--from human experience and human emotion, built on ample sense of beauty.”128 Thus Mexican modernists saw the indigenous as being pure and connected to life because they have not been corrupted by “theories.” Lomnitz further discusses Rivera and Mexican modernists use of Posada, “Thus Posada was made to embody the polarity between popular and academic art: an art that served the appetites of the people rather than the bourgeoisie, an art that was in a fundamental way anonymous and

128 Ibid, 415
generous rather than self-promoting and precious.”

Rivera brought Posada’s imagery into the art sphere and murals, and would be one of the main reasons for its nationalization. Rivera’s use of the *calavera* imagery can be seen in Diego Rivera’s “City Fiesta” refer to figure 2. Lomnitz comments Rivera’s piece, “At the same time, the nationalization of death also had implications for ways in which the social compact was imagined, as is clear enough in Rivera’s City Fiesta, seen in Figure 5. Depicted in the image is the urban fiesta. Among the people you can see various people of varying social classes celebrating Día de los Muertos, such as the children wearing *calavera* masks, prostitutes, Zapatistas, indigenous, and elites. All of them can be identified and placed into classes by how they were depicted in dress. Above is the revolutionary nationalization of Day of the Dead through the depiction of revolutionaries as *Calaveras*. Lomnitz observes the mural, “In short the society comes together and celebrates to the tune of it's’ dead, whose differences are both made eternal and harmonized in death”

The *calaveras* are at the forefront of the celebration. At the bottom Rivera and many Mexican modernists saw Day of the Day as cultural fusion, a strictly mestizo celebration, at the center of Mexican national identity.

The now national “totemic symbol” the *calavera* can be seen littering the streets of Mexico during *Día de los Muertos*. Although Skeleton imagery can be seen in both the Pre-columbian context and the Spanish Catholicism context, it is not certain to the extent that the *calavera* imagery was affected by these previous influences. To understand why the *calavera* is placed in the *Ofrenda* and a central image in Day of the Dead we must understand why it’s original creator Posada took the image of death to represent his social and political atmosphere and why Mexican modernists appropriated his image to enforce their ideals of what Mexico was.

129 Ibid, 418.
130 Ibid, 46.
131 Ibid.
Through our understanding of Posada’s discontent with Mexican government we can see the culmination of all the regimes that preceded it reflected in a government that remained deeply stratified since colonialism. The calavera’s place in Mexican identity in Day of the Dead notes how Diego Rivera and Mexican modernists appropriated an image to help their goals in constructing a unifying identity that held mestizo’s as the truest representation of mexicanidad. Modernists saw indigenous groups as a thing of the past and to be absorbed into the Mexican narrative similar to the creoles before them who claimed pre-Columbian civilization as an ancient “authenticating” history of Mexico, both movements took advantage of the indigenous identity to enforce their agenda and disregarded the still living indigenous of the present. We can see in Figures14 and 19 calaveras are mainly administered in places central to urban areas and public ones where ofrendas that are in more rural communities and home altars there are little to no administration of them as seen in figures 7 and 20. Perhaps it is because in areas that are urban the idea of mexicanidad is more stressed and commodified. The public ofrenda created by students of UNAM (refer to Figure 19) mourning the disappearance and assumed deaths of the missing 43 students is both administered as a political statement and recognition of their Mexican identity. The students based it on the theme of Frida Kahlo, a Mexican modernist painter and the wife of Diego Rivera, and atop the ofrenda are skeletal figures of La Catrina. Through this display they express their mestizo identity and perhaps without intention administer the theme of death in a similar way that Posada does by critiquing their government for being corrupt and holding a place of indisputable power that believes they have power over the lives of it’s citizen’s. Nevertheless, whether intentional or not the ofrenda calls out the corruptness and uses the calavera as a symbol of equalizing death.
Maize and Chocolate

Food provides life but with development of societies singular food items have been transformed into commodities and tools to define culture. These commodities have a long history in changing landscapes through the desire for capital and power. The history of food in the context of Spain’s colonial pursuits in the New World makes a commentary on the journey of Mexican national identity and all the diverse characters that used food as a tool to define identity. Marcy Norton observes that scholars have disproven the “rational consumer” who attempts to maximize function use-value or to fulfill biological destiny with the “reductive consumer” who consumes to create and maintain a “social identity.” ¹³² In both the highly stratified societies of Spain and Mesoamerica self-presentation and lifestyle was key to defining oneself in society, down to the food that one ate. Both societies centered themselves around their respective religions. Religion teaches, repeats, and enforces societies ethics and standards. ¹³³ Eugen N. Anderson writes, “The group that prays together stays together--especially if its members share religious feast.” ¹³⁴ In the case of the conquest Spain, conquistadors came with a firm understanding of their diet being structured around Catholic health, class, and race. ¹³⁵ By eating the diet set by their society it defined the conquistadors as Catholic civilized Spaniards. Though

¹³⁴ Anderson, 189.
the indigenous society didn’t stray to far from a similar structure, by their consumption of *maize*, the plant that brought life to their civilization, they honored it and the deities. As part of the evangelizing project Spaniards strived to impose their diet upon the indigenous, if you eat like a Catholic you will be Catholic. Though when the Spanish arrived they could not control the environmental differences which affected the food regime. Which made them reliant on indigenous knowledge to survive the initial years of colonialism and affected how certain goods would make their way into European society. Food, specifically chocolate and maize, are the final items that I will analyze and their central role in the *Ofrenda*. John C. Super explains all the intricate ways in which food affects all spheres of society in *Food, Conquest, and Colonization in Sixteenth-century Spanish Americas* writes,

> Food was one of the many material and cultural elements that helped to shape the new social, economic, and political order that emerged in the sixteenth century. Essential to the new order was the ability of the natives and colonists to produce, distribute, and consume the foods necessary for survival and growth...Food supplies were the result of an ever-changing process that embraced the clash of old and new, the struggle to persevere, and the willingness to adjust to the realities of sixteenth-century life. Broad changes in the Atlantic region altered food patterns everywhere. At the local and regional level, the interaction between environment, population, and the economic demands of colonization, buffered by traditional beliefs about food, influenced food supplies.

Food was first of all a means of survival and second of all a reflection of a society's ethos and way of life. Many narratives allude to the idea that during the conquest it was a consistent pillage and destruction. It was the Spaniards that did onto the indigenous. As can be seen in Paz’s perceived idea of *Hijos de la chingada*, it was the male Spaniard which rapes the female native.

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136 Laudan and Pilcher, 63.
138 Super, 1.
Though the conquest would directly reflect the societal idea that the higher classes in power affect the lower classed. The conquest was far more complex than a mere rape of the land and the people. Not only does Paz limit the agency of women and natives but also the vast diversity of the Mexican identity. Mary Norton writes, “There is a belief that it was mainly the indigenous being accustomed to Spanish society and that the indigenous were the ones that received, but it was also the other way around in which the Spanish were ‘susceptible to native acculturation’.”\textsuperscript{139} Though colonizers held a place of power their initial survival was dependent on native knowledge of the land.\textsuperscript{140} Not only that but during the spiritual conquest priests had to find ways to indoctrinate and educate the native populations efficiently, at times synchronization was the most effective way in accomplishing fast conversions. Much to the dismay of the Spaniards there were many similarities in not only religious spheres but also social strata.

Though even Spanish cuisine was not uniquely itself Catholic since it had integrated food brought over by the Moors during the time they conquered and ruled Spain.\textsuperscript{141} The climate in which New world foods grew in plays a large role in the demand of “exotic” goods from the New World and the dissemination of a New World good into Europe. Some New world foods could simply not be grown with the same success in Europe and some like \textit{maize} were adaptable and spread rapidly through the Old World. Why did \textit{maize} an essential indigenous food stick around all the way until the present barely being changed? How did chocolate, a scared indigenous drink, become one of the most popular drinks in Spain with its bitter taste? Why are these items central to the \textit{ofrenda}, what does their placement in an \textit{ofrenda} say about Mexican history? \textit{Ofrendas} display the foods most favored by the deceased loved one, thus the food is

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{139}Norton, \textit{Tasting Empire}, 679.
\item \textsuperscript{140}Super, \textit{Food}, 58.
\item \textsuperscript{141}Lauden and Pilcher, \textit{Chiles}, 62.
\end{itemize}
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reflective of a person’s identity and what they consumed in their lifetime as well as reflecting the social situation of the era they lived in.

One of the staple foods in the Mexican diet next to bread is corn, also known as *maize*. *Maize* can be seen in most *Ofrendas* in varying forms; as a drink, as tortillas, tamales, and many more. Figure 16 depicts a model *Ofrenda* where at the forefront are two ears of the corn. Figures 16 and 17 are artistic representations of the *ofrenda* which make more apparent the crucial items in the construction of an *ofrenda*.

*Maize* has a deep history in indigenous creation myths. Elisabeth Lambert Ortiz describe the Maya creation story in relation to corn,

Maize was more than just food to the ancient peoples of America. It was the focal point of religion which was built around the Gods of corn. For the Maya, whose empire stretched from Western Honduras in Central America and into Yucatan and Chiapas in Mexico, language, ritual, and the calendar were all based on corn. The greatest of the corn gods was Quetzalcoatl. He was descendant of the great god, Kukulkan, who is said to have founded the city of Chichen Itza in Yucatan, the ruins of which can still be visited today. One of his emblems was sprouting maize. Even today, maize is still important to Mayan culture in Guatemala. Over time, maize spread from its Mexican and Central American homeland across North America and into South America... 142

Thus *Maize* was seen as the source of life and fertility. *Maize* would become one of the main starches in indigenous cultures of Central America and Mexico. Its adaptability, taste, and diversity made it popular among all of the Americas and can be found in indigenous cultures in

South America and North America. Cultivated Maize traces back as early as 5000 BC. The Mayan’s creation myth also makes complete sense from a biological perspective. Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat explains that indigenous cultures that preceded the great civilizations of the Mayan and the Aztec had found ways to efficiently harvest maize through their understanding that the weed teosinte helped maize grow abundantly, helping them to “achieve true civilization.” The Aztec were able to increase nutritional value through a process called nixtamilization. The developed process transformed the starch into a even more diverse food able to not only provide simple food but also nutrition. Maize was the reason for civilization and an abundance of life in Central America and Mexico. It was not only attributed to the creation of life but also to the longevity and maintenance of life. Toussaint-Samat quotes the Popol Vuh the Great book of the Mayas, “The first man was made of clay, and was destroyed in a flood. The second man, made of wood, was swept away by a great rain. Only the third man survive. He was made of Maize.” Maize persists through floods and rains, and it would continue to persist through history as being a staple food and identity marker.

Spanish conquistadors had no other choice but to rely on the food provided them by the native populations, later on they would try to establish the food that they held close and religiously meaningful. Rachel Laudan and Jeffrey M. Pilcher explain Spain’s deeply rooted gastronomy origins,
The Romans had introduced their gastronomy to their provinces in Spain, laying the foundation for the diet based on wheat bread, wine, and olive oil. Christians endowed the products of this agricultural triad with multiple religious meanings, incorporating all of them into the rituals of the Church. Wheat was the only grain recognized for the Holy Eucharist; from the eleventh century on, priests could substitute no other bread for the body of Christ.\footnote{Lauden and Pilcher, \textit{Chiles, Chocolate}, 62.}

Bread was the staple starch in the Spanish and Roman context and also held a similarities to corn. They were both a staple food for all classes in their prospective cultures. Though corn dough was representative of the bodies formed by the gods to create humans in the Mayan creation story,\footnote{Gray and Lawson, \textit{Celebraciones}, 3.} while wheat bread was representative of the body of Christ. The Spanish came holding wheat very close to them and once they established themselves in New Spain one of their first objectives was to replace \textit{maize} with wheat. It held the highest potential for changing the diets of the indigenous due to the increased demands of the Spaniards.\footnote{Super, \textit{Food}, 57.} Jeffrey M. Pilcher states that, “Spanish efforts to convince Indians to eat wheat failed miserably. The natives grew the crop only for European markets, either under repartimiento compulsion or on their own entrepreneurial initiative. Priests worked to introduce bread during religious festivals, but sacrificial loaves often sat beside tamales, indicating continued veneration for maize.”\footnote{Pilcher, Jeffrey M. "Tamales or Timbales: Cuisine and the Formation of Mexican National Identity, 1821-1911." \textit{The Americas} 53, no. 2 (1996): 193-216. doi:10.2307/1007616., 199.}

The presence of \textit{Pan de Muerto} also known as Dead Bread (Seen in Figures 1 and 15) exemplifies the success of wheat bread but presence of \textit{maize} in its varying forms alongside it shows the persistence of indigenous culture. The Spanish population would also be a minority and thus the
market had to grow with the growth of the creole and mestizo population. Wheat bread’s popularity would never demolish the use of maize in cuisine.

Food in Colonial New Spain became an important “status marker” by associating the poor indigenous as “people of the corn” and the elite-Spanish with wheat.151 Stratifying images in casta paintings were used to enforce visual racial distinctions and associations by having darker skinned individuals seen with tamales and other native foods, “demonstrating the significance of culture as a status marker.”152 Even after Independence corn continued to signify lower-class, political elites believed that indigenous must acquire Europe culture to obtain Mexican citizenship and saw corn reflective of the country’s “backwardness.”153 Pilcher defines the cuisine as having a central role in conflicting conceptions of Mexico’s national identity thus making it difficult to create a united Mexico.154 Maize was a sturdy crop that had a high yield for rural communities but provided little income; where wheat held a low yield and only proved profitable in urban areas.155 The two crops symbolized the traditional countryside and the urban elite that aspired to keep up with European industrialization.156 It was not until the Revolution and the drive to enforce mestizo culture did the combination of the two become a signifier of Mexicanidad.157

Not only did corn have popularity in the New world but it soon spread to the Old World. It grew popular among the lower-class in Spain through its efficiency and proved to be another item on the list to be taxed.158 It found even greater success in Africa through the transmission of

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151 Pilcher. *Tamales or Timbales*, 194.
152 Ibid, 200.
153 Ibid, 214.
154 Ibid, 195.
155 Ibid.
156 Ibid.
157 Ibid, 196.
the Portuguese. The Portuguese established large farms of corn in Africa which were cheap and fast growing to provide sustenance to large communities or more importantly ships full of slaves and even in the present day in age still provides nutrients to many parts of Africa. This is an example of how one commodity helped fuel the trade and growth of other commodities. Despite both Spanish and creole efforts to replace maize with wheat bread the same indigenous traditions in cuisine survive today, people continue to use the process of nixtamalization to further its nutritious value and as well turn ground maize into tamales, arepas, pupusas, and tortillas. Though it has become victim to capitalism and endured increased price changes it continues to be a staple of the daily diet. As much as the Spanish had a disliking towards maize, they could not deny its reliability as a easy source of food able to be grown in many condition and providing sustenance to both humans and animals. It was not only reliable but versatile, it could be made into porridge, drinks, baked into tortillas, incorporated into soups, and made into alcoholic beverages. Maize’s reasons for having deep cultural roots allowed it to persist through all the phases of Mexico’s development as a nation and it’s presence in the ofrenda is a statement in itself of it’s cultural perseverance.

The god Quetzalcoatl that was responsible for the creation of humankind was also responsible for gifting ‘fortune’ and ‘strength’ through the cacahuauchtli Tree that bore the cacao seeds. Pre-Columbian diverse cultures use of it as currency and their similar preparation of the beverage ingredients is evidence of its status and ‘underscored the pan-Mesoamerican

159Ibid, 10.
162Clampitt, Corn, 12.
163Ibid, 7.
164Toussaint-Samat, A History of Food, 516.
embrace’ of the beverage.\footnote{Norton, Tasting Empire, 671.} Cacao seeds were consumed through varying beverages, one of the more common recipe used was a mixture of fermented and ground cacao seeds, water, chilli peppers, honey, \emph{tlilxochitl} (vanilla), \emph{xochinacaztli}, and \emph{mecaxóchitl}.\footnote{Norton, Conquests of Chocolate, 16.} Presentation, smell, texture, and taste were all equally important, the goal was to create an experience.\footnote{Ibid, 14.} The drink was used in various ritual ceremonies and was associated with life-force and enforcing the belief by incorporating achiote making blood red appearance.\footnote{Few, Martha. "Chocolate, Sex, and Disorderly Women in Late-Seventeenth- and Early-Eighteenth-Century Guatemala." Ethnohistory 52, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 673-687. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost (accessed April 19, 2017)., 675} Within the stratified Mexica society the drink was associated with the privileged elite, being used to welcome visiting dignitaries.\footnote{Ibid, 14.} Martha Few observes that Mayan’s also associated chocolate consumption with the elite by the presence of chocolate drinking vessels in many elite burial tombs.\footnote{Norton, Conquests of Chocolate, 16.} Europeans initial encounter with chocolate was during Columbus’ fourth voyage in 1502 near the coast of Mayan Honduras, and though there was an immediate dislike towards the bitter drink the Spanish would soon understand the significance of it within the society.\footnote{Norton, Conquests of Chocolate, 15.}

The colonial narrative continues to be that it was Spanish authorities asserting power and assimilation unto the native population but Marcy Norton negates the idea by presenting Europeans internalization of indigenous practices through their consumption and appropriation of chocolate. Norton problematizes the myth of chocolate conforming to European tastes, which sprung from Spanish conquest ideology based on the idea that colonists brought civilization to
‘barbarians.’\textsuperscript{172} The idea that “civilized” Spanish internalized “barbaric” ritualistic drinks completely went against the idea of colonialism and was a failure within the spiritual conquest. Norton identifies several reasons why Spanish internalized both the taste and ritual for cacao; the first was their initial dependence on the indigenous thus acquiring a taste for the bitter drink\textsuperscript{173}, the second was the wealth that could be acquired from native consumers and the second was its role in distinguishing hierarchy, and the final was the closeness in which both colonizers and indigenous lived together in particular were the use of indigenous women as servants and wives.\textsuperscript{174} Norton observes that due to Cacao’s previous use as tribute within Aztec civilization, in the sixteenth-century Spanish promoted the continued tributaries of cacao production seeing a possibility for economic expansion through indigenous consumption.\textsuperscript{175} As cacao production increased it became more available to more indigenous groups, this was one of the many ways in which the conquest dismantled traditional social hierarchies.\textsuperscript{176} Though the Spanish did not take for the granted the use of cacao as a class defining good of “power” and “prestige.”\textsuperscript{177} The spread of chocolate in Spain and the rest of Europe was administered through the appeal to elite classes and religious orders. The earliest shipments of chocolate and its paraphernalia were for the elite merchant class.\textsuperscript{178} This observance makes not of the soon to be developing market for cacao in general, the first steps to making consumption an experience that required specific vessels to drink it with; quite similarly to the ways indigenous groups had in the past. Churches and ecclesiastical orders were “nodes of transmission” both in the New and Old world. Norton notes that within Europe missionary orders in particular Jesuits were important ‘human networks’ to

\textsuperscript{172}Norton, \textit{Tasting Empire}, 686.
\textsuperscript{173} Norton, \textit{Conquests of Chocolate}, 15.
\textsuperscript{174} Norton, \textit{Tasting Empire}, 677.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid, 676.
\textsuperscript{176} Norton, \textit{Conquests of Chocolate}, 15.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid, 15.
\textsuperscript{178} Norton, \textit{Tasting Empire}, 681.
disseminate taste.\textsuperscript{179} In New Spain churches ‘served as nodes of transmission’ by being a place where cultures met communally. Chocolate continued to remain across cultures a religious and ritually transmitted food.

Norton continues her argument by stating that Spanish “learned to like chocolate because their material dependence on Indians,” and one of the importance spaces was the domestic sphere where Spanish took Indian wives, servants, and concubines as a result of a lack of Spanish women and as another form of conquest strategy.\textsuperscript{180} It is important to take note that the domestic sphere was not only the center of the institution of society but was also an important vessel in transmittance and maintenance of culture. At the center of the domestic sphere were women in all the varying roles. Norton describes domestic spheres as an intimate “colonial space of dependence” and space of cross-cultural contact where women could be seen as “cultural intermediaries.”\textsuperscript{181} Even when there was an increase of Spanish women in Colonial New Spain it was only the elite that married peninsular women and indigenous women remained in the domestic sphere as servants and wet nurses.\textsuperscript{182} It was the new generation of New World born Spanish Creoles who were raised in the indigenous environment and households who acquired the taste for not only chocolate but the traditional ways in which it was prepared.\textsuperscript{183} It was the domestic sphere that played a large role in Creoles acculturation to indigenous palates. *Peninsulares* feared Creoles upbringing in the New World would lead to reverse acculturation and continuance of idolatry.\textsuperscript{184} *Peninsulares* fears were true but what they didn’t acknowledge was that they too had already internalized indigenous tastes and values. Creoles consumption of

\textsuperscript{179} Norton, *Conquests of Chocolate*, 16.
\textsuperscript{180} Norton, *Tasting Empire*, 677.
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid
\textsuperscript{182} Ibid
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid, 683.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid, 687.
chocolate in traditional forms was a focal point for *peninsulares* ‘denigration of Creoles.’ Creoles were made to be a perfect example of the ‘vulnerability of colonial subjects of all castes to acculturation of native ways.’ Though despite *peninsulares* association with chocolate consumption as a degenerate and idolatrous act people of all genders, castes, and races still participated in the act.

Martha Few expands on chocolate’s association with idolatry by the analyzation of Inquisition records where women were accused of preparing witchcraft concoctions with chocolate and citizen’s demands for it, in *Chocolate, Sex, and Disorderly Women in Late-Seventeenth- and Early-Eighteenth-Century Guatemala*. Few further explains that women’s chocolate use was not solely associated with witchcraft but also social disorder. She observes that the presence of supernatural manifestations, witch hunts, and role of the Inquisition exemplified conflicts within culture revealing gender and ethnic dimensions in social relations which helps us better understand the politics of power in colonial ruled centers. In the late sixteenth-century once chocolate became more readily available through the increase of production and through the domestic sphere so did the ways in preparation spread. Even lower-class citizens who could not afford servants may have learned preparation through their integration in native communities. Mixed-race, indigenous, and Afro-Guatemalan women were the primary targets for accusations of performing witchcraft. Accusations of witchcraft performances through chocolate covered a large sphere of spells having to do with casting illness, seeking revenge, healing, sexual desire, curing men’s anger, bewitching men into

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185 Ibid, 688.
186 Few, *Chocolate, Sex*, 674.
187 Few, 677.
188 Ibid, 683.
189 Ibid, 680.
submissive roles\textsuperscript{190} and many other spells that reflected social discomfort within the colony. The thick brew of chocolate was a perfect disguise to cover herbs and feminine fluids administered in witchcraft.\textsuperscript{191} Although peninsulares took pride in their disdain towards chocolate as a way of defining race and class there is evidence that both elite Spanish men and women resorted to consulting female sorcerers; men in search of lovers and women to remedy spousal problems.\textsuperscript{192} Both consumers and producers were going against colonial pursuits on different levels. Where consumers were participating in either acculturation of indigenous ways or continuing idolatry. Producers, primarily women, were breaking gender roles, taking advantage through their power in the domestic sphere, and going against evangelization. Elite Spanish women also broke the boundaries of feminine roles. Few presents the example of elite Spanish women in Santiago coming to Church with their servants to prepare their chocolate “in great luxury” which caused a ruckus in church, as a result laws were made prohibiting the consumption of chocolate in church. On top of this there were additional cases in which nuns had been dismissed for “scandalous behaviour” regarding chocolate consumption.\textsuperscript{193} Few wraps up her analysis and argument by observing that women who consumed chocolate ran the risk of being associated with women’s heresy and law-breaking yet some saw it as an opportunity to take advantage of their role in the domestic sphere and made threats of doctoring chocolate during conflicts.\textsuperscript{194} Chocolate’s meanings were changed and also maintained through varying characters in the colonial context. More importantly women’s use of it revealed much more of the ways in which women went against the roles set out for them by colonists, who were projecting Roman Catholic ideals of the

\textsuperscript{190}Ibid, 678.
\textsuperscript{191}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{192}Ibid, 679-681.
\textsuperscript{193}Ibid, 683.
\textsuperscript{194}Ibid. 684,
roles gender and race must adhere to. Chocolate leaked into every class, gender, and caste in the colonies.

Although Spaniards continued the dialogue that colonization adhered to the “top-down” model of society by later claiming that the addition of milk and sugar to chocolate was a way of “civilizing” the taste of the “barbaric” drink.\(^{195}\) Norton analyzes that this was only eighteenth century colonial ideology and the gradual change in taste with the addition of sugar was for several reasons; to replicate the sweetness of honey, the increasing sugar plantations in the Americas and Caribbean making it more readily available,\(^{196}\) and that it was neither cost-effective or efficient to acquire certain ingredients through long-distance trade.\(^{197}\) Yet Spaniards did not understand that regardless of the changes made to chocolate they had created a market by developing specific utensils similarly in the way the the pre-Columbian’s had vessels distinctly for chocolate. The exotic food became “fashionable” through it’s place at the top of Spain’s hierarchy.\(^{198}\) Norton summarizes that taste is not only a ‘social phenomena’ in the case of chocolate,

...taste instead of naturalizing ideologies of hegemony, can reveal internal contradictions of hegemony, can reveal internal contradictions in ideological apparatuses. In Spain and Spanish America, Europeans’ taste for chocolate did not bolster a normative hierarchy that elevated European colonists over Indian subjects, or Christian over pagans. Instead, it brought unwanted attention to the failures of the colonial civilizing and evangelical project and revealed the civilizers’ vulnerability to cultural metamorphosis and Christians’ potential for internalizing idolatry.\(^{199}\)

\(^{196}\) Norton, *Conquests of Chocolate*, 16.
\(^{197}\) Norton, *Tasting Empire*, 660.
\(^{198}\) Laudan and Pilcher, *Chile, Chocolate*, 65.
\(^{199}\) Norton, *Tasting Empire*, 691.
Not only did chocolate in the New World and the Old World prove the failures of colonialism and evangelization, it also made apparent gender dynamics, the transformation of commodities, and ways in which castes were created and enforced through social discourse.

The world was transformed when the Atlantic Slave trade erupted. Norton makes note of one way in which commodities transformed societies by summarizing the arguments of Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Kenneth Pomerantz, and Robin Blackburn, “colonial trading companies and profits from the slave trade and slave-based plantation economies--fueled European demands for tropical groceries--were a prerequisite for industrialization and the European take off.”200 There is also the ways in which plantation societies developed due to the lack of indigenous presence which promoted the import of slaves. Slaves would also make plantation endeavors more cost-effective. Brandes notes that the lack of a concern to evangelize an indigenous population, in areas such as the Caribbean and Brazil created a different society based solely on Sidney Mintz’s model of a plantation society that produces and meet demands of the mass market and on top slave population had no disposable income to partake in the market.201 Commodities not only affected the landscapes of varying societies but also affected each other. Norton notes that the spread of the bitter chocolate drink in Europe prepared the consumers for the next bitter drink of coffee, both these drinks became vessels for sugar.202

Super writes, “Food habits are often assumed to be stable parts of culture, rigid, and resistant to change. Changes in food habits announce broader social changes and suggest deep cultural transformations.”203 This can be said of both Spanish and pre-Columbian cuisine. Though

200Ibid, 665.
202Norton, Tasting Empire, 667.
203Super, Food, 66.
the changes in cuisine are very apparent such as the ever-present bread in most if not all
*Ofrendas* and the incorporation of livestock into a large variety of dishes. Who is the largest
player in the continuance of food culture? It is women; they are the consumers, producers, and
central players in the domestic sphere and in these roles they took agency which influenced
economy, culture, and national identity. They not only continued and took advantage of the
preparation of chocolate they were the ones that continued family traditions by instilling tastes in
the children they watched over and raised. Even in the very beginning of the conquest indigenous
women were placed in the kitchen and since virtually all were illiterate the only way to pass on
tradition was orally.204 Even now families pass on their special recipes down through generations
of women.205 Indigenous women took agency through the central role in domestic living,
influencing African slaves and elite Spanish women. The practices of mestizo cuisine
demonstrate the way in which subordinate groups, women and lower classes influenced national
identity.206 In the late sixteenth century the marketplace was defined as an Indian institution.207
Specifically indigenous and black women took the role as “purveyors of knowledge” on the
substances presented and Spanish took the role of “seekers and buyers.”208 Women were not only
center to the community space of the marketplace but also the Fiesta. The preparation of Tamales
reflects the communal efforts where women take the reigns in assigning tasks to the time
consuming and complex process which doesn’t stray far from pre-Hispanic tradition.209 Fiesta’s
were once associated with indigenous revolt and civil unrest in the 16th century.210 Stanley
Brandes states that Spanish colonialists were perturbed by the popular fiesta Day of the Dead due

204 Pilcher, *Tamales or Timbales*, 204.
206 Pilcher, *Tamales or Timbales*, 194.
207 Norton, *Tasting Empire*, 668.
208 Ibid, 687.
209 Gray and Lawson, *Celebraciones*, 34.
210 Ibid, 2.
to its fusion of death, celebration, and ‘flamboyant symbols of death’ as a sign of resistance to colonial ideology.\textsuperscript{211} Death had never before been celebrated in such a manner. Day of the Dead and many other fiestas which orient themselves around food remain and the way the Church brought the community together, so did the fiesta through affirmations of national cultural cuisine. Though chocolate is present in Day of the Dead ofrendas it was always present in death rituals; Mayas would offer it the deities during sacrifices\textsuperscript{212}, colonial mourners would drink it during wakes\textsuperscript{213}, and now it persists as a central addition to many foods of the ofrendas (Atole, mole, hot chocolate, candy, chapurrado, etc). Many of the recipes that have chocolate, besides the drink, also have maize or will be accompanied by tortillas. Food is transformed into something sacred once it is used in a ritual of death. In Day of the Dead once a dish is placed on an altar or gravesite it “obtains an aura of sacredness.”\textsuperscript{214} It becomes an intermediary between the world of the living and the world of the dead.

Chocolate and maizes way to the ofrenda was a bumpy road. Beginning with the minority of Spanish colonists in an indigenous society fearing that any acculturation to native ways would undermined their authority.\textsuperscript{215} Reflected in their disdain towards mestizos, indigenous, and most importantly Creoles. Due to Creoles acculturation native customs, in particularly taste, Spanish saw them as an example of what could happen to a Spaniard if they “succumbed” to acculturation, they would be closer to the “barbarians” than civilized Europeans. This played out in prohibition of Creoles in clerical positions.\textsuperscript{216} The unrest created by this, among others, lead to Independence from Spain and identifications as “Mexicans.” Creoles sought to create their own

\textsuperscript{211} Brandes, \textit{Sugar, Colonialism}, 294.
\textsuperscript{212} Few, \textit{Chocolate, Sex}, 675.
\textsuperscript{213} Ibid, 677.
\textsuperscript{214} Brandes, \textit{Sugar, Colonialism}, 276.
\textsuperscript{215} Laudan and Pilcher, \textit{Chocolate, Chiles}, 63.
\textsuperscript{216} Norton, \textit{Tasting Empire}, 687.
patria (fatherland). They attempted to create “nations cultural autonomy” through food, publishing cookbooks which saw Mexican cooking as versions of French cuisine without acknowledging indigenous roots. Creoles only embraced indigenous food as a way of asserting their patriotism to Mexico and disdain for Spain. The later Porfirian regime viewed lower class food as “unfashionable” and a “menace to society, and promoted cooking classes to ‘wean’ lower classes off corn. Porfirio’s patriarchal society was reflected in his 1891 birthday banquet where women were excluded from sitting at the table, through this act he denied them citizenship. Pilcher observes that due the patriarchal regime women did not feel the need to adhere to its abhorrence towards indigenous cooking and continued it. Creole patriots glorified pre-Columbian civilization as a means to claim authenticity where later after the Revolution of 1910 Mexican intellectuals saw westernized mestizo’s as the future. Neither movement honored indigenous themselves and used the identity to promote their propaganda; Creole’s disregarded indigenous in the community yet glorified their history and Mexican intellectuals of post-Revolution pushed their idea the mestizo encompassed the Mexican experience under the name of the indigenista movement, but did not give rights to the indigenous instead they saw them as a group that must be absorbed by mestizo’s and westernized. Both pursuits still erased indigenous and their culture but also had their part in continuing many traditions, in particularly cuisine. It could be said that even with all the movements and attempts to erase certain food from the Mexican diet that staples such as chocolate and maize had such a sturdy foothold in the tastes

217 Pilcher, Tamale or Timbales, 216.
218 Laudan and Pilcher, Chocolate, Chiles, 67.
219 Pilcher, Tamale or Timbales, 206.
220 Ibid, 214.
221 Ibid, 194.
222 Laudan and Pilcher, Chocolates, Chiles, 66-67.
of its citizens and the presence of indigenous women in households would be driving forces to keep these tastes around.

Spanish society was structured around Roman Catholicism making evangelization and colonial pursuits one in the same. When gender boundaries were broken by women through chocolate consumption and manipulation it was also a failure on the church and the government in place. When indigenous continued to hold maize as a staple food even after government continued aversion to it, it was also a failure on the Church and its inability to replace the idolatrous food palates with a Catholic one that held their holy starch of bread as a staple.

Not only do chocolate and maize reflect the long history of Mexico’s construction, there can be much more said about the other common items seen in these ofrendas; such as the bananas seen in Figures 13 and 20 and their transformation of the land for plantations; and their now current impact on deforestation and environmental devastation. Though Spanish could not replace maize with wheat bread it nonetheless took a firm foothold in cuisine and evolved in the hands of the citizens of Mexico. Ofrenda food is reflective of the deceased’s taste and what they liked the most in their time alive, placement of ‘Pepsi’ bottles in Figure 20 make a commentary on the results of the sugar take over in carbonated drinks and the popularity of them in Mexico, also signifying the spread of Westernization. All the varying recipes coming from different regions and families represent the diversity in Mexican identity. Though they are similar are go under the same name they hold a special significance to their producers. Through food in the ofrenda we can understand all the players in the construction of Mexican National identity and also acknowledge the truths behind propagandas and the ways in which subordinate groups such as women and indigenous still had agency in the development of a nation. Not only that but
foods such as chocolate reveal the ways in which colonialism and evangelization failed and Europeans were acculturated to indigenous ways both in the New and Old World.

Conclusion

Ofrenda’s, translated into offering, are at the center of Mexico’s Días de los Muertos, a festival where the living pay tribute to the dead through celebration. Ofrendas are dedicated to the deceased loved ones. They are found in rural, urban, personal, and public spaces. They are as diverse as the Mexican population but all follow a similar outline. La Virgen de Guadalupe, Maize and Chocolate are symbolic of the crucial elements that comprise an ofrenda. Guadalupe symbolizes the religious icon needed in the altar to create a sacred space. In figures 1, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 20 all of ofrendas either have the Virgen de Guadalupe or the image of religious icon. Maize and Chocolate symbolize the food that is presented to the dead by the living, most ofrendas have these foods in one form or the other, if they are not present there is always the presence of fruits and bread. La Calavera is not present in all ofrendas and there is not anything similar to it, but when it is employed in an ofrenda it is a statement of mexicanidad. It is more popularly seen in ofrendas towards the central urban areas and in public ofrendas (refer to figures 14 and 19) it is not usually seen in ofrendas of private spaces, such as the home, and rural towns (refer to figures 7, 8, 12, 13) All three chapters tell the history of these items and when utilized in ofrendas are cultural signifiers of Mexico.

We turn to Kay Turner’s observations on personal altars employed by women, “...a highly condensed, symbolic model of connection by bringing together sacred images and ritual objects, pictures, mementos, natural materials, and decorative effects which represent different realms of meaning and experience--heaven and earth, family and deities, nature and culture,
Self and Other. Turner's observations of personal altars is reflected in Mexican *ofrendas*, which can be assumed since the *ofrenda* is another version of an altar. The *ofrenda* brings the ‘sacred images’ of Guadalupe and ‘ritual objects’ of food together. Each *ofrenda* is unique to itself by having ‘mementos’ of both the creator’s regional culture and familial tradition. They usually have a ‘picture’ of the deceased loved one alongside sacred images. There are ‘decorative effects’ such as *papel picado* (refer to figures 8 and 16) and the use of the orange marigolds referred to as *cempuschils* and other flowers to create an effect that both beautifies it and had significant cultural meaning to the ones that employ them. The *ofrenda* is a sacred space in which the living can communicate with the dead through the assembly of these images and items on the dates of Day of the Dead. *Calaveras, La Virgen de Guadalupe, maize,* and chocolate endured the many regimes and eras of Mexico on their road to the contemporary *ofrenda*. Their presence indicates the historical players which used their image throughout the changing landscape and regimes of Mexico. Their perspective histories reveal gender dynamics, colonial ideology, indigenous perseverance, appropriation of culture, and imperial powers effects on identities. Lomnitz further elaborates on how historical figures wield totems, “The invocation of a national totem channels the foundational power of the totem to its wielder, for this reason, there tends to be a *field of appropriation* of national totems, and sometimes a true battle for predominance between contending parties.” Mexico has a long history with the appropriation of not only the totems outlined in this paper but many others throughout it’s history. Totems were essential tools in constructing identities or uniting groups.

*La Virgen de Guadalupe* is a dichotomous image signifying both an enforcer of colonialism and a vessel cultural synchronization. The discourse of the dichotomy of Mary/Eve

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224 Lomnitz-Adler, *Death*, 42.
and *La Malinche/Virgen de Guadalupe* reflects the regulations and roles placed on the women of Mexico’s identities. Her image was taken through the hands of the Catholic church, indigenous groups, independence movements, revolutionaries, and *indigenistas*; each appropriating and interpreting her to suit their idea of Mexico. Contemporarily she is an image that many Mexicans identify with are united under. Similarly *La Calavera* was not born to be what it is today. It was a result of Mexico’s ever changing political powers that had always valued the power gained through stratifying the society. Through the hands of Mexican modernists, such as Diego Rivera, the *calavera* was elevated to national totemic status. The *calavera* was also in relation to the “familiarity with death” as a national totem. Lomnitz writes, “The use of familiarity with death as a national totem belongs to the third great wave of historical reconstruction and nationalism in Mexico, a wave that is generally associated with the Mexican Revolution (1910-20).”\(^{225}\) Lomnitz attributes this moment as heralding what we now know as Mexican National Identity and Day of the Dead being quintessentially Mexican. The *calavera* helped visually construct Mexico as a death cult. *Maize* and chocolate differ quite greatly from *la calavera* and Guadalupe since their initial interaction with pre-Columbian society they were seen as sacred and essential for life. *Maize* was seen to be crucial to the construction of civilization in Mesoamerica. The taste for it and efficiency in which it could be grown could never be erased from Mexican society, no matter how many ruling powers tried to replace it or erase it from the communities. Chocolate made an even larger commentary on colonialism, gender dynamics, and the impact of commodities on the world. Marcy Norton’s argument that European’s internalized indigenous tastes negates all colonial discourse and puts into questions Octavio Paz’s idea of Mexico being a result of violation. Norton’s argument makes clear that indigenous groups and lower classes had more agency in the colonial era and that colonial discourse of Spanish civilizing the indigenous was

\(^{225}\) Ibid, 42-43.
wrong. Martha Few makes apparent the ways in which women used chocolate to break gender roles and continue idolatry, which went against Catholic social orders. These varying histories come together in Mexico’s day of the dead *ofrenda*, which helps us understand the mechanisms in play in the development of Mexican national identity.

The items and images may have come to represent what they mean now as national totems and cultural signifiers due to the wielders of them but there is also some truth that they do encompass Mexican identity. Whether they were understood differently by varying wielders they were ever present in the creation of Mexico and even before in the case of food. It is necessary to understand the perceptions of what these totems meant in the hand of the varying wielders in order to critique them. These brief histories and analyzations of these totems barely grazes the top of the many symbolic materials that comprise *Ofrendas*. Such as the chilies, vanilla, bananas, and varying fruits that are present that have their own unique backgrounds their role in Mexican history and their larger impact on the international economy. One item that holds high importance in Mexico is sugar, it is reflected in the sugar skulls, sodas, chocolate, and many other forms. It has a history in Mexico of plantations, Zapata came from Morelos which was a primarily sugar plantation agriculture area. Sugars ascension to becoming a staple commodity in the Atlantic Slave trade changed the world, transformed landscapes, and how societies were built. There is also the use of smell as a tool used in *ofrendas* to call upon the dead such as ancient incense of copal and the cempuschil flowers known to summon the dead through their scent, both of these aromas originating from pre-Columbian traditions and remaining important all the way to it’s place on the *ofrenda*. There is something to be said in the way the aroma incites memory and associations. Lastly there is *papel picado* which is a decorative aspect of
ofrendas that tend to house calavera scenes and other totemic symbols. Along with the items that
could not be explored there is also much more to be said about the items that were. In regards to
Virgin of Guadalupe there is much more too said on women breaking the boundaries of their
gender roles through joining the convent and challenging the religious hierarchies that were
primarily male dominated. Since Spanish societal structure emerged from Roman Catholic
ideology women who have questions the hierarchies of the roots of society are breaking the
bounds of society. In regards to the calavera there is still more to be understood through its
spread by westernization and capitalism. As well as how it’s image was enacted by Diego
Rivera, Frida Kahlo, and other modernist artists. In regards to maize and chocolate there is an
extensive history on their spread to the world via the Atlantic slave trade. Maize seeped into
many varying areas around the world, importantly the U.S. and Africa transforming their
landscapes into the present. Chocolate was a vessel for sugar and was made into candies,
desserts, and chocolate bars.

In contemporary Mexico a new saint has emerged that hybridizes La Virgen de
Guadalupe and calaveras. Mexico remains highly stratified and the citizens are still constantly
faced with their morbidity through the corrupt government, gangs, and the drug wars. As a result,
the saint Santa Muerte has appeared to those on the outskirts of society. She is represented by
a skeletal figure adorned in ravish clothing by her following. Though her skeletal figure does not
reflect calaveras humored play on death but a very bluntly confrontation with mortality. Like
Guadalupe she appeals to the citizens on the outskirts. She takes Mexican death cult to another
level of not only confronting mortality on Day of the Dead but on a daily basis. Santa Muerte

227 Ibid, 165.
could be seen as a result of the presence of *calaveras*, which helped established Mexicans identity with being familiar with death, and Guadalupe as the patron saint of Mexico but Santa Muerte does not seem to be created with this in mind she simply made sense to those who worshipped her.

All of the totems presented do not have one single definition or stand for one singular movement, they are complex and appropriated. In this sense they do demonstrate the Mexican. Mexicans identity is not represented by one group it is diverse in all the regions that encompass Mexico. The only thing that all Mexicans have in common is their shared history but their national memory has been re-interpreted and appropriated by many groups. Perhaps some groups were not conscious of the ignorance in their interpretations it still came with great consequence of a generalized idea of what it was to be Mexican. Through all the varying *ofrendas* we can see Mexican history in all its diverse identities through the material culture and religious icons administered. The *ofrenda* itself is a tool used to encompass Mexican identity by making itself a ritual passed down through generations.
Primary Source Image Collection
Figure 1: Public ofrenda/offering for Day of the Dead in Oaxaca on November 2, 1988.\textsuperscript{228}

Figure 2: Diego Riveras’ Day of the Dead Education murals, Courts of Fiestas, Day of the Dead

Figure 3: Posada’s *Calavera Catrina*, 1913.²³⁰

Figure 4: Posada’s *Dancing Calaveras, El jarabe en ultatumba.*

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Figure 5: Diego Rivera’s *Dream of Sunday Afternoon in the Alameda* General view.²³²

Figure 6: A Posada cartoon that shows the various classes in their attire, in *Posada, monografía de 406 grabados*, intro. By Diego Rivera, ed. Frances Toor, Paul O’Higgins, and Blas Vanegas Arroyo, fac. Ed. of the 1930 ed. (México: Ediciones Toledo, 2002).233

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233 Lomnitz, *Death*, 50.
Figure 7: Home ofrenda with the four generation of women who assembled it.\textsuperscript{234}

Figure 8: Alfredo Perez Matias Family Altar.  

Figure 9: Votive paintings have been popular in Spain for over 500 years. The tradition was brought to the Americas soon after European contact and was immediately adopted to events and places in Mexico and Central and South America. The painting thanks the Virgin of Guadalupe for saving sailors shipwrecked off the coast of Veracruz.  

Unknown Mexican. Ex-voto; devotional image; painting. 1879. Oil on tin. Bard Visual Resources Collection, New York, New York, USA.
Figure 10: Petra Castorena's home altar. “This is mine—my altar.”

237 Vargas, Kathy. Petra Castorena's flower strewn altar dominates her small bedroom in Laredo, Texas. Gesturing broadly she proclaimed, "This is mine--my altar." 1985. Photograph.
Figure 11: La Virgen de Guadalupe, Tilma.²³⁸

Figure 12: Home Oaxacan Altar.\textsuperscript{239}

Figure 13: Full moon over the cemetery of Cuchuco, Day of the Dead.

Figure 14: “Every year, municipalities send delegations to the statewide altar contest in the Plaza Grande in Merida. The contest, celebrating the traditional religious aspects of Hanal Pixan, or Day of the Dead, is organized by the Cultural Institute of the Yucatan Government.”

Figure 15: Public Ofrenda in Oaxaca.242

Figure 16: Model Day of the Dead Altar in Oaxaca, Mexico.\textsuperscript{243}

Figure 17: Family Altar of Day of the Dead, 20th Century.²⁴⁴

Figure 18: Luis de Mena, casta painting. Ca. 1750, oil on canvas 120 x 104cm, Museo de América, Madrid.²⁴⁵

Figure 19: Public ofrenda dedicated to the 43-missing student in Mexico.\textsuperscript{246}

Figure 20: Woman sitting besides offering for the souls on Day of the Dead.²⁴⁷

**Primary Source Bibliography**


Unknown Mexican. Ex-voto; devotional image; painting. 1879. Oil on tin. Bard Visual Resources Collection, New York, New York, USA. Votive paintings have been popular in Spain for over 500 years. The tradition was brought to the Americas soon after European contact and was immediately adopted to events and places in Mexico and Central and South America. The painting thanks the Virgin of Guadalupe for saving sailors shipwrecked off the coast of Veracruz.

Vargas, Kathy. *Petra Castorena's flower strewn altar dominates her small bedroom in Laredo, Texas. Gesturing broadly she proclaimed, "This is mine--my altar."* 1985. Photograph.

**Secondary Source Bibliography**

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