

Cabecinhas, R. & Abadia, L. (eds.) (2013)  
*Narratives and social memory: theoretical and methodological approaches*  
Braga: University of Minho  
ISBN: 978-989-8600-04-2  
pp. 253 -265

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## Colonial Missions in the North American Southwest: Social Memory and Ethnogenesis

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### Abstract

Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, European Franciscan and Jesuit missionaries established missions for Native American groups throughout the American Southwest and modern northern Mexico. The process and methodologies of missionization implied radical changes in Native American societies and culture. The impact of such changes was different for settled, crop-growing groups than it was for those who were nomadic and made a living gathering and hunting. Equally important was the way the contact generation and second generation Natives adapted, reacted, or acted on the processes of indoctrination and acculturation. Using archival texts, practice theory and concepts such as structuration and hegemony, this paper explores identity formation and argues for the embeddedness of missionizing practices in ethnogenesis. Practice theory and concepts such as the habitus and hegemony provide the means to interrogate missionary texts such as confessional manuals and catechisms and investigate how these refashioned social arrangements affected shamanistic practices. Likewise, structuration *à la* Giddens facilitates an understanding of the way rules, stated and understated, practices, and social relationships were produced and reproduced in individual and collective social interactions between the missionized and the missionaries. As Native peoples were exposed to the institution of the mission they retained Native habitual practices and traditions while embedding new routines and practices in repeated social actions and interactions. Often displaced and culturally diasporic, the generations that emerged out of the colonial mission system, and particularly modern Native groups, were jolted into contextualizing and reinterpreting their culture in the process of ethnogenesis, a negotiation and articulation of shared meanings and experiences that produces an identifiable cultural entity whose members feel they belong together. In the case of many missionized Native American groups that process of identity formation includes a large Catholic heritage component, which, in some cases, is the key defining element of the expression of their modern identity.

### Keywords

Colonial missions; American Southwest; Native Americans; ethnogenesis

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Between the late 1500s and the early 1800s Jesuits and Franciscan missionaries under the Crown of Spain established a multitude of Catholic missions from Spanish Florida to California, a geographical area that encompassed most of the colonial territory of New Spain. Most missions in North America were clustered in Florida, Texas, New Mexico and California, and in some cases both religious orders worked in the same mission field at different times.

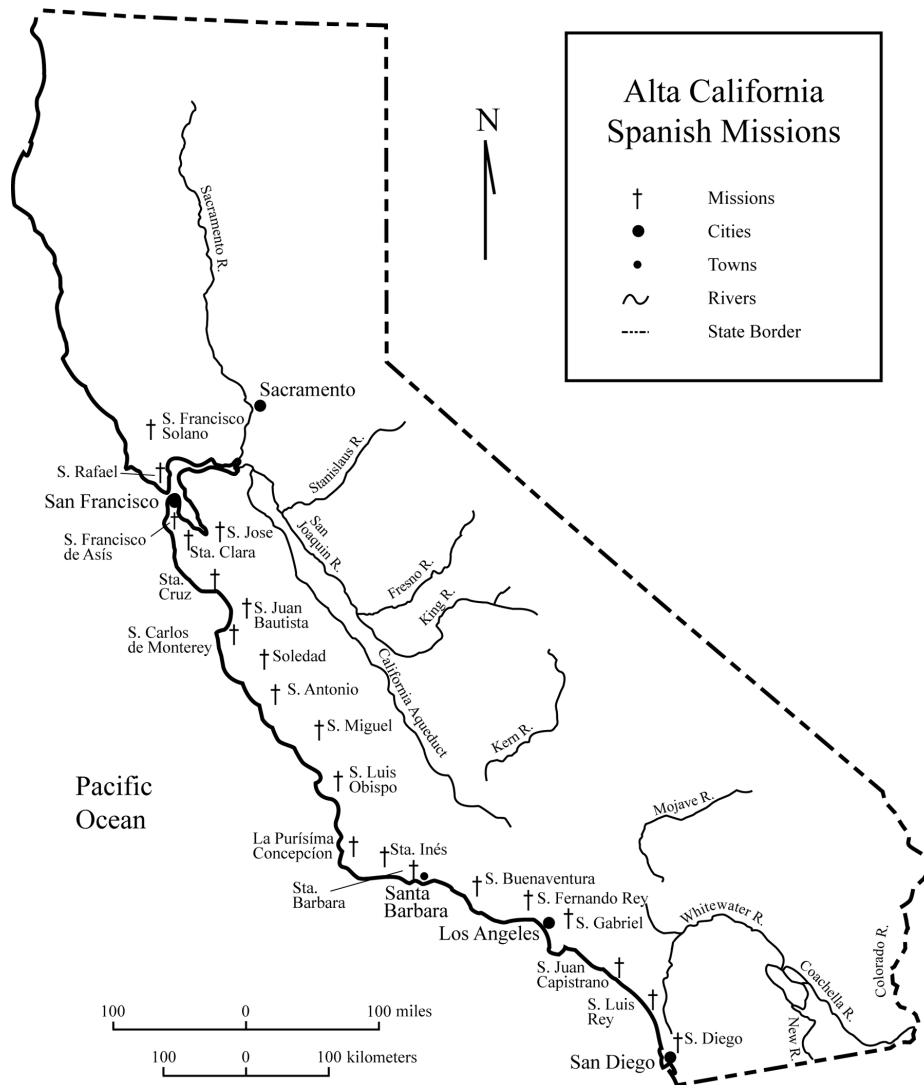


Figure 1 – Spanish Missions in Alta California.  
Map prepared by Claire Huie & Don Wade. (Courtesy of the University Press of Florida)

These missions, their conditions of establishment and their development were time and location sensitive. Some missions were established for Native populations that made a living fishing, hunting and gathering while others were set up for agriculturists. The missions' architectural characteristics and space arrangements differed according to the targeted Native populations' mode of living, geopolitical arrangements, period of establishment, and the specific physical and cultural environments in which the missions were inserted.

The geopolitical complexity of the Spanish Empire under the Habsburgs [1450s] and the eighteenth century Bourbons brought to North America missionaries from many modern European countries whose background and training differed greatly as did their mother-language. Despite that, they all adopted Castilian Spanish as their language to teach and indoctrinate the Native American missionized populations. This fact alone created serious issues in the translation and comprehension of key religious concepts and practices (Wade, 2008, pp. 147-8).

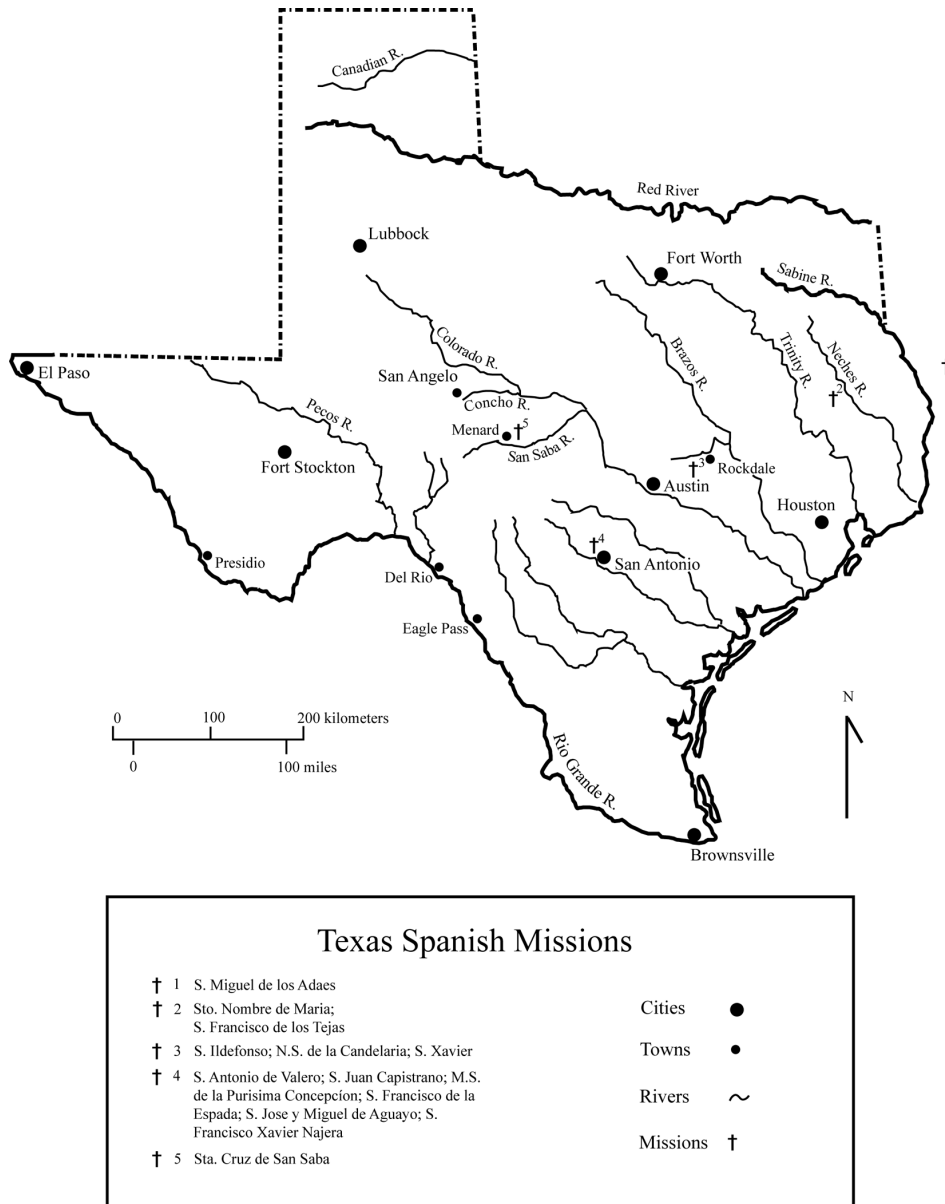


Figure 2 – Selected Spanish Missions in Texas.  
Map prepared by Claire Huie & Don Wade. (Courtesy of the University Press of Florida).

Regardless of the overall length of the mission period or what religious order was operating in any particular area of New Spain, several generations of Native Americans experienced mission life either voluntarily or by force. Some were attracted to the missions by offers of gifts and food, others asked for missions unaware of what mission commitment would entail, and others still were brought to the missions under the force of arms, particularly when missions suffered population loss due to disease, conflict or fugitivism. All missions were established in close proximity to military installations, presidios, whose soldiers provided protection and support to the missionaries. These soldiers were routinely engaged in forays to the countryside to bring back Natives to the missions. Presidio soldiers and settlers also benefited from the existence of missions to attend to their religious needs, often to provide a Native labor force, and as suppliers of farming and livestock products.

Differences in the Native Americans' processes of acculturation and indoctrination reflected the missionaries' background, their training, personal abilities and knowledge as much as they reflected the very process of a missionary's adaptation to the area and to his flock. Significant didactic and logistic changes occurred in the late mission period (after the 1750s) as missionaries became wiser to the Native reluctance to abide by Christian teachings and practices. In Texas, for instance, missions became surrounded by massive stone walls that prevented entrance to non-missionized warring Native tribes, such as the Apache and the Comanche, as much as they precluded mission Natives from leaving the mission compound. Conversely, in New Mexico missions were inserted in preexisting Pueblo villages, as these groups were settled and practiced agriculture and animal husbandry. In these cases, missions were not walled compounds and the Puebloans transited freely and returned to their homes after attending religious ceremonies. These differences in spatial positioning, freedom of movement and frequent familial social contact were reflected in the ability to organize, retain cultural traditions and reinforce social ties, thwarting, or delaying, the process of accepting or abiding by the colonizers' cultural dicta (acculturation).

Still, there are certain aspects of acculturation that apply to all Spanish colonial mission periods and areas.



Figure 3 – Californians' Dance at San Francisco, author Louis Choris.1963.002.1312-FR. Robert B. Honeyman, Jr. Collection of Early Californian and Western American Pictorial Material, UC Berkeley, Bancroft Library.

First, the schedule of Catholic religious events and precepts suffered little change throughout the mission period. Attendance to daily mass and prayers, catechism and yearly confession and communion continued to be required. Similarly, Natives were incessantly encouraged to speak Spanish and abandon their native languages. The dynamics of this process of language replacement could include force, but the process was also reinforced with incentives such as power positions among other Natives, and privileges such as

greater freedom of movement, special foods, coveted clothing items, better housing and sometimes even the labor of other natives. Power was paired with knowledge; knowledge of the Spanish language meant access to information which in turn was translated into further power (Foucault, 1980), initiating a vicious circle whereby knowledge and information were continuously required to maintain the flow and exercise of power. For instance, a Native translator or guide often had knowledge of mission politics, troop movements, the schedules and objectives of friars and military officials, and the foibles of other fellow Natives. Males, more so than females, could manipulate that knowledge to exercise power. Missionaries relied on translators to learn local languages, build vocabularies and prepare confessional and doctrinaire manuals. Translators were frequently catechists with the power to manipulate Christian words and concepts and I believe the tone Christianity acquired in the future, the present of Christian Native populations, reflects the process of reshaping unyielding religious concepts and words to fit Native cosmology and comprehension.

Within a mission's colonial setting mother language loss and colonial language acquisition permeated and structured all daily practices. As Native peoples were exposed to the institution of the mission (Bolton, 1917) they retained Native habitual practices and traditions while embedding new routines and practices in repeated social actions and interactions. To contextualize and flesh out this process of structuration and the interplay between structure and agency (Giddens, 1984, p.14-37) let's consider the case of a missionized Native woman who marries a Native man according to Catholic Church rules.



Figure 4 – Portrait of Indian Girl, author unknown. Banc Pic. 1963.002:1305:F-ALB, Robert B. Honeyman, Jr. Collection of Early Californian and Western American Pictorial Material, UC Berkeley, Bancroft Library.

To be able to do so, she has to have received the sacrament of baptism and as a result, renamed. For most societies personal names are important self-identifiers that connect the individual to a genealogy and to the social group. In general, Native names also did so, but they went further in connecting the self to specific spiritual protective powers. Later in life Native



American names also connoted a curriculum of capabilities, achievements, misfortunes, and idiosyncratic aspects of an individual's personality; all unique placement links in the group's social memory, (Nabokov, 1967). Social memory is "attached to membership of social groups" (Fentress & Wickham, 1992, p. ix), but differs from collective memory in that the memories are individually internalized even if collectively shared and constitutive of the social group's identity (Climo & Cattell, 2002, pp.4-5, 12, 34-6; Fentress & Wickham, 1992, pp. 5, 7, 25-6). Catholic renaming could truncate those links to identity or craft a double identity she would try to render functional in separate or hybrid contexts. This hybridity would become central to her public identity and her ability to compartmentalize as well as her fluidity in switching behaviors would determine the degree of success in straddling cultural worlds. Her choice of mate would be conditioned by available kinfolk's mates or by mates from other culturally sanctioned groups depending on her own group's endogamy or exogamy rules.

The missionary had to approve the marriage, and she could neither divorce her husband nor have more than one mate. For the majority of missionized Native groups this last condition constituted a very serious problem (Wade, 2008, p. 224-5). Choice of mates implied the creation and maintenance of social and economic alliances and males frequently had more than one mate. Absence of kin and group alliances through coupling curtailed social and economic links between groups and meant that individuals, not Native groups, had to procure and guarantee access to prestige goods and services, essential to harness a measure of power particularly within the communal mission system. Further, individual procurement of prestige goods and services strengthened co-dependency between missionaries and soldiers and Native individuals. This break with previously adopted traditional practices whereby individual agency and identity gained primacy over group action and identity, had important social repercussions. In fact, treaties and reservation policies the United States used in the late 1800s capitalized on breaking up the socio-cultural tribal bonds, particularly by allotting reservation land to individuals and not the tribe (Deloria, 1985). These processes, which were integral to identity formation, would later affect the process of ethnogenesis as groups negotiated, and continue to negotiate, who is a member of a specific tribe (Hill, 1996, p.2; Sattler, 1996, p.59-64). These decisions reflect complex historical contexts, social memory and modern political realities.

Males who before entering the mission had more than one mate generally were forced to choose only one wife. Women not selected as the religiously accepted wife were often left with children and without male and kin support. Marginalized and stigmatized by a hegemonic set of rules and regulations these women and their offspring had to negotiate and forge new identities in daily social interactions that span domestic arrangements such as who would they live with, to survival issues such as who would hunt for them or who would partner in the rearing of their children. Their dubious social status placed them at greater need to accept missionary protection.

Unlike females, male children were incorporated as church acolytes, learned Spanish, enjoyed greater freedom of movement and had greater opportunities for advancement and prestige. An 1813 Spanish Crown inquiry distributed to Franciscan friars in California shows that the majority of missions reported reasonable language proficiency among Native males

and almost no knowledge of Spanish among females (Geiger & Meighan, 1976, p.19-21). Age was a factor also in Spanish language capabilities. Young males and in some cases those younger than thirty years old were more proficient in Spanish, reflecting the time since the establishment of each specific mission and the acculturation process of the youth (1976, p. 20). Archival documents show perceptible differences in acculturation between the colonial contact generation and the subsequent generations of missionized Natives. The contact generation was more reticent to learn Spanish and to accept religious indoctrination. The second and third generations learned Spanish but also become proficient at manipulating colonial politics and often rebelled. Throughout North America, many missionized Native Americans born or raised under colonial rule used the Spanish language and their knowledge of the Spanish colonial system to exploit conflicts between the civilian authorities and the missionaries. In this manner they extracted favors and created individual and collective spaces of freedom. In some cases, as in Baja and Alta California, they used the Spanish courts to redress grievances and to attempt to extend trade and obtain control over lands (Wade, 2008, 142-4). The unintended consequences of intentional acculturation enabled Native power plays and sometimes produced power shifts (Giddens, 1984, pp. 10-4).

If this hypothetical Native woman was successful in marrying a man the missionary approved and who was ethnically and socially appropriate according to her native canons, she would have to navigate two intersecting social systems with different and conflicting norms and requirements. Her identity construction would reflect these different demands which would be produced and reproduced in individual and collective daily social interactions. For instance, generally neither she nor her female children would learn Spanish nor would they be selected for most Catholic Church rituals, but her male children would. She and her female offspring would be simply in charge of household domestic chores such as washing clothes, cleaning, grinding corn and cooking meals. In some cases they would have little intercourse with their male family members, including her husband and male offspring during the day or the week. In fact, in some missions they would not be permitted to deliver lunch to their husbands who were working in the fields because of the trouble they caused, as the friars stated (Wade, 2008, pp. 244, 263). Further, in most hunting and gathering societies, females gathered and males hunted. In the mission, females' movements were restricted to their dwellings and to the missions' compounds while males performed gathering chores as farm workers, thus denying women their traditional socio-economic role and changing a man's role into that of a woman. Under the hegemonic and paternalistic Spanish colonial society, women were denied access to traditional Native social and ritual roles that balanced gender contributions to society and had been worked out and established through millennia. No doubt, individuals subverted and bypassed these rules in their daily interactions, but they did so at the physical and psychological cost of incurring punishments and being labeled transgressors. Habitual practices taken for granted were brought to consciousness and subject to alternative decision-making; transgressive behavior had consequences and marked the actor (2008, pp. 140-2, 257). Such transgressive acts could be speaking one's mother language, failure to attend a religious ceremony, refusing to wear a garment, or leaving the mission to collect foodstuffs without obtaining permission.

At least once a year, this baptized Native woman would have to confess and receive communion to fulfill the Catholic Easter precept. Depending on the location of the mission, until the early 1700s in most cases she would have to confess facing the missionary without the protective barrier of a confessional box and she might need an interpreter, particularly since women had few opportunities to learn Spanish. Later and only at some missions, confessional manuals were prepared in the most prevalent Native language present in a mission. Aside from the fact that some geographical areas like Texas and California had a multitude of different languages and language dialects often mutually unintelligible, the confessional manuals' questions required a precise accounting of events, emphasized the missionaries' extreme fear of sexual contact outside of the marriage and particularly of anything the missionaries considered deviant behavior. Questions such as "How many times did you fornicate and with whom? Who was watching? Did you fornicate with your brother in law?" not only required a memory account of socio-sexual relationships but provided the confessor with information on Native kin sanctioned sexual relations (Señán, 1800s/1967, p.40-63; Vergara, 1732/1965; Wade, 2008, p.217-9). In fact, confession worked as an ethnographic and genealogical tool to identify potential occasions of sinful behavior and the policing of specific individuals by other Native Americans or by the missionaries. Gossip, as an instrument of power and social control would easily be a vehicle for dissemination of information beyond the confessional. How these introspective memory exercises on sexual acts affected Native social and sexual behavior is not clear. Archival texts do show that in the short term, missionaries were very concerned over the low birthrate and over abortion and targeted questions and measures to minimize both. In Texas, where the colonial mission period began in the late 1600s and where most missions were closed by 1773, women were mostly confined to the mission compounds (Wade, 2008, p.263). In Alta California (North America) the mission period began in 1769. In that mission field unmarried women and widows were kept in locked dormitories at night to prevent contact with males (2008, p.263). In relation to the Fifth Commandment, the *Ventureño Confesionario* of Fr. José Señán asked, "Have you ever caused a woman to kill the child in her womb?" and "Have you ever killed the child in your womb?" among other questions dealing with abortive drinks or with "spilling the body's seed" to avoid pregnancy (1967, p.38-9). At a time of incipient medical knowledge about human sexuality missionaries questioned the reasons for the phenomena clearly implying the willingness of couples to avoid procreation. Yet, the colonial archival evidence is overwhelming on the love Native parents had for their children. At Mission San Gabriel in Alta California, the missionary stated that "when it concerns the children...their parents love them to such an extent that we might say they are their little idols" (Geiger & Meighan, 1976, p.23). These statements were repeated throughout the colonial period by all those who had extensive contact with Native American groups (Casañas, 1691/1975, p.23-7). If we take into account the evidence that Native Americans loved their children dearly and that children were a source of pride, it seems very likely that efforts to curtail pregnancy would deeply affect personal and group identity construction aside from obvious future demographic and social results.

While females were especially subjected to scrutiny regarding their sexual and procreation practices, males and females were extensively questioned in the confessional



about shamanistic practices. Midwives and shamans were deeply implicated, or presumed to be, in the procurement and administration of abortive measures. More important, shamans were the spiritual adversaries the missionaries associated with the devil, evilness and dark powers. Among Native groups shamans, as spiritual and medicinal practitioners, held positions of great power but also of great danger as they did battle with cosmic forces. Missionaries were not unaffected by shamanic power and their influence on Native communities. Confrontations between Native American spiritual practitioners and Catholic missionaries permeate the archives. Winning over or defeating a charismatic shaman were clear validations of God's grace and of the missionary's work (Wade, 2008, pp. 13-9). Native elders and shamans held the key to social memory and to the spiritual practices which guaranteed the socio-cultural transmission and continuity of traditions. Though in general we lack the evidence, the systematic battle missionaries waged against Native American shamans as spiritual competitors could not but influence the transmission of social memories and traditions.

We have no good archival evidence to track the long-term changes produced in social roles and in females' or males' identity formation in the post-mission period but they had to reflect many decades or centuries of missionization depending on the mission field. Despite the extent of change experienced, Natives negotiated, exploited and reworked Spanish missionary demands into their own traditions to structure their identities. Exploring vulnerabilities and fissures in the colonial mission system, such as the need for translators for religious and social functions, guides with environmental knowledge and the continuous need for Native labor and expertise, Natives won space to embed their social arrangements and practices into the mission structure subverting the missionaries' objectives. The frequent cases of *ladinos* who gained the confidence of the missionaries and the military and acquired power and prestige, illustrate the nature of the process. *Ladinos* were Natives who spoke Spanish and were familiar with Spanish colonial customs. Antonio Arcón, native governor of Mission Valero in Texas, fled the mission with family and friends and because he knew well the mission's defenses and troop movements, he led several other Native groups in attacks against the Spanish (Wade, 2008, p. 117). In Baja California, Leandro, a *ladino* *mayordomo* (a Native village official) and trusted guide, obtained privileges such as special housing, free passes to travel and even Native labor to plant his private garden. When the missionaries tried to curtail his attempts to help his friends flee the mission, he used his intimate knowledge of the political frictions between missionaries and soldiers to create an endless series of problems for the missionaries (2008, pp. 160-3). Likewise, a dying faithful Christian Native refused confession because he felt that he had been duped for many years and he wanted to die undeceived and as a Native (2008, p. 33).

These notorious archival cases refer to Natives who had acquired important power positions within the missions and whose cases were recorded, but many other actors would have structured social actions to define their identities, reinterpret their culture and forge the basis for ethnogenesis. It is productive to conceptualize ethnogenesis as a multivalent process of negotiation and articulation of shared meanings and experiences that produces an identifiable cultural identity whose members feel they share precisely because of those common experiences (Hill, 1996, pp. 1-3).

As missions were returned to local parish priests (secularized), mission Natives across the country were presumed to own and share the missions' buildings and agricultural land the missionaries had held in trust for them according to the missions' charters. The results were diverse for different mission fields but, in general, Native peoples lost all the missions' properties as they did in Texas and California. Mission Natives dispersed, integrated with other groups, or remained in the area working as servants and sometimes as blacksmiths, ranch laborers (cowboys), weavers, tanners, and carpenters etc., using the skills they had acquired at the missions. Some missionized populations later entered the United States reservations, but others did not, and mixed with other local ethnic groups in a complex process of miscegenation which became intrinsic to individual and tribal ethnogenesis. The discussion of such processes is particular to each group; even generalizations on this issue are beyond the scope of this paper.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the majority of Native populations in North America were removed to reservations sometimes voluntarily but mostly forcefully. Though it is often difficult to document the importance of identity to North America Native American groups during the colonial period (for exceptions see Bohaker, 2010), and post-colonial Native American ethnogenesis processes are difficult to document and narrate (for exceptions see Panich, 2010), the evidence is clear in the endless list of Native American groups that have received United States federal recognition as tribes and those that have applied for it (Bureau of Indian Affairs, Tribal Directory). At present there are 565 Native American Tribes federally recognized. Other tribes have requested recognition, and either have been denied such recognition or they are in the process of reapplying (National Conference of State Legislatures; U.S. Government Accountability Office). The process of federal recognition is difficult and often divisive, and may actually complicate, redefine or blur traditionally perceived tribal and ethnic group boundaries.

Throughout the colonial period, unplanned and unmanaged Native tribal mixing occurred together with imposed European and Christian norms and regulations which also resulted in ethnic mixing. As a consequence, Natives and Native tribes imbued with relevance that which was shared, gathered what cultural material they still retained together with material ethnologists and anthropologists collected in the post-colonial period, and in collective and individual social interactions forged identities that reflected their position in the present. Appiah stated that "we make up selves from a toolkit of options made available by our culture and society," and I would add by the history we share, dealt or chosen (1994, p. 155). Identity building then, becomes imagining the possible community (a field of tactical possibilities) and negotiating through conflict, struggle and discontinuities a groups' positioning vis-à-vis its historical past and its challenging present, taking into account the realities of external and internal systemic power imbalances (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, pp. 24).

In some North American areas where missionaries were active, such as Texas, New Mexico and California, descendants of mission Natives adopted Catholic practices, very often laced with Native spiritual traditions. The Sanctuary of Chimayo in northwestern New Mexico is one of the best examples of these processes. Archaeologists assert that the sanctuary "encompasses three older indigenous sites that date back to a period between

approximately A.D. 110 and A.D. 1400" (Gutierrez, 1995, p. 72). The colonization of New Mexico did not begin until the mid-sixteenth century and *de facto* occupation of the area started only in the seventeenth century. The construction of the sanctuary is shrouded in several "miracles" (1995, p. 77). The sanctuary is located on "sacred earth" which pilgrims use for ritual purposes (1995, p. 77). The most important place within the sanctuary is a small hole in the ground from which the ritual dirt is extracted. This hole is a *sipapu*, an entry into the underworld from which Native peoples emerged "and to which they would return after death" (1995, p.74). Tewa speaking Native American Pueblo groups visit the sanctuary as do Catholic pilgrims and tourists of other ethnicities, all sharing the healing powers of the *sipapu's* dirt, though most likely imbuing the ritual with different meanings. As Gregory Smoak noted, "The construction of meaningful identities, be they ethnic, tribal, racial or otherwise, is always a reflective process. Identity formation does not take place in isolation; it is not dependent on exclusion of the Other. Rather, the process takes place in conversation and interaction with the Other" (2006, p.192). The San Fernando Cathedral in San Antonio, Texas, offers another example of these interdependent conversations and of the incorporation of recent immigrant communities, their histories and memories. San Fernando was constructed in the 1730s and served as the first parish church for the colonial settlers. After Mexico's independence from Spain in 1821 and the various changes in government until Texas became part of the United States, the cathedral continued to be the spiritual and social hub of a vibrant borderlands multiethnic community. During the 1930s the cathedral was the center for processions that meandered "through the plaza and streets for the feasts of Cristo Rey, the Virgin of Guadalupe, *posadas* (Christmas celebrations) and First Communion" (McCracken, 2000, p. 194). Immigrants from Mexico and from other places in Latin America continued to arrive through the middle twentieth century, the latter particularly after the civil wars in the 1970s and 80s. Under the leadership of Father Virgilio de Elizondo and his theology of *mestizaje*, the cathedral has embraced and incorporated "hybrid Latino practices" (2000, p. 195) that focus on material representations that help dislocated and dispossessed ethnic groups create a meaningful ritual and social space. Aside from the statues of saints and divine figures that are part of the cathedral, groups of people have, on their own, placed specific images or statues to which they have particular devotion at the base of, or next to, other permanent cathedral statues. These 'meta-altars' include devotional figures related to specific immigrant cultures, such as El Cristo Negro de Esquipulas for Guatemala, and San Martín de Porras, a mulatto saint, for Peru. Indeed, like the Virgin of Guadalupe does for Native Americans and Mexicans alike, these divine figures of color pre-form, validate and enhance identities constructed with, and around, multiple colonizing experiences and memories. People "light candles, pray and display *ex-votos* such as photographs, petitions, milagritos, and other mementos," (2000, p. 197) as they do in Chimayo. They leave notes of thanks and requests for help and comfort. These displays change continuously in a private *cum* communal narrative manifesting hopes and anxieties in a multiethnic dialogue with the divine, and with each Other.

If the co-existence of Christian beliefs and Native American beliefs, albeit sometimes through force, had not been important and had not deeply affected identity construction

among Native and mestizo populations we would not be discussing the issue. In the present, these colonized peoples make choices rooted in the past but actionable in the present. For many years, I have worked with the Adai, a Native American tribe formerly of Texas and today located in eastern Louisiana. The Adai appeared in the historic record in the mid-seventeenth century and persist today. They are profoundly Catholic though their rituals include many Native American traditions. Interestingly, and despite their refusal to accept Christianity in the colonial past, Catholicism is an integral part of their individual identities and the defining element of their modern tribal identity.

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