

Nahua Reggae and Metal: A Comparative Case between LA and Mexico City.

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to compare two music groups: Xipe Vitan J'ai, a metal band from Mexico City, and Quinto Sol, a reggae band from LA. Both groups mix lyrics in English, Spanish, Nahuatl and other indigenous languages of Mexico and use a variety of 'pre-Hispanic' instruments. Members of Quinto Sol identify as Chicanos, while members of Xipe Vitan J'ai identify as Mexican mestizos and Native Mexicans of the (falsely labelled) Otomí tribe. This article explores these lyrical and musical identity practice phenomena by questioning how Mexicans (mestizos or Natives) and Chicanos create new, syncretic identities in their struggle to find a sense of belonging that resists the simple acceptance of hegemonic identity narratives and asserts their individuality.

Keywords: Nahuatl, Reggae, Metal, Mexican Mestizos, Native Mexicans

In Mexico, there are currently still 68 indigenous languages being spoken. According to INEGI's population census in 2015, 7,382,785 people 6.5% of the population reported speaking an indigenous language in Mexico. Of these languages, Nahuatl is the most widely spoken, with 1,376,026 native speakers [1]. But many indigenous people find the need to integrate into mestizo society for access to upward social mobility, leaving behind their languages, ways of life, traditions, communities, etc. They are, in a way, forced to learn Spanish, the 'official' language [2], oftentimes English, to have access to what seems to be a better life from a socio-economic standpoint, instead of fighting to preserve their traditions and languages. In the short term, they seem improve their position in Mexican society by not being Indians anymore, but currently, many indigenous groups have realised that they have merely managed to become poor Mexicans or dark mestizos, deprived of both their indigenous dignity and their rich, original traditions. Many in the second or third generations are unaware of their indigenous history. They do not know who they are now or who they used to be.

In the 90s various musicians -Nahuatl natives, Mexican mestizos and Chicanos- began to blend

'modern music' with traditional 'pre-Hispanic music.' Through songs written in Spanish, English and Nahuatl they seek to convey contemporary social problems by portraying either their reality or that of the ancient Mexican indigenous cultures which endured the arrival of the Spanish conquerors. All of them seem to have a need to talk about who they really are: to express what it means to be part of a minority group, to live among a mix of traditions and to have been born out of a violent conquest.

In this article I will compare two specific musical groups that follow this sonic tradition, Xipe Vitan J'ai, a metal band, and Quinto Sol, a reggae band. Both groups sing in English, Spanish, Nahuatl and other indigenous languages of Mexico while mixing a variety of 'pre-Hispanic' instruments. Quinto Sol is from LA and its members are Chicanos [3]. Xipe Vitan J'ai is from Mexico City and, while some of its members simply consider themselves Mexican mestizos, others claim to be Native Mexicans of the (falsely labelled) Otomí tribe. This article will explore why these bands decided to mix a 'modern' music genre with Nahua culture if indigenous cultures in the Americas are, according to the Euro-American narrative, heading toward extinction. Why choose to sing or talk about a culture with 'no

future'? Which rights are they claiming?

I claim this phenomenon is due to the fact that both Mexicans (mestizo or indigenous) and Chicanos create new, syncretic identities in their struggle to find a sense of belonging that resists the simple acceptance of hegemonic identity narratives and assert their individuality. In this way, such groups may define who they are and where they come from using their own agency. They resist simply accepting an identity built by the state hegemon; an identity built by the ones in power who aim to develop strong and homogeneous nations, where Native peoples and other minority groups are very often regarded as a menace and a danger to the state. They have been told who they are by erasing their roots and cultural indigenous origins and by having a new identity created for them: the identity of the impoverished, the pariah, the undesirable, the Chicano or the 'mestizo'. They are expected to fit in and integrate into the dominant culture forgetting their diversity. This reality has pushed them into a search for their roots, one that may lie in the mixture of the ancient Nahua, which they consider as their mother culture, and other modern cultures of their present. Through this process, they contribute to the preservation and revitalization of their indigenous cultures, and more importantly, to raise peoples' awareness about the modern realities of native existence.

First, this article also provides general information about both bands. In order to understand the band members' motivations to create these genres of music, I will look into: the socio-historical context of the social group they belong to; the philosophies behind the 'modern' music genre in which they chose to perform; and the aspects of old and 'modern' Nahua culture they have adopted as part of their band's concept or message. The music genres addressed are Reggae and Black Metal with consideration for the social movements and the contexts in which they unfold: Chicanismo, Indigenismo, and New Age. In the second section the article analyses and addresses interviews and images related to these concepts, before presenting the results. A comparison of the results of data analysis of both bands follows perceiving them within their historical and sociocultural context as to understand their motivations from their reality.

Finally, I present some conclusions comparing the differences and similarities in the case of these two bands.

Quinto Sol

Quinto Sol, or 'Fifth Sun' is a reggae band that emerged from the artist/activist community of East Los Angeles in 1994. Quinto Sol is roots-reggae with Latin rhythms such as cumbia, rumba, and son. This collective of artists uses music as a tool to build awareness about socio-political and economic issues facing their community. Their lyrics talk about their own urban realities in everyday life and the struggles of indigenous communities around the world. In 2003, Quinto Sol released their second independent album and first national release, *Barrio Roots*. Produced and arranged by the Quinto Sol band, and engineered by Johnny Alvarez and Mizraim Leal, the band's lead vocalist and guitar player respectively. *Barrio Roots* documents music from a period that helped shape what is known today as the East L.A. art "scene"; a contemporary Chicano-inspired arts movement.

Quinto Sol is dedicated to planting the seed that may let their audience know where they come from and where they are headed. The band members believe that by getting to know their roots, their people will achieve a stronger, independent identity and freedom. [4] The main members of Quinto Sol are Mizraim Leal (lead vocals and rhythm guitar), Martin Perez (bass guitar) and Tezozomoc (Tony Sandoval, Nahuatl poet and professor).

Reggae Music

According to Anderson (206) reggae music has its most significant antecedent in the American soul music of the 50s and 60s with influences of calypso and the Jamaican folk music called mento. The off-beat rhythmic pattern of soul music and rock 'n' roll would find a strange and unique expression in Jamaica with reggae music during the late 60s and early 70s. The resulting rhythm was complex for the Western popular music of the time and irresistibly danceable. The sound evolved from Ska, to Rock steady, to reggae, as did the lyrics that went from songs

about the earthy and the sacred, to songs with a focus on spiritual and political matters. During the 70s, a period known as 'roots and culture', reggae music lyrics were dominated by the Rastafarian worldview (208).

The Rastafarian doctrine is a biblical and millenarian religion based on the teachings of Black Nationalist Marcus Garvey and on idiosyncratic interpretations of certain key passages of Old Testament scripture supporting the belief that the Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie (born Ras Tafari Makonnen) was the second incarnation of Jesus Christ. Rastafarianism is not a creedal religion, but a compound and diverse variety of different philosophies. Some of the core doctrines are African nationalism, political and social separation from Babylon (European culture and its influences), and the divinity of Haile Selassie. Rastafarianism combines the strict dietary laws of Levitical Judaism with a Nazarene approach to personal grooming (resulting in the hairstyle known as 'dreadlocks') and a belief in the use of marijuana as a religious sacrament and tool for meditation. The central themes of Rastafarian doctrine are represented and developed in hundreds of songs of the period by many artists, Bob Marley being the most famous. Rastafarianism gave the philosophical foundation for most of the best works in the reggae canon (208-209).

Chicanismo

The term Chicano comes from the word *Mexica* (with the 'x' pronounced like 'sh' in English), and it is a term used to name Mexican Americans born in the United States. Chicano population in the USA increased from approximately three million in 1940 to more than twenty million in 2000. Before the Chicano Movement, the label Chicano was mostly used pejoratively and not well accepted by Mexican Americans because it was used to discriminate against them. [5]

The Chicano Movement was a social activist effort in the United States that ranged from the 60s to the 70s. At this time, a large number of organisations and individuals appeared in Mexican American communities nationally, agitating for economic and political change, and promoting a militant version of self-help and

racial solidarity (Garcia 9). Garcia synthesizes the Chicano Movement in four stages. During the first phase, Mexican American intellectuals, politicians, students, and artists realized that the liberal agenda was morally corrupt and a failure. It had failed to end poverty, segregation, racism, and had done a poor job integrating Mexican Americans into the mainstream. Mexican Americans at this time were largely absent in politics, the media, and the academy. Until then, they had tried to be part of the mainstream by developing patriotic organizations, serving in the armed forces and trying to adopt American ideals in order to de-emphasize their national origins. Yet, most Chicanos felt isolated from the mainstream, were discriminated against or simply ignored. This rejection of Chicanos from the liberal agenda led them to search for new solutions. These new solutions were oriented towards separatism (31).

In the second phase, Mexican American activists saw a need to re-interpret the past (32). They knew that to build an identity, Mexican Americans needed to see themselves as a historical people with heroes, legends, triumphs and legacies. Chicano historians identified ancient heroes and reinterpreted old events through a new nationalist framework that made Mexican Americans active participants in history. This reinterpretation led Mexican Americans to discard the stereotypes of the lazy, passive, mañana-oriented Mexicano, and replaced this perception with a proud, historically rich Chicano. Scholars, writers, dramatists, poets and essayists found new protagonists in the forgotten history.

During the third phase, Chicano activists, intellectuals, and artists affirmed a rediscovered pride in their racial and class status (33). They emphasized and glorified their indigenous past and the ancient civilizations of Mexico and South America. This connection to racial origins gave them historicity. By accentuating their class status, they were able to legitimize and sometimes romanticize the lives of people living in the barrios. Mexican Americans, particularly the youth, did not have to be embarrassed by their music, their food, their traditional medicine or their home-grown philosophies. This affirmation of race and class created a sense

of solidarity with Third World movements for liberation, and united Chicanos in a world-wide revolution against oppression. It also brought a renaissance of Chicano literature, theatre and art. Artists and writers took the barrio now as the setting for their work, and the working people or their indigenous ancestors as the protagonists.

The final phase of the movement is called “the politics of Aztlan”, it tried to operationalize the essence of the three previous ones (34). Chicano activists developed platforms, manifestos, and strategies that best represented the new ideas coming from the rhetoric of the new leaders. Chicanismo was the by-product of a community in struggle. Chicanos rejected the mainstream American Society and stuck to the idea of Aztlan, a social, political, economic and cultural utopia free of liberal politicians, welfare programs, police brutality, discrimination, poverty and identity crises.

Xipe Vitan J'ai

Xipe Vitan Jä'i, previously called Xipe Totek Kalpul, is a metal band that sings in native languages of Mexico. They appeared in 2006 singing covers of Black Metal bands such as Immortal, Dark Funeral and Numen. In 2008, the band decided to start playing their own music and they recorded their first demo called *Yohualahuananzij* (the nocturnal drinker) inspired by Nahua culture. In 2009, they released their first album called *Xoxopantla* (green period) with which they came to public attention in Mexico and some other countries. As a result, they had the opportunity to perform in several events in Mexico City, Oaxaca, Tlaxcala, Hidalgo, etc. and festivals such as Metal in the Forest and Metal Fest on the Street in Tlahuac. They also gave radio and internet interviews.

In 2010, they participated in the French documentary *L'art du Mythe, Xipe Totek du Mexique* (*The Art of the Myth, Xipe Totek of Mexico*), about the sculpture of the god Xipe Totec at the Musée du quai Branly in Paris. In 2012, they released their first studio album *Uitsnauatlampaj* (in the place surrounded by prickles). The LP contains thirteen tracks in four indigenous languages of Mexico and Central America: Nahuatl, Hñáñü, Triqui and Quechua;

and features several 'pre-Hispanic' instruments: uueuetl (traditional drum), tlapitsalsin (clay and reed flutes), ayoyomej (rattles) and quena (traditional Incan flute). In 2014, they performed in the World Festival of the Resistance and Rebellion organized by the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation). Xipe has also participated in colloquia, and other forums to discuss the current and general situation of First Nations in Mexico. According to the band, their purpose is not only to make music. Its members also contribute in a critical, respectful, objective and tangible way to the dissemination, acknowledgement, conservation and legitimation of the cultural, linguistic, territorial, social, and political diversity of the indigenous peoples of Mexico by creating projects that are intended to transform the social reality in which all Mexicans live. [6]

The members of the band are: Thubini (lead vocals and flutes), Trece-Muerte (guitar), Una Tatyí Tuun (prehispanic instruments), Jahir Morales (guitar), Pablo Ramírez (bass guitar), Eduardo Munguía (guitar) and Marco Nafate (drums). [7]

Black Metal and Neofolk Music

According to Granholm, heavy metal was conceived in the late 60s early 70s by British bands such as Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple and Black Sabbath. These bands were influenced by blues-based hard rock and psychedelic rock as well as the 60s counterculture with its tendency toward rebelliousness. The music was made more extreme and the Hippie message of love and peace was changed into a grimmer worldview. The “New Wave of British Heavy Metal” in the mid-70s presented heavier, faster, more complex and melodic forms of metal. These bands influenced the development of American Heavy Metal and the subsequent extreme metal genres that emerged in the 80s. The term *Black Metal* based on the title of Venom's second album from 1982 started to be applied to extreme metal bands that incorporated more overtly anti-Christian and 'satanic' themes in their lyrics and image. However, it was not until the Norwegian “second wave” in the early 90s that the term black metal is mentioned as a genre (525-526).

From its inception, metal has embraced esoteric and occult notions. Although most subgenres of extreme metal include occult themes, none did so as much as black metal. The “second wave” or Norwegian black metal is often considered overtly satanic. However, lyrics rarely refer directly to Satan; they show, on the contrary, a heathen influence with references to Old Norse, pre-Christian myths, religion and culture. Early Norwegian black metal could be more aptly labelled as ‘pagan’ or ‘heathen’ since the label ‘Satanic’ does not sufficiently describe its particularities. The identification of this particular black metal as ‘satanic’ can be attributed to the influence of mass media (527-529).

From the early 80s the post-industrial style of most relevance was the *neofolk*. Black metal and neofolk have much in common. Thematically, they are both strongly devoted to the themes of romanticism and old Germanic and Scandinavian mythology and culture; but musically, neofolk focuses on traditional European and acoustic instruments. Many black metal bands combine both styles. It is important to note that black metal and neofolk are not only musical styles, but complex cultural systems, providing specific sets of ideologies, meaning, practice and traditions. While both mostly function simply as musical styles for most listeners, and even many of their musicians Granholm argues that this function is secondary (534-535).

The discourse present in black metal and neofolk bears strong similarities to Radical Traditionalism, whose key characteristic is the rejection of dominant Western culture. Instead, attention is focused on what is considered more ‘authentic’ culture and uncorrupted expressions of eternal wisdom. The turn to a pre-Christian Germanic and Scandinavian past satisfied several needs: an ‘esoteric appeal of the exotic,’ as these ancient cultures represented a reality far removed from the present dominant cultural and societal trends, norms, and values. It satisfied the rebelliousness of rock discourse and provided legitimacy both by being outside the mainstream, as well as part of a perceived “authentic native culture” (537-538).

Pre-Hispanic Nahua Culture or Aztec Civilization [8]

All the information given in this section about Aztec Civilization was taken from online Ancient History Encyclopedia, because this article is not about analysing Aztec Civilization per se, but what people know about this culture and what they do with this information that they learned mostly in primary school.

The Aztec Empire flourished between c. 1345 and 1521 CE and it covered most of northern Mesoamerica. Tenochtitlan on the western shore of Lake Texcoco today’s Mexico City with its 200,000 inhabitants by the early 16th century CE, was the largest city in the Pre-Columbian Americas. Tenochtitlan was a huge trading center, and the political and religious capital of the empire. Aztecs were highly accomplished in agriculture, trade, art and architecture. This civilization is the most well documented of Mesoamerica.

The ‘myth’ says that the original Aztecs came from a place called Aztlan (literally land of white herons and origin of the Aztec name) in the far northwest. They were nomads and were looking for a place to finally settle down. Huitzilopochtli, their war and sun god, told them to travel south and found Tenochtitlan where they found an eagle sitting on a cactus while eating a snake. The god also gave these people their name, the Mexica, who along with other ethnic groups, who similarly spoke Nahuatl, collectively made up the peoples now generally known as the Aztecs.

Their two main gods were Huitzilopochtli (the war and sun god) and Tlaloc (the rain god). Other important gods were Quetzalcoatl (the feathered-serpent god common to many Mesoamerican cultures), Tezcatlipoca (supreme god at Texcoco), Xipe Totec (god of spring and agriculture), Ometeotl (the creator god), Mictlantecuhtli (god of the dead) and Coatlicue (the earth-mother goddess). The gods were honoured with festivals, banquets, music, dancing, decoration of statues, burning of incense, the ritual burial of precious goods, penances such as blood-letting and animal sacrifices. Humans, both adults and less often children, were also frequently sacrificed to metaphorically feed the gods and keep them

happy lest they become angry and make life difficult for humans by sending storms, droughts etc. or even just to keep the sun appearing every day. Victims were usually taken from the losing side in wars.

The sun had great significance for the Aztecs. They believed that the world went through a series of cosmic ages. Each had its own sun but finally each world was destroyed and replaced by another until the fifth and final age was reached the present day for the Aztecs. This cosmic progression, which also crops up in many other places, was wonderfully represented in the famous Sun Stone. At the center of the stone is a representation of a main god, which may be Tonatiuh (the Day Sun), Yohualtonatiuh (the Night Sun) or the primordial earth monster, Tlaltecuhli, in each case representing the final destruction of the world when the 5th sun fell to earth, the nahui ollin (4 – Movement). Around the central face at four points are the previous four suns, known by the day name when their final destruction occurred.

In 1521 CE, Hernán Cortés, a Spanish Conqueror, laid siege to Tenochtitlan. Lacking food and ravaged by disease, the Aztecs finally collapsed on the fateful day of 13th of August 1521 CE. Tenochtitlan was sacked and its monuments destroyed. From the ashes rose the new capital of the colony of New Spain.

Indigenismo and Meztisaje Politics in Mexico

The Colony of New Spain (1521-1810) dislocated the previous social indigenous order and structured a new hierarchical order that depended on the exploitation of the newly invented sector: the Indian. [9] The category of Indian denotes, then, the condition of colonized and makes necessary reference to the colonial relation. The colonizer gradually takes over the lands he requires; submits, organizes and exploits the workforce of the Indians. The colonial domain modifies the social organization and cultural systems of the dominated peoples (Bonfil 1972 110-112). The colony reduced indigenous peoples to rural communities, dedicated to servitude, and less prestigious occupations in cities. The loss of communal lands eroded the basis of traditional Indian culture, and many

Indians were forced to sell their labor to the 'Haciendas' as peasants (Fernández).

With time, there was a need for another social category, the mestizo. This social category has to do more with social relationships and wealth than with biological race per se. The Ibero-American colonial regime demanded a social layer capable of carrying out a series of tasks (administrative, service, mediation) that the colonizing population- that is, Peninsulars and Criollos [10] -were not enough to cover. In this group an intense acculturation was exerted that resulted in its uprooting from the colonized sector. The mestizos can be seen as a sector of colonized origin that the colonial apparatus co-opted to incorporate into the colonizing society, but assigning them a subordinate position within it (Bonfil 1972 113).

Once independence was obtained from Spain in 1821 and Mexico stood as a new country, the administrations failed to conform a culturally homogenous nation in accordance with the admired European model of Nation-State, but rather prolonged a situation of internal colonialism where the old social categories still co-exist: Indian, mestizo and colonizer. To try to homogenize the Mexican State, Indigenismo was born. Indigenismo, according to its critics, is an instrument at the service of national states to destroy the identity of Indigenous people and integrate them into a homogeneous national culture (Fernández).

The presence of two different civilizations (indigenous peoples, and Peninsulars or Criollos) implies the existence of different historical projects that postulate equally different hierarchies of values and aspirations. Nevertheless, the new Mexican nation was conceived as culturally homogeneous, following a Western model, where indigenous culture should be eliminated and European culture generalized. The rationale to this perception lies within the (European) ideals of the time: a strong Nation-State 'should be' integrated by people who have the same culture and the same language, as the product of a common history. In addition, the new leaders of the Mexican nation were the minority group that had inherited the orientations of Western civilization, but these Criollos did not want to be directly related to

Spain anymore. Therefore, the Criollo identity gave way to the ideology of mestizo Mexico, where every individual was Mexican and every Mexican was a mestizo (Bonfil 1990 102-104).

The role of Indigenismo at this stage was to exalt indigenous cultures as the proud origin of Mexican nationality, but as cultures from the past, cultures already dead. In order to fulfil this mission, the state used its control over the work of anthropologists, archaeologists, national historiographers and artists, as well as over the institutions responsible for Indian policy, the ideological discourse of public education and the speech of state officials. One Mexican philosopher who promoted the mestizo ideologies of homogeneity was José Vasconcelos, who in 1925 wrote *La Raza Cósmica* (Cosmic Race), where he describes how a mestizo race is better than a pure one. As the Secretario de Educación Pública (Secretary of Public Education), he launched cultural projects to promote a culturally rich indigenous past and a mestizo present. This constituted the 'Mexican image', where indigenous people do not exist. In 1940 the First Inter-American Indian Congress was held. From this congress, indigenismo became a common continental strategy and a widespread movement.

All these projects failed to achieve their main objective, the disappearance of the 'Indian' and the consequent transformation of indigenous peoples into the archetypal Peruvian, Mexican, Bolivian, etc. The fact is that Indians exist today as poor, marginalized and as differentiated as ever. The difference is that, at present, Indians are increasingly assuming their ethnic status and intending to conduct their own destiny by ending internal colonialism (Fernández).

New-Age Culture

According to Sebald, the sociocultural dynamics of late 20th century America involves the interaction of three social movements: the Moral Majority, secular humanism, and New-Age. The three movements propose divergent philosophies and incompatible lifestyles. The New-Age movement, envisions an alternative lifestyle that fits neither into the narrow Christian heritage of the Moral Majority, nor

into the rationalistic and empirical philosophy of humanism. The counter-culture of the 1960s and early '70s was a rejection of a destructive and demystifying industrialism, which seemed to be pushing the world toward nuclear annihilation. Increasing numbers of people saw science as the servant of a war machine. At the end of the Vietnam War, the movement changed into gentler New Age Romanticism. New Age philosophy is, before the eyes of humanists, full with romanticism and supernatural beliefs. Romanticism is a peculiar way of looking at the world that takes place within the childlike, hedonistic, picturesque, bizarre, unknown and mystical. Romanticism embraces nostalgia for the past, melancholy for the impossible, the desire for the unreal and persistent pursuit of mysticism (Sebald 106-108).

New Age is a social movement in a loose sense. It has no tight structure or organization, no definite leadership, or any clearly promulgated dogma. There are, however, a number of characteristics that allow New Age to be considered a movement (Sebald 109). 1) *A Sense of belonging*. Most of its adherents live in small groups, communes or small communities. 2) *Common values*. They promote a 'consciousness' of life forces within and around us. This consciousness, according to New-Agers, is not achieved by the superficial and destructive approach of empirical science. "Conscious" people reject modern medicine and psychiatry and prefer faith healing, meditation and Om-circle; they reject synthetic chemicals and prefer herbal medicine and 'organic' foods; they reject psychological analysis and prefer explanation by reincarnation or astrology; they follow dietary principles such as vegetarianism; they encourage a 'return to nature'. 3) *A goal*. New Agers aspire to a lifestyle that significantly differs from that of the mainstream American materialistic and capitalistic philosophy. They want to return to a simpler, more natural, more loving and caring existence. Factories and impersonal industry would be replaced by a more natural way of life, greater self-sufficiency, and higher reliance on friendly trade rather than on impersonal and competitive commerce. 4) *Common style*. The anti-materialistic style signifies itself in simplicity in dress, diet, housing, transportation, and other necessities of life. 5)

Jargon. Possibly the most important bonding mechanism of the New-Age movement is the vocabulary shared by its members, which reflects a common belief, attitude, emotion and lifestyle. Some examples of the New-Agers' jargons are concepts such as: consciousness, reincarnation, karma, etc. 6) *Mass communication.* There is no one single organ of communication but several newsletters emanating from numerous groups that identify themselves as New-Agers.

New-Age people adopt elements of Oriental religions, alternative views of interpersonal relations, and beliefs in various utopian visions, sharply deviating from the 'straight' road of Western science and rationalism, while simultaneously opposing established political, economic and religious institutions (Sebald 110). New Age emerged from a syncretism of astrology, theosophy, Hindu philosophy, Zen Buddhism and the perception of mystical forces that transcend space and time. The universal forces are believed to be capable of manifesting themselves as 'entities' (spirits); a belief that opened the door to medieval attitudes, including the belief in magic, witchcraft, and Castanedean hoaxes (Sebald 114). Maybe one of the most significant characteristics of the New-Age movement is its obsession with the occult. New-Age is a response to the need for a new ideation. New-Age Romanticism must be understood as a symptom of social unrest and discontent; as a surge toward ideas and a lifestyle that recreates meaning, adds colour, and fascinates with a new mystique (Sebald 125).

Analysis

This section examines some short interviews, as well as at some publicity pictures and logos from Quinto Sol and Xipe Vitan J'ai in order to analyse and understand their musical concept and motivations.

Selection of information from the interview made by FNX Native Television in 2013 to the band Quinto Sol. [11]

FNX: "We learned about... and their indigenous heritage."

Band: "We all have something in common and that's our indigenous blood. A tree without roots can easily be knocked

over. It empowers you because you know who you are and you have this indigenous consciousness. That's who I am and nobody can tell me who I am but myself. Our lives changed when we came across Bob Marley and we actually got all rasted out before we went back into the indigenous culture. It's not a typical reggae it's got a mix of some cumbias, some sons, some salsa, some jazz, a lot of Latino flavour, Latino rhythms. We are a bunch of Chicanos influenced by Latino music trying to play reggae. Nahuatl is one of our indigenous languages. We wanted not only to do music in Spanish and English but in our original language."

We see in this interview that the members of the band Quinto Sol claim to be Chicanos, and also to have an indigenous legacy, which gives them strong foundations and power; but only when they are aware of it, when they know their origins. If they ignore their history, the colonizer as 'Other' is able to invent an identity for them, which they will have to believe and accept. This is why they decided to play reggae not only in Spanish or English, but also in Nahuatl.

Selection of information from an interview made by Panquetzani in 2007 to the band Quinto Sol [12]

Band: "Originally we were punkers. We were aware in the sense of anarchism. We came across Bob Marley. We wanted to do what they were doing for the black people we wanted to do it for the brown people. Speak conscious stuff for a better tomorrow. We wanted to do that for our people. And now we are raztecas, this whole movement. The reggae rhythm represents this walking movement of the Azteca warrior always moving, always marching forward. It is about people opening their mind and accepting and knowing. You are indigenous, just live it".

For the band members the type of music they play is not as important as the message they want to send. They want to bring awareness to their community, the Chicanos. That's why they chose reggae music, a music genre born

to create awareness among black people. Quinto Sol chose to adopt this style to build consciousness among brown people, the Latinos or Chicanos. They call themselves *raztecas*, which is a socio-cultural movement product of the mixture of Rastafarian and Aztec philosophy. They consider themselves and all Chicanos Aztec warriors, always marching forward. It is therefore important for Quinto Sol that the rest of the Chicanos learn this and accept themselves as indigenous people. According to the band, knowing this would give Chicanos their identity and power back, then they would understand that they are not what they were told they are; a bunch of pariahs.

Logo of the band Quinto Sol



Picture 1: Quinto Sol Logo



Picture 2: nahui ollin (Codex Borbonicus)



Picture 3: hunab ku

The name and logo of the band Quinto Sol in picture 1 was taken from the Aztec myth of the suns or ages, which is represented in the Sun Stone or Aztec Calendar. It is the fifth sun,

the *nahui ollin* (four movement) in picture 2 which is the centre of the stone. Still, instead of using the original colours that appear in Codex Borbonicus, they incorporated the colours of the Rastafarian movement (red, yellow and green). Another symbol that appears in the logo of the band is the *hunab ku* seen in picture 3 which a lot of people believe to be part of pre-Hispanic Maya culture. The name *Hunab ku* is in the Maya language and apparently means 'The One God', suggesting the Maya people were monotheists and believed in a single god. The earliest information found about this 'god' is from the 16th century. It seems that this god was invented by Spanish friars to facilitate the evangelization of the Maya people (Damián 405-406). The name was popularized by the anthropologist Domingo Martínez Parédez in his book *Hunabku: Síntesis del Pensamiento Filosófico Maya* (*Hunabku: Synthesis of Maya Philosophical Thought*), published in 1964. But in this book Martínez Parédez only showed circles and squares as a representation of Hunab-ku. It was José Argüelles (1987), an American artist and New Age author, who apparently made up the symbol today known as Hunab ku. He published it on the cover of his book *El Factor Maya* (*The Mayan Factor*). It is believed that Argüelles took the symbol from the Magliabecchiano Codex, a Mexica Codex, and styled it to make it look like a yin-yang or a spiral galaxy. [13] Hunab ku is then a symbolic product of New Age culture. Finally, *Barrio Roots*, the name of their second album, also appears at the bottom of their logo.

Publicity pictures of the band Quinto Sol

In pictures 4-7, taken from their Facebook page, we see four of the most popular publicity pictures photos of the band Quinto Sol. Two of them pictures 4 and 5, were clearly taken in Mexico City. Picture 4 was taken at the archaeological zone Templo Mayor, displaying remains of Tenochtitlan, the great Mexica city. Picture 5 was taken in the Zocalo, Mexico City's down-town civic square, a few steps from Templo Mayor. Behind them, the Government Palace with the Mexican flag is clearly visible. The band members are dressed rather conservatively, only the main members of the band, Mizraim Leal and

Martin Pérez have a more dramatic look. We see some elements of the Latino-Chicano look, like the tattoos, the Padlock beard, the tank top t-shirt and the hat or bonnet. Some elements of reggae look are also quite typical, such as long hair with dreadlocks, the bandana worn on the head and the bright colours of the t-shirt. Finally, we see some elements of indigenous cultures: the motives of the tattoos, and of the orange t-shirt; the necklaces, bracelets and earrings; and the braids.



Picture 7

Selection of information of an interview published by Grupo NVI Noticias to the leader of the band Xipe Vitan Ja'í. [14]



Picture 4



Picture 5



Picture 6

“Thubini Mästöhö, the leader of the band was known as Arturo García García, youth who studied landscape architecture and spoke only Spanish. Today he speaks Nahuatl, Hñähñu and Tu'un savi, best known as Otomí and Mixteco. He works as a teacher and researcher of Native languages of Mexico. His contact with Hñähñu gave him not only a way to communicate but also an identity. He chose his new name after learning the language and living in a community in El Valle del Mezquital, in Hidalgo, Mexico for two years. His life has changed so much that today he states that he is not Mexican, but Hñähñu”.

“Thubini was born and grew up in Mexico City. During his life he had no special contact with indigenous cultures until at age one 20 his mother told him that his grandmother spoke Hñätho, a variant of Hñähñu. The generation from Thubini's mother did not learn the language anymore. In 2008, he started learning Nahuatl and in 2011 Hñähñu. Since then, he is a new person. When he lived in El Valle del Mezquital, he learned that the reality of indigenous people is different from what the books and the official history tell.”

Thubini grew up as a Mexican mestizo and, like most Mexicans, ignored the reality of indigenous people. Getting to know his ancestry and the reality of indigenous people today gave

him an identity. For him, to be Mexican is to accept an identity imposition that comes from the 'Other', the one telling the official history where indigenous people do not exist anymore, and are identified and stamped as poor peasants, Mexican mestizos. He therefore changed his life completely, and today all his work is dedicated to help indigenous groups with the preservation of their languages and cultures.

Logo and publicity pictures of the band Xipe Vitan Ja'i



Picture 8



Picture 9



Picture 10

The first name of the Band was Xipe Totec, the name of an Aztec God, 'our lord the flayed one.' The most recent name of the band was Xipe Vitan J'ai, meaning people of today, people of change. *Xipe* is Nahuatl and means 'change'; *Vitan* is T'un savi or Mixteco and means 'today';

J'ai is Hñahñu or Otomí and means 'people'. Their logo is a bull's skull, which is a typical element of black metal bands. In album covers and publicity pictures, they use a lot of cacti as a representative element of the indigenous cultures of Mexico. European black metal bands present publicity pictures and album covers showing Nordic landscapes. Xipe follows this tradition but presenting Mexican cactus landscapes.

The look of the members of the band when they have a performance is shown in pictures 9 and 10. Most of them wear textiles made by indigenous people of Mexico from various cultures, though none in particular. They also paint their faces, not following a tradition from any particular culture. Each of the members creates their own make up with a personal meaning. They took the idea of painting their faces from indigenous cultures, because indigenous warriors apparently used to paint their faces when they had to go to war [15]; and they also claimed the idea from black metal, for their own because black metal bands paint their faces, too, but they mostly use black and white to resemble human skulls.

Discussion

Quinto Sol

The members of the band *Quinto Sol* are Mexican Americans and call themselves Chicanos, embracing a term originally used by Euro-Americans with a pejorative connotation that saw Chicanos as second-class citizens. As a musical group, their main goal is to create a new consciousness among Chicanos. They think Chicanos should know both who they are and what their roots are in order to have an identity of their own, instead of accepting the identity created by the colonizing 'Other.' They should also be able to see the way they are oppressed and manipulated. Therefore, the lyrics of their songs- in Spanish, English and Nahuatl -are very direct, easy to understand; and about the socio-political and economic situation of Chicanos in the USA. Their look is not highly sophisticated, as not to differentiate themselves from other Chicanos. The mix between reggae and Latino music results in lively and catchy rhythms that attract Chicanos' attention.

The band *Quinto Sol* intertwines its musical

concept together with the main ideals of Chicano movement, reggae and Rastafarian philosophy, the New Age movement and Aztec culture. Some things that all these movements have in common: their stance against mainstream Western culture, industry, and capitalism; they preach to return to nature, ancient cultures, and roots; they have a common struggle against the oppression exerted by the dominant, Western culture against minority groups. All these movements were born from unrest and discontent among minority groups. In addition, many Chicanos claim Aztec ancestry due to their Mexican origin and/or because they are descendants of the indigenous people of Aztlan, the Aztecs' original homeland, which has been identified with today's south-western United States.

Xipe Vitan J'ai

The members of the band Xipe Vitan J'ai are Mexican born and from a racial point of view all of them are mestizos. However, the leader and vocalist of the band (Thubini) rejects being called Mexican and designates himself as Hñahñu (Otomí), even when it took him 20 years to figure out that his grandmother was an indigenous woman and that there are still a lot of indigenous people living in small towns in Mexico speaking their languages and living according to their 'ancient culture.'

Indigenismo and mestizaje policies succeeded in hiding indigenous cultures from mestizos and create the need among indigenous people to blend in as mestizos to avoid discrimination and lack of job opportunities. This way, Mexico should be a land of darker and lighter, poorer and richer mestizos with same religion, same language, same history and same interests. When Thubini and other members of the band realized that the real situation and history of indigenous cultures in Mexico was far away from what Mexicans learn in school, they wanted to do something about it.

They chose the name of the Nahua god Xipe Totec for the band blending black metal and neofolk traditions. They started singing, like many other bands, about ancient Aztec culture and the arrival of Spaniards in Nahuatl language and only for the pleasure of making music. Little

by little, their motivations changed towards socio-political purposes; though not by all the members of the band. The band's main goal according to what they say is, on the one hand, to create consciousness about indigenous people among mestizos and, on the other, to contribute to the decolonization of indigenous people. They want to develop criticism and reflexion of the socio-political situation of indigenous people of Mexico among their audience and provide them with alternatives of identity. Mexicans should be able to see that mestizo identity is a creation and an imposition of the Mexican Nation State developed in order to eliminate indigenous cultures. At the same time, while showing mestizos that indigenous people exist and have rich and interesting cultures, the band also shows indigenous people that their cultures are nothing to be ashamed of, but give them a stronger identity than that of the poor peasant.

In their latest phase as a band, Xipe sang in three different indigenous languages of Mexico highlighting everyday objects or traditions regarding indigenous peoples' lives of Mexico. The lyrics are very poetic, recreating the metaphoric way of the 'writing' of ancient Nahuas, but are difficult to understand by audiences due to, both their use of the indigenous language and of growling, the traditional singing style of many metal bands. The only way to understand what they are singing about is to read the lyrics with the translation into Spanish; yet the message is encrypted in the poem. Their look is very dramatic, following black metal tradition; but with original twists at the same time. This style could be used intentionally by the group to intrigue their audience so that they want to know more about the band and the origins of their look. Nevertheless, the look is neither a common black metal band look, nor the look of indigenous people of any particular culture. The mix of metal intensity with pre-Hispanic instruments makes their music original and interesting. However, someone who does not like metal music is not likely to listen to them even if he/she is interested in indigenous cultures.

The band Xipe Vitan J'ai builds its musical concept together with the main ideals of black metal and neofolk musical movements along with the new age movement and Indigenous

cultures. Black metal and neofolk as well as the new age movement reject mainstream Western culture, and preach a return to the beliefs ancient cultures', many times wrongly called mythologies. All these movements have an interest in esotericism and exoticism, as opposite to western mainstream culture. Black metal, as many people know, also rejects Catholicism, since it was the Church that tried to bury ancient cultures in Europe and America. Xipe Vitan J'ai was at first only inspired by ancient Aztec culture. As Indigenismo and the theory of the Raza C6smica (Cosmic Race) planned it; mestizos really adopted this 'mystic' past as their identity, believing all indigenous people simply disappeared after the Spaniards' conquest. Mexico City is one of the places with more presence of indigenous cultures in Mexico. There are Nahua names everywhere, archaeological zones, museums about ancient cultures, statues of Aztec emperors or warriors, people dressed up as ancient Aztecs dancing and asking for money etc.; but more importantly, if we pay attention, we see there are people from many different indigenous cultures living in the city, speaking their languages, trying to sell their arts and crafts to survive. These are the people and the reality that Xipe tries to portray in its music.

Conclusion

Both bands fight against the oppression of a minority group (Chicanos and Indigenous people) by the dominant group. They both built a musical concept following social and musical movements that are also against dominant mainstream Western culture, and look for a return to nature, to ancient cultures and philosophies. They both want to create the consciousness in their audience that allows them to develop an identity of their own. They both claim to have indigenous roots and have been influenced a great deal by Aztec culture. They both talk about indigenous groups of today, although Quinto Sol does not mention any particular name other than Mexica.

One of the biggest differences between both bands is that Quinto Sol belongs to the minority group they fight for; Xipe does not.

Quinto Sol are Chicanos fighting against Chicano oppression. Xipe are mostly mestizos fighting against indigenous people's oppression. Although Thubini, the vocalist of the band, considers himself Hñahñu, he did not grow up in an indigenous reality; that gives him a different background and identity. The rest of the members of the band are apparently not so interested in being something else than Mexican mestizos. However, that does not mean that the cause of Xipe Vitan J'ai is not genuine. Another difference is the kind of music genre they perform. Reggae is a lively, peaceful, tropical music with an easy-going audience; but strong rebellious clear lyrics. Metal is a loud, saturated, aggressive music with an uneasy young audience and romantic encrypted lyrics.

In the case of both bands, we have to be careful and observe if they are not simply using indigenous cultures in search of an exotic novelty that sells well. Especially in the case of Xipe Vitan J'ai the dramatically, strong performance that all metal bands normally do. We should not forget that, first of all, they are both music bands trying to attract more audience, to be original, and to sell their albums -and exoticism sells. That is one of the problems with new age culture: they create information and then they sell this information as coming from an ancient culture. We mentioned before the case of Hunabku, a new age creation sold as part of ancient Maya culture.

Endnotes

[1] Estimation from INALI (National Institute of Indigenous Languages) based on data from the II Census of Population and Housing, 2005 (INEGI) and the Catalogue of National Indigenous Languages, INALI, 2008

[2] 15'686,262 people in Mexico speak English as a second language according to Consulta Mitofsky-Tracking Poll Roy Campos: Foreign Languages in Mexico, January 2013 and II Census of Population and Housing, National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Computing (INEGI).

[3] Chicanos are US Americans with Mexican ancestry.

[4] According to the band's Facebook site <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Quinto-Sol/118623300032>

[5] "Chicanos." Dictionary of American History. *Encyclopedia.com*. <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/united-states-and-canada/us-history/chicanos>

[6] According to the band's Facebook site https://www.facebook.com/pg/Xipe-Vitan-Jai-257758320904435/about/?ref=page_internal

[7] The band officially split up last year 2017 before this article was finished. The reason for their dissolution will not be discussed in this article.

[8] «Aztec Civilization». *Ancient History Encyclopedia*. http://www.ancient.eu/Aztec_Civilization/

[9] Indian was the term that Spaniard conquerors used to refer to indigenous people of the New World. The term had and still has a racist connotation.

[10] According to Spanish colonial caste system, a Peninsular was a Spanish-born Spaniard residing in the New World, making reference to Peninsular Spain. A Criollo was a Spaniard (of Spanish ancestry) born in the New World.

[11] FNX Native Television interview. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BvrAkmzQaw0>

[12] Panquetzani interview <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIEp197d6EM>

[13] "Hunab Ku: Were the Mayans Monotheistic?" *Bethany Youngblood* <http://geniusofancientman.blogspot.com/2015/03/hunab-ku-were-mayans-monotheistic.html>

[14] Taken from Grupo NVI Noticias. Article: Rockear en náhuatl. By Andro Aguilar. 08.13.2015 <http://old.nvinoticias.com/en/node/296148>

[15] "Aztec Body Art – Tattoos, Body Painting, War Paint & Aztec Makeup". *World History*. August 3, 2017. <https://worldhistory.us/latin-american-history/aztec-history/aztec-body-art-tattoos-body-painting-war-paint-aztec-makeup.php>

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Author's Biography

Paloma Coatlicue Rodríguez Villarruel graduated from Guadalajara University in Mexico with a BA in French teaching, an MA in Applied Linguistics and an MA in Studies of English Languages and Cultures. She is currently in the fourth year of the PhD in Inter-American Studies at Bielefeld University in Germany with the thesis project: "Constructing Alterities: Nahuatl Language and Culture in Contemporary Youth Cultures (metal, rock, reggae)", advised by Prof. Dr. Wilfried Rausert. In the last 9 years she has been interested in researching Nahua culture and language from different perspectives such as: sociolinguistics, theoretical linguistics and cultural studies.