

Lowriding across Time, Space, and Disciplines

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Dylan A. T. Miner. *Creating Aztlán: Chicano Art, Indigenous Sovereignty, and Lowriding across Turtle Island*. Tucson, AZ: U of Arizona P, 2014. Pp. 288. ISBN 978-0-8165-3003-8.

Artist and historian Dylan A.T. Miner's innovative and insightful text effectively bridges the gap between the fields of Chicana/o Studies and Indigenous Studies, invoking relevant discussions of art history, anthropology, sociology, and philosophy. In his interrogation of conceptualizations and visual representations of Aztlán throughout a variety of temporalities and spatial constructs, Miner offers a framework that relies heavily on Indigenous studies to understand the artistic creation of various manifestations of Aztlán as foundational for Xicano sovereignty and integral to overcoming the legacy of settler-colonialism. Promoting a (trans)hemispheric approach, *Creating Aztlán: Chicano Art, Indigenous Sovereignty, and Lowriding across Turtle Island* links Indigenous people groups—from the pre-Cuauhtemoc Mexica to Chicano activists of the 1960s and contemporary MiXicano (Michigan Xicano) and Anishinaabe artists along *la otra frontera*—through the construction and transformation of Aztlán as a strategy of Indigenous resistance. The author establishes his positionality as Michif or Métis, raised alongside many Xicanos in a rural community in the U.S.-Canada borderlands, and explains that the text is, “[...] based in my own experiences as a Michif artist engaged in radical Xicano politics. It merges these intellectual and lived experiences in a way that situates Chicano art history within a series of radical potentialities and Indigenous ontologies” (12). As such, Miner's book establishes the nexus between individual and collective experiences and identities as well as the links of colonial oppression, resistance, migration, diaspora and survivance shared by Xicano and Anshinaabeg individuals, as reflected in artistic production.

Relocating the study of Chicano art within Indigenous studies, or perhaps vice versa, Miner's Indigenist leaning is evident. Beyond the incorporation of seemingly minor editorial choices such as the use of “pre-Cuauhtemoc” rather than “pre-Columbian” to displace the emphasis on the role of the settler-colonizer, or the spelling of “Xicano” to reflect indigeneity as well as a “lost or colonized history” (221), *Creating Aztlán's* bifurcated structure uniquely complements the primary arguments of the text through utilizing the Nahuatl concept of *in tllili in tlapalli* (“red and black”) (17). Divided into two sections (*Tllili* and *Tlapalli*), even in its structure the text embraces the Indigenous

concept of sacred knowledge and dualistic singularities (17). *Creating Aztlán* focuses first on a comprehensive overview of the history of theoretical frameworks relevant to Aztlán and the notion of utopia, and includes a 12-page glossy insert of colored images. The second section develops concepts that are more directly pertinent to Chicano art history through analysis of various artists' works. Moreover, Miner integrates a variety of the projects that Linda Tuhiwai Smith identifies in *Decolonizing Methodologies* as a framing technique, naming individual chapters after these decolonizing projects and describing how the various artists are engaged in such within each chapter. Of utmost importance are the acts of naming, and re-claiming, and thereby creating Aztlán. This theme of Aztlán as reclamation emerges repeatedly throughout the text's exploration of the continued implications of Aztlán for Indigenous communities today.

Divided into five thematic areas, Miner traces the history and historiography of Aztlán, incorporating a variety of interesting images from pre-Cuauhtemoc codices as well as maps created during the colonial period. He then explores the notion of Aztlán as utopia, not in the sense promoted by Thomas More, but as a dialogic process along the lines of Mikhail Bakhtin's heteroglossia. Nuanced, though perhaps a bit dense for the readers outside of academe that Miner intends to reach (221), this discussion outlines how various Indigenous renderings of Aztlán disrupt the idea of a monolithic or hegemonic narrative of Aztlán. Next, Miner emphasizes the manner in which Xicano sovereignty does not preclude other Indigenous or Native sovereignties before delving into the history of Chicano art along the U.S.-Canada border. Finally, the focus shifts to the significance of lesser-known and emerging Midwest Chicano history and art to the fields of Chicano Studies and Indigenous Studies, providing a helpful overview of conversations within the field of Chicano Art, and underlining how the various artistic manifestations function as anti-colonial (or decolonial) resistance while also demonstrating the dialogic nature of Aztlán as a utopic process.

Perhaps most clever, though, is Miner's use of lowriding as a methodology or framework with which to logically migrate across time and space throughout Turtle Island or the Americas to analyze diverse representations of Aztlán. As Miner explains, "In this book, we will be lowriding across Aztlán, an Indigenous Xicano territory, and into Anishinaabewaki, the traditional homelands of the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi" (3). Miner utilizes the patent symbolism of lowriding for both Xicano and Anshinaabeg cultures and extends the metaphor upon positing lowriding as engagement in the process of "slow-movement" (3) as an Indigenous way of knowing, moving through the world, and being in the world. Lowriding, then, exemplifies anticolonial and "fundamentally anticapitalist" (23) Indigenous resistance through its antithetical relationship with the settler-colonial capitalist drive to profit from the occupied lands.

Lowriding across Turtle Island, particularly to the U.S.-Canada border, allows for the understanding of Aztlán as a utopic place of dialogue and tension from which a critique or transformation of hegemonic norms may emerge. Thus, this approach reveals the manner in which artists like Nora Chapa Mendoza, Gilbert "Magú" Luján, Malaquías Montoya, Carlos Cortéz Koyokuikatl, Favianna Rodríguez, and Dignidad Rebelde join Santa Barraza in providing counternarratives that contest the monolithic and *machista* concepts of Aztlán at the height of Chicano cultural nationalism during the Movement years. These

counternarratives “enunciate a revolutionary and Indigenous Xicano sovereignty” (15), and demonstrate how various artists have appropriated—though, notably, not in a negative sense—a Mesoamerican narrative originally upheld by the elite (the Mexica), and then used it to create “community and sovereignty for a detribalized Indigenous people” (15-16). In many cases, Miner proposes, these counterhegemonic versions of Aztlán emerge via solidarity with other Indigenous and working-class people in the region and globally. He explores such alliances through lowriding through and examining Xicanisma, Zapatismo, solidarity with Palestine, and Ixachilan, a broader hemispheric concept of Indigenous sovereignty based on the Nahuatl term for Turtle Island or the Americas (169, 198). Thus, according to Miner, the artists, and we as passengers, lowride not just through specific time periods and geographic locations, but also through more amorphously defined zones of Aztlán, Nepantla, and Ixachilan, all of which reflect notions of Xicano territoriality. Critically, from an Indigenous perspective, the lowriding or migration is circular rather than unidirectional, as perceived by settler-colonial systems. This circularity is also reflected in Aztlán’s conceptualization of time, Miner suggests, as it permits forward movement and simultaneous backward reflection, as well as connections with “otherwise disparate times and peoples, linking Xicanos with the Aymara of the Andes and Anishinaabeg of the Great Lakes” (88).

In addition to noting the revolutionary capacity of Indigenous thinking regarding circularity, which contrasts with Western linear thought, yet another element of the circularity of lowriding that Miner develops is that of the wheels’ revolutions. In order for the bicycle, as in the case of Miner’s work with local Anshinaabeg youth, or the car to remain in motion and maintain balance, the wheels must continue to revolve. Similarly, he notes, revolutions provide order. Extending this play on words, Miner ultimately proposes quite controversial and revolutionary thinking (at least within Chicano Studies circles) with respect to hybridity and a distinct view of *mestizaje* grounded in Indigenous and Native American Studies.

While he acknowledges the utility and importance of *mestizaje* in the 90s and recognizes the “very real presence of ‘racial’ or cultural mixing” (187), Miner offers a strong critique of the continued focus on *mestizaje* within the discipline of Chicano Studies, arguing that its role as a colonial paradigm or strategy has been instrumental in the detribalization of Indigenous peoples, and necessarily entails the rejection of Indigenous roots through rejection of notions of purity. Miner thus declares the importance of asserting indigeneity after such detribalization, and prefers to adhere to the ideas of Jack Forbes, author of *Aztecas del Norte*, whom he suggests should be considered among one of the field’s foundational scholars for his “radical indigenist and Indigenous perspective that sees *mestizaje* for what it is: an act of continued and systematizing colonial violence continually acted upon Native bodies” (215). For Chicano Studies scholars, this begs the question: Why haven’t we heard more about Forbes? Conversely, is this critique of *mestizaje* common within the discipline of Indigenous Studies? Given the mixed target audience of readers from both disciplines and “especially [...] Native readers outside the academy” (221) that Miner describes, additional development of the divergent ideas on the matter of *mestizaje* may be helpful, particularly in elucidating how the celebration or acknowledgement of *mestizaje* presupposes the impossibility of indigeneity. After all,

Chicano activists and authors like Corky Gonzáles reclaimed their indigeneity through their acceptance and celebration of *mestizaje* in the seminal text *I Am Joaquín*.

Although elaboration of the Indigenous Studies “take” on *mestizaje*, as well as frameworks and terminology involving survivance and settler-colonialism, would facilitate a deeper comprehension of the topics, particularly for those outside of the field of Indigenous Studies, the arguments that Chicano art should be considered to be Indigenous, and that Aztlán functions as a multifaceted form of Indigenous sovereignty and resistance are largely compelling through Miner’s nuanced analyses and explanations of the convergence of experiences of Xicanos and other Indigenous people groups. This text will undoubtedly be a great resource for students and seasoned scholars alike, and will prove particularly useful for examining issues of art and Xicano and/or Indigenous resistance from an interdisciplinary and intersectional perspective.