

Restoring Anáhuac: Indigenous Genealogies and Hemispheric Republicanism in Postcolonial Mexico

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Abstract: This article turns to postcolonial Mexico to analyze the importance of Indigenous political thought for the transformation of radical republicanism during the Age of Revolutions. I argue that Mexican insurgents deployed Indigenous genealogies to instantiate what I call “restorative revolution,” a form of revolutionary thinking that prioritized memorialization over absolute foundation. Mexico’s restorative project began with calls for the return of the Anáhuac Empire, an Indigenous genealogy that memorialized histories of popular self-rule to legitimize postcolonial demands. I suggest that the Anáhuac movement transformed the principles of radical republican thought by mobilizing around religious, plebeian, and hemispheric identities. Each of these characteristics problematizes dominant interpretations of republicanism as a secular, elite, and national enterprise. This article uses popular objects and archival ephemera to illustrate the importance of engaging with the political contributions of marginalized groups from the spaces, practice, and languages they used to envision postcolonial emancipation in collective terms.

José María Morelos’s 1814 inaugural speech before the Congress of Anáhuac in Chilpancingo, Guerrero, announced the first independent constitution of Mexico by appealing to national and international registers of revolutionary change. According to Morelos, Mexicans were victims of crimes that “carefully hid” that “sovereignty essentially resides in the public” and that citizens are “free to reform their political institutions as they see fit” (Morelos and Bustamante [1813] 2017, 1).¹ This turn toward popular sovereignty came as insurgents converged Indigenous genealogies, Catholic religiosity, and radical republicanism to formulate the political principles of postcolonial Mexico.² Namely, the movement proclaimed the return of the

Anáhuac Empire, a narrative that looked to Indigenous histories to claim native belonging to Mexico and the Americas (Brinton 1893, 6–7; Schroeder et al. 2010).³

I argue that, in calling for the return of Anáhuac, Mexican insurgents instantiated a *restorative revolution*, a conception of revolutionary change in which political foundation operates more as memorial recovery than novel beginning. Unlike the foundational revolutions of neo-roman republicanism, the restorative frame of Anáhuac was not centrally motivated by the question of free state power (Arendt 2006, 223; Bernal 2017, 29; Skinner 2012, 17). The concerns of the Mexican movement were also genealogical and substantially

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¹All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

²Mexican actors self-identified as insurgents in New Spain. I use the term *insurgent* as synonymous with *revolutionary* and use *insurgency* to characterize the early phases of the Mexican independence movement. See Brading (1991, 583).

³*Anáhuac* is a Nahuatl term for “the great Earth encircled and surrounded by water,” a reference to the system of lakes of the central valley of Mexico, the *cemanahuac*. Anáhuac is the ancestral home of Nahuatlaca peoples who migrated to the central basin of Mexico in the fourteenth century, among these Olmeca, Tolteca, Otomi, and Mexica nations. *Anáhuac* took on a political valence in the fifteenth century when leaders organized pan-Indigenous coalitions to resist Aztec domination. The term underwent renewal in the nineteenth century to mobilize popular insurgency against colonial rule.

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invested in the restoration of pre-Columbian identities, histories, and practices that in turn betrayed the historically contingent character of colonial subjection.⁴ Approaching the Anáhuac movement through a restorative frame demonstrates the importance of Indigenous genealogies for guiding critiques of colonial rule. While the Mexican independence movement was broadly anti-colonial, I suggest that restorative thought refined its decolonial and postcolonial ambitions. The narrative of Anáhuac functioned as a decolonial practice that decentered Spanish subjection by revealing a precedent for popular Indigenous rule in Mexico—a historical reassessment demonstrating that Americans were fit for independence.⁵ These critical genealogies in turn legitimized postcolonial imaginaries, which looked to Indigenous histories to argue for republican futures.⁶ Thus, by operating between past and future, Mexico's restorative revolution portrayed the emergence of the republic as a moment of emancipatory renewal rather than nascent foundation.

Mexico's restorative revolution challenges long-standing interpretations of republicanism as a secular, elite, and nationally oriented tradition (Machiavelli [1531] 1998, 35; Montesquieu [1748] 1989, 9, 19, 30; Rousseau [1762] 1997, 145; De Tocqueville [1835] 1994, 68; Pettit 1999, 177; Viroli 2001, 94; Conolly 2014, 106). I suggest that the Anáhuac movement transformed republican thinking in at least three ways. First, it developed a highly religious interpretation of republicanism that was committed to Catholicism. Indigenous insurgents coalesced around Catholic identities to organize across classes, especially behind the Lady of Guadalupe, a symbol that spoke to Mexican unity (Brading 1991, 2004). Indigenous religiosity was a major catalyst for the independence movement and problematizes the assumed secularity of republican principles (Viroli 2001). Second, the Anáhuac movement leveraged plebeian republican politics to call for egalitarian reforms like the abolition of slavery, elimination of Indigenous tribute, protection of

communal lands, and redistribution of private property (Guardino 2002, 2005). These commitments illustrate the importance of Indigenous politics for the evolution of popular republicanism in New Spain, and my analysis seeks to build on studies of plebeian republican thought from the investments of American postcolonial imaginaries (Gourevitch 2013; Green 2016; McCormick 2011; Vergara 2020).

Third, the movement appealed to American fraternity in ways that emphasized hemispheric ties over national identities to conceptualize republican emancipation. Although rhetorical appeals to hemispheric unity were common during the Age of Revolutions (Fitz 2017), the Anáhuac movement offers a unique case in which Pan-American connections altered how revolutionaries understood concepts like citizenship and the general will. This article traces the evolution of hemispheric republican language from a rhetorical practice that legitimized anti-colonial sentiments to a civic principle formalized under the 1814 Constitution of Apatzingán, the first constitution to call for Mexican independence.⁷ The constitution granted citizenship to all *Americanos* born in the “New World,” regardless of country of birth, and was based on a shared commitment to defend the liberty of the Americas (Decreto Constitucional para la libertad de la América Mexicana 1814, 47).⁸ This hemispheric conception of republican citizenship draws creative tensions with interpretations of republicanism as defined by national and local ties (Bernal 2017; McCormick 2011, 56; Pettit 1999, 257–58; Viroli 2001, 86).

More broadly, this article signals the importance of lending due attention to the political innovations of marginalized groups in the field's “non-Western” turn (El Amine 2016). Current scholarship on Latin American political thought tends to focus on the contributions of creole-elite actors like Simón Bolívar and Lucas Alamán (Simon 2017). Among hemispheric approaches, Juliet Hooker has juxtaposed Black thinkers like W.E.B. Du Bois and Frederick Douglass with creoles like José Vasconcelos and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (Hooker 2019).⁹ Others, like Adam Dahl (2017) and Adom Getachew (2016), have studied transnational politics in the Americas from the perspective of Black and

⁴This article uses *genealogy* in the ordinary sense of the term, as related to familial bonds or “blood” origins. This conception of genealogy was particularly important in the Spanish colonial context where the *sistema de castas* regulated colonial hierarchies based on categories of “blood purity” (Martínez 2011).

⁵By *decolonial*, I mean a critical reevaluation of history used by Indigenous actors to reveal experiences of subjection under colonial rule. My use of the term draws from the work of Glen Coulthard (2014) and María Joséfina Saldaña-Portillo (2016) on settler colonialism and Indigenous recognition.

⁶By *postcolonial*, I mean a critical stance toward colonial power, which in future terms seeks to imagine a world beyond coloniality. I draw from the work of Robert J. C. Young (2001) and Adom Getachew (2019) on postcolonial imagination.

⁷In the following, I refer to the 1814 Constitution of Apatzingán as the “Anáhuac constitution.”

⁸Article One also calls for the Catholic faith to unite their nascent republican community. In the following cited as “Constitution of Apatzingán 1814.”

⁹Hooker (2005) engages with Indigenous and Black politics in contemporary Latin America. I build on her work by addressing similar problems from the context of colonial Latin America.

Caribbean political thought, where Spanish America remains in the background of colonial events.¹⁰ I aim to bridge these areas of scholarship by analyzing how Indigenous groups in Mexico subverted the colonial state and envisioned emancipation from their respective standpoints toward colonial subjection. To do so, I draw from popular discursive objects like marching poems, pamphlets, and visual artifacts that reveal how marginalized groups influenced the development of republican thought in Mexico. In doing so, this article seeks to problematize the kinds of works, objects, and voices that together compose the archive of political theory.

This argument is developed in three sections. The first section reassesses dominant approaches in the study of Latin American and Indigenous thought by tracing the evolution of Indigenous revival from a conservative creole practice to a popular decolonial critique. I do so by reconstructing the global reception of the Anáhuac movement as depicted by Simón Bolívar and Servando Teresa de Mier, two creoles who spoke to the power of Indigenous genealogies for supplanting colonial history in contrasting ways. The second section turns to the Novohispanic context to analyze the participation of Indigenous actors, and influence of Indigenous thought, in crystalizing the political principles of the Dolores Republicans, an insurgent group comprising majority Nahuatl and Otomi peasants who organized against colonial authorities (León-Portilla and Mayer 2010). I demonstrate that the Dolores movement was particularly important for developing the popular, religious, and hemispheric principles of early Mexican republicanism. The third section demonstrates how these principles were adopted and institutionalized under the 1814 Constitution of Apatzingán, drafted by the Congress of Anáhuac under the leadership of José María Morelos, a parish priest of Indigenous and Afro-Mexican descent. I conclude with a short analysis on the value of the Anáhuac movement for reassessing the study of marginalized actors in political theory and how their political innovations may encourage further research on the central principles that undergird republican political thought.

Anáhuac Genealogies in Global Context

After reading Fray Servando Teresa de Mier Noriega y Guerra's *Historia de la Revolución de Mexico* (1813),

¹⁰ *American* in this article refers to all people born in the American hemisphere.

Henry Cullen, an English observer of the American revolutions, wrote to Venezuelan leader Simón Bolívar with concerns that Mexican insurgents were reviving Indigenous religious practices. Mier's *Historia* proposed that Mesoamerican Indigenous nations were always Catholic by claiming that St. Thomas the Apostle had appeared in the Americas as Quetzalcoatl, Mexica deity of the sun. Bolívar's response to Cullen, his "Jamaica Letter," is one of the most famous examples of the international reception and importance of the Anáhuac movement.¹¹ Bolívar portrayed the Mexican insurgency as part of a broader project for American emancipation but did so while reducing the contributions of Indigenous peoples. The restoration of Anáhuac was only a strategy for inciting popular rebellion, according to Bolívar:

The South Americans have a tradition that ... after the passage of a specific number of centuries [Quetzalcoatl would] reestablish his cult and restore their happiness... [I]t isn't the hero, Quetzalcoatl, great prophet or god of Anáhuac, who would be capable of bestowing the prodigious benefits you propose... I will tell you exactly what we need to ready ourselves to expel the Spaniards and form a free government: unity, of course ... unity will not come to us through divine miracle but through sensible action and well-organized effort. (Bolívar [1815] 2003, 28–29)

While Indigenous genealogies were mobilizing anti-colonial sentiments in New Spain, they also posed a competing narrative for Bolívar's vision of Pan-American unity. By appealing to Indigenous belonging, Anáhuac narratives betrayed the liminal position of creoles, who were neither "originally" American nor European. As Joshua Simon shows, Bolívar's creole republicanism prioritized the virtues of the lettered classes as the foundation for postcolonial change (Simon 2012). Bolívar's simultaneous praise and disavowal of Indigenous revival is representative of the way creoles instrumentalized Indigenous imaginaries to legitimize anti-colonial sentiments while rejecting the contributions of Indigenous groups.¹² While Indigenous revival certainly played a role in sustaining creole-elite status, other groups linked Indigenous thought with plebeian politics.

¹¹ Bolívar translations are by Frederick H. Fornhoff in Bushnell (2003).

¹² Rebecca Earle calls this rhetorical practice "indigenous revival." As David Brading shows, creole organizing around Indigenous imagery was particularly common in New Spain. See Brading (1991) and Earle (2007).

There are examples of this within the Anáhuac movement, where revolutionary actors connected Indigenous self-rule with radical republican demands. This case, in other words, not only illustrates the importance of linking popular politics and Indigenous thought, but it also provides insight into how both framed the evolution of republicanism in the Americas.

The Anáhuac project did not signal a return to Indigenous religious practices but rather a pursuit of critical restoration that centered indigeneity, religion, and plebeian politics in the construction of republican futures. Mexico's restorative revolution emerged from a popular investment in genealogies of belonging to the land of Anáhuac, which in turn opened avenues for portraying colonial rule and colonial identities as precariously constructed forms of arbitrary domination. Genealogical thinking operated in a dual register for Mexican insurgents. First, Anáhuac genealogies offered a decolonial lens that delegitimized claims made by European taxonomists like Guillaume Thomas François Raynal, William Robertson, and Cornelius De Pauw that Americans were unfit for self-rule (Cañizares-Esguerra 2002, 40, 205).¹³ The narrative of Anáhuac was particularly powerful for understanding revolutionary change in restorative terms. Calls for the return of the Anáhuac Empire appealed to the burial of Tenochtitlan, the central *altepetl* (city-state) of the Aztec Empire, during Spanish conquest (Townsend 2017, 49). Restorative revolution entailed a rhetorical unearthing of Anáhuac histories and identities to illustrate the feasibility of replacing colonial rule with Mexican independence. These genealogies relied on the notion that Indigenous and Mestizo peoples held native belonging to the valley of Anáhuac, where Mexico City, the crown jewel of the Spanish colonial system, stood and Tenochtitlan once existed. By critiquing European conventions of civilization and centering Anáhuac histories, Mexican revolutionaries Mexican insurgents framed revolution as a moment of memorialization and restoration that syncretically bound Indigenous and republican self-rule. This emphasis on native belonging threatened to destabilize creole dominance within the colonial hierarchies of the Spanish Americas—a threat that Bolívar attempts to diminish in his letter to Cullen.

¹³These responses to European naturalism began among theologians like Javier Clavijero, Carlos de Sigüenza de Góngora, Juan de Velasco, and Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzman, who argued that Americans were indeed different from Europeans but not *in nature*. Rather, they were born into exceptional conditions that set them up to overcome the violent impulses of Europe (Cañizares-Esguerra 2002, 205).

Second, the genealogy of Anáhuac offered a tool from which to envision and legitimize postcolonial futures. The Mexican independence movement emerged amid a wave of thirty republican revolutions that seized control of the American hemisphere (Sabato 2018). The saliency of radical republican vernaculars during the Age of Revolutions invited Mexican thinkers to link the restoration of Anáhuac with the broader, hemispheric project of republican emancipation. This connection produced interpretations of republican resistance that spoke to the idiosyncrasies of Mexican and American experiences. Thus, Catholic identities, popular rule, and hemispheric ties became rhetorical markers for the Anáhuac movement. I suggest that the syncretism between Indigenous genealogies (as decolonial critique) and republican emancipation (as postcolonial critique) set the political frame for Mexico's restorative revolution.

Proclamations for the return of Anáhuac, then, were more than a “disguise” in “borrowed language,” as Marx writes of French monumental thinking in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* ([1852] 1978, 595). As I demonstrate in the following sections, the restoration of Anáhuac was a rare, if short-lived, project in which Indigenous groups were central for formulating the principles of Mexican republicanism. The group of Dolores insurgents who initiated calls for independence was composed of about 60% Indigenous peoples at the peak of the march, most of whom came from peasant, artisan, and agricultural backgrounds (León-Portilla and Mayer 2010; Van Young 2002). Mexico's restorative revolution can be interpreted as working from within and against the regulatory powers of coloniality (Quijano 2000). Indigenous insurgents, in appealing to lost histories of Anáhuac, attempted to retrieve muted capacities for self-governance hidden by the domination of colonial rule. To do so, revolutionary change had to draw from the legitimating power of Indigenous history and the novel emancipatory possibilities of radical republicanism. Further, by converging religiosity, indigeneity, and republicanism, insurgents were able to organize across economic, ethnic, and political classes. Religion, in particular, was so important to the movement that Bolívar's own assessment not insist on the secularity of republican revolution. Instead, he praises insurgents for bridging religious and political passions through a veneration of the Lady of Guadalupe that was “superior to the most exalted rapture that the cleverest prophet could inspire” (Bolívar [1815] 2003, 29).

Anáhuac genealogies were also instrumentalized to speak to the rise of republican revolutions in global context. Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, the Mexican theolo-

gian moving in the background of the “Jamaica Letter,” is the clearest example of a creole actor who deployed Indigenous genealogies in connection with plebeian republican politics. Mier began his restorative mission during a 1794 sermon commemorating the Lady of Guadalupe, a prominent event attended by Viceroy Miguel de la Grúa Talamanca y Branciforte and Archbishop Manuel Omaña y Sotomayor in Mexico City (Brading 1991, 540). Mier’s sermon suggested that the Lady of Guadalupe appeared in Anáhuac a thousand years *before* the accepted date of 1531, thus signifying Catholicism as endemic to Mexican identities.¹⁴ Mier’s revisionist vision was shared among insurgents across New Spain, who looked to the Lady of Guadalupe as a symbol of Mexican identities (Brading 2004; Connaughton 2003).

Mier’s sermon resulted in his exile to Europe, where his writings reached international audiences. This was especially so through his work with José María Blanco, a Spanish liberal with whom he collaborated on *El Español* (1810–14), the first newspaper to openly advocate for American independence, published in London with funding from the British Foreign Office (Brading 1991; Nichols 1936).¹⁵ His writings demonstrate how Indigenous genealogies were linked to popular revolution as a response to the Anáhuac movement in New Spain, as well as the instrumental role hemispheric rhetoric played in legitimizing a radical American turn in republican politics. Like Bolívar, Mier argued that New Spain and New Granada were pursuing independence as part of a broader movement by Americans seeking to “escape the clutches of the Spanish” (Mier Noriega y Guerra [1811] 2013, 331). Unlike Bolívar, however, Mier’s hemispheric narrative was more concerned with arguing for the legitimacy of popular sovereignty and American innovations rather than the primacy of creole-elite power.

His “Carta de un Americano” (“Letter by an American”), published in *El Español* on November 11, 1811, is a particularly good example of the way Indigenous genealogies, Catholicism, and hemispheric language converged through critiques of European hegemony. The “Carta” was a public response to Issue XIX of *El Español*, which published the 1811 Venezuelan Declaration of Independence along with an anonymous response by a Spanish observer, who criticized the movement for attempting to “establish liberty with barbarity” by fanning the flames of the Spanish crisis amid the Peninsular War (“Independencia de Venezuela” 1811). Mier’s rebuttal at-

tempted to legitimize the demands, and political innovations, of popular American movements by unifying their claims as part of a hemispheric response to colonial power inspired by the “guiding lantern” of independence in the United States (Mier Noriega y Guerra [1811] 2013, 337). He did so, first, by dispelling misrepresentations of Indigenous history as the “offscourings of Raynal, de Pauw, Ulloa, and Muñoz,” which “weaved slander and falsities” to reinforce naturalist European claims of superiority over Americans ([1811] 2013, 332). Independence in Venezuela, Haiti, and the United States not only signaled a capacity for self-rule, but it also revealed the potential of American republicanism to innovate beyond European principles by working from the “academy of revolution” toward a “general will ... in which the end of all society is none other than the well-being of the individuals who comprise it” ([1811] 2013, 336). Although the revolutions were not working in unison, they did reveal a growing hemispheric movement in which “Americans held no divisions regarding the end goal: all wish to escape the clutches of the Spanish, who have tyrannized them for three centuries” ([1811] 2013, 336). More than calling for a singular Pan-American project, Mier relied on hemispheric language to narrativize American independence as a collective phenomenon in which individual revolutions grew comparatively by appealing to one another’s subversion of colonial authority.

On the Napoleonic invasion of Spain, Mier turned to the conquest of Anáhuac to portray the Peninsular War as divine retribution—an “identical” reenactment of “falsities, felonies, and violence; same invasion of rights; the same protections and happiness promised by destructive tyrants” that characterized the Spanish destruction of Tenochtitlan (Mier Noriega y Guerra [1811] 2013, 331). This time, Charles IV was the “candid Motecuhzoma” and Ferdinand VII the “young monarch Cuauhtemoczin,” two of the *tlatoanis* killed during Spanish conquest ([1811] 2013, 335).¹⁶ Rather than repeat the tragedies of European conquest, American revolutions opened avenues for growing beyond the tired practices of colonial rule. These innovations would not come by adopting European prescriptions found in texts like the *French Declaration of the Rights of Man*, but from their own idiosyncratic conceptions. Mier looked to Venezuela as an example of Americans “restoring” a “work of their own” to the world, an act that followed the ambitions of “the United States, where circumstances are equal” ([1811] 2013, 336). The Anáhuac

¹⁴Mier would later publish his revisionist history in his *Historia de la Revolución de Nueva España, Antiguamente Anáhuac* (1813).

¹⁵The British Foreign Office bought 100 issues for local distribution and 500 for distribution in the Americas.

¹⁶This is a reference to Moctezuma and Cuauhtémoc, fifteenth-century Aztec *tlatoanis* (rulers) who fell to Spanish conquest.

movement was on a similar path toward republican innovation.

Mexican insurgents distributed copies of Mier's "Carta" as proof that American independence movements—and Spanish corruption—had gained international attention. The letter was printed by virtually all major independent newspapers in Mexico, including the *Semanario Patriótico Americano* (*Patriotic American Weekly*), which called the letter a revelation that the "root of all misery" resided in "the avarice of the Europeans who came determined to exploit its inhabitants, reducing them to virtual slavery" (Brading 1991, 577). The message conveyed was quite clear to Henry Cullen and other European witnesses: The Mexican independence movement sought to restore popular self-rule in the region, but republican emancipation was for all *Americanos*.

Indigenous Insurgency from Dolores to Valladolid

On September 14, 1810, the city of Dolores, Guanajuato, was seized by a group of Indigenous peasants led by Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, a local parish priest. The march began with chants declaring, "Long live religion. Long live our Holy Mother of Guadalupe. Long Live Ferdinand VII. Long Live America and death to bad government" (Breña 2016, 167; Guzmán Pérez 1996, 207). Hidalgo's rallying call, now known as the "Cry of Dolores," was likely made in Otomi, the dominant Indigenous language in Guanajuato at the time (Navarrete Linares 2010; Tutino 2015). These claims emerged as a response to the forced abdication of Ferdinand VII by Napoleon and subsequent accession of Joseph Bonaparte as king of Spain in 1808. The Peninsular War significantly influenced the way Mexican insurgents understood republicanism and their loyalties to the Spanish metropole. These demands were primarily aimed at the vicereignty and were initially communicated in support of the Spanish Crown. At the same time, however, the Dolores insurgents turned to French republicans like Montesquieu and Rousseau to assess the characteristics of "good government" (Guzmán Pérez 1996, 55, 65). The result was a movement that instrumentalized the language of popular sovereignty and the general will as markers of the public's renewed authority in absence of the king.

The Dolores republicans' recourse to popular politics, as an extension of kingly authority, opened avenues for the adoption of radical republican imaginaries. By the time the insurgents left the city of Dolores on their march

toward Mexico City, they would claim that the king "was an entity that no longer existed" and that sovereignty now resided in the public (Guzmán Pérez 1996). This interpretation of popular authority preserved loyalty to Ferdinand VII while entertaining the emancipatory possibilities of republican self-rule. In this regard, the Dolores movement illustrates the rapid evolution of popular political thought in New Spain as well as the central role Indigenous communities played in envisioning the principles of republican Mexico. Historians like Alicia Hernández Chávez call this a moment of "transcendental change" in Mexican republicanism—a set of events that successfully converged plebeian agrarian interests with the broader prescriptions of republican liberty (1993, 21). The overlap between local and hemispheric republican imaginaries within the movement, however, remain understudied.

Similar to Mier, the Dolores republicans instrumentalized appeals to the emancipation of the Americas as a way to legitimize their claims and widen the scope of their movement. These usually appeared through transnational connections that spoke to growing bonds between American publics. In the case of Mexico, the United States was a neighboring example to follow. Between 1810 and 1813, the Dolores movement called for the creation of a representative legislature that emulated U.S. Congress and also sent delegate Bernardo Gutiérrez de Lara to meet with James Madison and James Monroe in efforts to formalize a political alliance (Coronado 2016, 158). Hidalgo's admiration for U.S. institutions also earned him a reputation as the "New Washington," a name he embraced to emphasize the transnational reach of the movement (Andrews and Guzmán Pérez 2018).¹⁷ Hemispheric appeals to American unity were particularly important at the early stages of the insurgency because they operated in place of a national state-building enterprise, which, as Miguel León-Portilla (2010) demonstrates, the group lacked at the outset of the march. Rather, as Benedict Anderson famously argues, these narratives operated as shared vernaculars for the emancipation of an American "nation" delineated by experiences of colonial subjection (1983, 5).¹⁸ Whereas Anderson links this rhetorical practice to creoles, the Dolores project shows that Indigenous and Mestizo

¹⁷Hidalgo's description as the "new Washington" first appeared in *El Americano* in December 1810.

¹⁸Anderson portrays the "universality" of imagined communal bonds as a prelude to nationalism. I interpret the saliency of hemispheric republicanism during the Age of Revolutions as a moment of political possibility in which the nation-state was only a contingent solution among competing postcolonial visions.

groups also understood themselves as part of a rising American collectivity.

These hemispheric connections emerged from a public turn in republican thought throughout the Americas. By the turn of the eighteenth century, francophone republican texts were circulating in places like Mexico City, Valladolid, Buenos Aires, Santo Domingo, Havana, and New Orleans (Brading 1991; Coronado 2016; Fitz 2017; Guardino 2005). Radical republican writings also began to appear in public spaces like billiard rooms, bars, and street readings, where people could discuss the ideas of French theorists as a matter of common interest (Guzmán Pérez 1996, 66). Among elite circles, republican texts were disseminated privately in *tertulias* (salons), where clandestine translations of the 1793 French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, 1776 Constitution of Virginia, Rousseau's *Social Contract*, Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*, Cicero's *Republic*, and other canonic works were produced by individuals authorized to manage "inflammatory texts" by the Spanish Crown (Andrews 2014). The Dolores movement, in other words, coalesced amidst a wave of republican thought captivating the Americas. And, further, it crystallized its political demands through popular discursive practices, such as public readings, pamphlets, manifestos, and poetry.

In New Spain, the convergence between republican discourse and popular religiosity transformed the defining principles of republican political thought. The leadership of parish priests within the Mexican independence movement inspired a religious conception of radical republicanism that attempted to decolonize Catholic identities by severing them from forced conversion under Spanish conquest (Connaughton 2003; Taylor 1999). Although this is apparent in Mier's claims that Quetzalcóatl professed Christianity in Anáhuac prior to Spanish contact, the power of religious identities in New Spain is most apparent as a popular practice. The connection between plebeian republicanism and Catholicism appeared at the early stages of the Dolores movement, as Lucas Alamán (1849) recounts in his *Historia de México*. After leaving Dolores, the insurgents marched to San Miguel el Grande to pray before the Lady of Guadalupe:

As the march crossed through fields and towns people would join them, forming diverse groups or pelotons, which tied cloths to sticks or reeds as flags of different colors, on which they fixed the image of Guadalupe who was the banner of the enterprise, and who they also carried on the brim of their hats ... the infantry was made up of

Indigenous peoples (*indios*), divided by towns or *cuadrillas*, armed with sticks, arrows, slingshots and spears ... and since many brought women and children with them, everything resembled more a barbaric tribe in migration from point to point, than a marching army. (Alamán 1849, 384)

Alamán's description of the Indigenous actors involved in the Dolores movement signals two important issues related to plebeian republicanism in Mexican context. First, while Hidalgo was leading the march from Dolores, Indigenous leaders were actively involved in recruiting other Indigenous groups, many of which joined as complete communities that included families from neighboring towns, haciendas, and *cuadrillas*. The movement, in other words, developed its political demands through the participation of actors who have been treated as marginal to the development of republican thought. Second, Alamán's praise of the "Indigenous patriots" is particularly important because he was writing from the perspective of a creole conservative and former royalist. His description of the group as a "barbaric tribe" shows that creoles held ambivalent sentiments toward Indigenous revolutionaries beyond the early independence period. Though Alamán's *Historia* seeks to disparage the popular features of Mexican independence, he concedes the importance of Indigenous insurgents for the successes of the movement. Alamán has been studied as a prominent figure of republican thought in Mexico (Simon 2017). Situating his politics in popular context reveals fraught divisions between the republican imaginaries of creoles and Indigenous insurgents critiquing colonial rule, as well as a need to better interrogate the innovations of the latter group.

The republican demands of the Dolores movement became most clear as they marched toward the city of Valladolid, in current-day Morelia. The insurgency stirred much concern among members of the Valladolid *cabildo* (city council), who believed that the group planned to sack the city, redistribute property, and execute Spaniards. News of the march was received by Bishop Manuel Abad y Queipo, who ordered the excommunication of all members of the Dolores republicans and the removal of the statue of the Lady of Guadalupe from the cathedral of Valladolid ([1810] 1996, 241). Queipo justified his excommunication decree by aligning the demands of the insurgents with those of the Haitian revolution, arguing that the "most analogous example for our present situation ... is in the French side of the island of Santo Domingo, where divisiveness and anarchy entered by effect of the French Revolution"

([1810] 1996, 242). Queipo's decree also made an explicit defense of creole interests in light of the Haitian revolution and its aftermath by reminding his readers that the propertied classes of Haiti were among "the wealthiest, most comfortable and happy people known on earth" ([1810] 1996, 242). If the allure of French republicanism led to the deaths of all "white creoles" in Haiti, it could also make New Spain "the most populated and cultured country of the Americas," nothing more than a "shelter for tigers and lions" (Abad y Queipo [1810] 1996, 242). The Dolores republicans would reach Valladolid as excommunicated "seducers of the people and slanderers of Europeans," but their reception among the *pueblo bajo* (low-born classes) was quite different (Abad y Queipo [1810] 1996, 242).

Queipo's excommunication decree pushed the Dolores movement to publicly proclaim its political commitments, which in turn led to a wave of print activity that illustrates the transformation of republicanism into a distinctly religious, plebeian, and hemispheric project. This began with the dissemination of Queipo's decree in *El Pelicano* on October 10, 1810, and via large broadsides posted on the doors of town churches (Guzmán Pérez 1996, 118). The public-facing versions of the decree attempted to delegitimize the prominence of Indigenous actors within the movement. Queipo argued that republican radicals were "trying to persuade the Indigenous peoples (*indios*) that they are the owners and lords of the land from which they were stripped by Spanish conquest" and that they now approached Valladolid with the intent of "conquering" the Spanish (Abad y Queipo [1810] 1996, 243). Like Alamán, Queipo attempted to delegitimize Indigenous participation in the insurgency by depicting Indigenous groups as mere followers, seduced and subjected to the radical premises of republicanism.

Queipo's fears that the Valladolid public would support the insurgents were confirmed after the excommunication was announced. The decree instigated rebellion among the peasantry, who defaced prints of the decree and ridiculed Queipo's attempts to excommunicate Americans by using *gachupín* (Spanish) power. Protests forced Queipo to flee and the members of the local *cabildo* to sign an order nullifying the excommunication order on October 15, 1810. The Dolores insurgents would enter Valladolid the following day, their visit announced with the ringing of church bells and the arrival of approximately 80,000 Indigenous revolutionaries (Guzmán Pérez 1996, 137). In the first 4 days of occupation, the Dolores republicans would declare the abolition of slavery, elimination of Indigenous tribute,

and redistribution of ecclesiastic and Spanish wealth (Hidalgo y Costilla, 1810a and 1810c).¹⁹

The insurgents responded to accusations of heresy in a pamphlet titled "Manifiesto by the General of the American Army," which critiqued Spanish hypocrisy and called for the unification of all Americans:

The nation which has been torpid for so long, rises suddenly from its sleep to the sweet voice of liberty, the people rush to the towns and take up arms to sustain it at all costs... . Open your eyes Americans, do not be seduced by our enemies, they are only Catholic for politics; their God is money and their condemnations only seek to oppress. (Hidalgo y Costilla, October 15, 1810b)

Rather than delegitimize religious authority in New Spain, the insurgents attempted to reformulate the primacy of their Catholic identities by connecting them with radical republican politics. Further, the pamphlet illustrates the importance of hemispheric discourse for the movement, which organized around the language of Pan-American unity to legitimize demands. This conception of shared American identities was defined by a condition of "subjection and enslavement" to the evils of colonial power. For the Dolores movement, these identities were religiously defined, guided by a "divine providence" that undergirded their postcolonial visions (Hidalgo y Costilla, October 15, 1810b). At this stage of the movement, the Dolores republicans had not yet called for national independence. Rather, their demands were situated in what they perceived as the rise of popular American sovereignty amid the crisis of Spanish authority. The Dolores "Manifiesto" did not call for a unified Pan-American institution; rather, it instrumentalized hemispheric rhetoric to narrate the collective rise of American publics against colonial authority, a strategy that legitimized the demands of the movement at local and international levels. Thus, the "Manifiesto" shows that republican vernaculars moved at a dual valence in New Spain. At local levels, the foundations of the republican movement crystallized through Anáhuac genealogies that converged the restoration of Indigenous rule with Catholic and republican principles. At international levels, references to neighboring American revolutions reinforced Mexico's restorative project by using the language of hemispheric unity to imagine a collective break from colonial subjection.

Events in Valladolid also produced materials that illustrate the value of popular discursive practices within

¹⁹All transcriptions for the Dolores movement are found in Guzmán Pérez (1996, 256–69).

the Dolores movement. A poem titled “Poesía Popular Insurgente” (“Popular Insurgent Poem”) published around the same time as the “Manifiesto” was particularly important for invoking the Indigenous, religious, and plebeian commitments of the march.²⁰ I suggest that popular objects and archival ephemera, like this poem, open avenues for studying the political innovations of marginalized actors through the sites and practices from which they imagined postcolonial change.²¹ The poem uses a simple *abba* rhyme scheme and a mismatching meter structure that prioritized audience participation in the performance of the poem. This implies that the author(s) likely lacked classical literary training. The poem opens with the following:

What did the Assessor think,
that for him there was no justice,
due to damned malice
he ought to rigorously pay

Today the excellent Hidalgo
intends across all confines
to give the gachupines
the best struck blow;
(...)

The plebs have risen
forming large contentions
looking to widen concessions:
this point is declared.
Tumult they have created,
anxious for rigor,
with labor and cruel vigor,
they made a boastful commotion
which on this evening caused
great dread in Valladolid

(“Poesía Popular Insurgente” 1810, 286, 289)

The opening rhetorical question of the poem presents the *asesor* (tax collector) as a figure who has thus far evaded justice. The question “What did the Assessor think” appears throughout the poem as a cue that likely led call-and-response chants during the march and, as the poem progresses, it centers different experiences of colonial injustice. While the poem cannot be read as a singular representative voice for popular actors

²⁰Transcription of the poem is found in Guzmán Pérez (1996, 286–91).

²¹Archival ephemera offer a broader approach for decolonizing and expanding the texts, objects, and peoples studied by political theorists. I use these materials to address the goals of comparative political theory from the problem of archival erasure and the marginalization of political knowledge. I draw from Saidiya Hartman’s (2008) “critical fabulation” as a method that addresses archival gaps through narrative reconstruction.

within the movement, the marching poem does function as a *collective practice* of postcolonial imagination—that is, as an object of popular discourse that provides a lens into both the sentiments that motivated insurgency and the language used to lay claims on the colonial state. This call-and-response practice should be read as an act of universalization through which Indigenous actors invoked the language of plurality as a postcolonial critique.

The “Popular Insurgent Poem” also illustrates the transformative influence of indigeneity, religion, and plebeian politics on republican political thought. The Lady of Guadalupe, for example, appears throughout the poem as an interceding protector of the “Indigenous horde” (*indiada*) capturing Valladolid:

They [the insurgents] got their entrance,
which is what they planned,
for not even the officers could
suspend such a large *indiada* (...)

Mr. Hidalgo has left
with an army of many people
to Guadalajara in a hurry,
for he wants to see it conquered.

The effect of what he proposes
is to take as intercessory
our Mother and Lady
which is María of Guadalupe.

(“Poesía Popular Insurgente” October–
November 1810)

This passage is particularly important for understanding how Indigenous actors deployed collective language to critique colonial rule. *Indiada* would have been understood as a pejorative term used to characterize Indigenous barbarity in nineteenth-century New Spain. By using the language of “Indigenous hordes,” the Dolores movement reframed naturalist colonial language in a way that centered Indigenous identities for bringing the assessor to justice.

Upon leaving Valladolid, the Dolores republicans founded *El Despertador Americano* (*The Waking American*) in December 1810, the first insurgent-led newspaper of Mexico. *El Despertador* provides more evidence that the Dolores insurgents understood republicanism at local and hemispheric levels. The newspaper’s first issue is dedicated to “all the inhabitants of America” and outlines its demands by speaking to different audiences involved in the Age of Revolutions, starting with a warning to all “Europeans established in the Americas” that “Americans, in pursuit of their sworn faith,” are taking a

“defensive stance” against French imperialists and Spanish traitors (Severo Maldonado and De La Sierra 1810, no. 1, p. 2). The newspaper then announces a rallying call: “Noble Americans! Wake to the noise of the chains you drag now for three centuries ... fly to the fields of glory under the guidance of the New Washington ... who has our hearts enamored with the admirable combination of popular and republican virtues” (1810, no. 1, p. 4). *El Despertador* also praises the “Americans of the North” for their “love of humanity and justice,” which forms the basis for a coming “perpetual fraternity and union ... established on a single continent” (1810, no. 1, p. 6). And finally, to Mexicans (*paisanos*), the issue closes with a reminder that their interests cannot be “coopted by any executive power, person, or corporation for only the general will must operate, as *conciudadanos* (compatriots) of liberty, and as partners in mutual sacrifice for its restoration” (1810, no. 1, p. 7). *El Despertador* would announce the Dolores movement to the world by aligning different American identities in their pursuit of liberty, the protection of religion, and their rejection of European imperialism.

Hemispheric Republicanism and the Anáhuac Constitution

The leaders of the Dolores movement were arrested and executed by Spanish authorities in January 1811, but its religious, plebeian, and hemispheric demands were preserved during the constitutional phase of Mexican independence.²² This is particularly true under the leadership of José María Morelos, a parish priest of Indigenous and Black caste backgrounds who studied under Hidalgo at the Colegio de San Nicolás Obispo in Valladolid (Brading 1991, 578).²³ Morelos was in many ways ideally representative for the project at hand—he was a Catholic priest, vehemently anti-European, and trained in francophone republican thought (Andrews and Guzmán Pérez 2018; Brading 1991, 578). It was under Morelos that the radical politics of the Dolores insurgency began to crystallize into the foundation of early Mexican

²²In central Mexico, rebellion continued to grow under the leadership of Albino García, an Indigenous cowhand who took command of approximately 5,000 Indigenous actors to redistribute lands, property, and goods throughout the Bajío region. It was under García's direction that insurgents reaffirmed their investment in redistributive principles and proved their feasibility (Hamnett 2002, 180).

²³Morelos held creole legal status and was thus allowed to interpret the law and serve in the clergy.

constitutionalism. What began as rhetorical appeals to neighboring American revolutions under Dolores reemerged as legal principles in the 1814 Constitution of Apatzingán. Drafting the first independent constitution of Mexico required bridging the interests of radical republicans and creole conservatives. The constitution resolved these tensions by instrumentalizing “Americans” as its central civic category, which simultaneously protected creole standing while rejecting European hegemony.

Indigenous genealogies continued to frame Mexico's restorative revolution amid constitutional debates. The Anáhuac Congress convened on September 13, 1813, to draft the constitution, and Morelos opened proceedings by converging Catholic and Indigenous imaginaries through a prayer now known as “Sentiments of the Nation”:

Father: we are involved in the most terrible battle witnessed in the ages of this continent; hinging from our valor and the wisdom of your grace is the fortune of six million Americans ... Geniuses of Moctezuma, Cacama, Quautimozin, Xicoténcatl and Caltzontzin, celebrate the conditions of this august assembly the same way you celebrated in the *mitote* where you were attacked by Alvarado's treacherous sword ... August 12, 1521 to September 14, 1813: between these dates the chains of servitude were tightened in Mexico-Tenochtitlan; on this day they break forever in the town of Chilpancingo.²⁴ (Morelos and Bustamante [1813] 2017)

Morelos's opening remarks presented the independence movement as a restoration of Indigenous rule and a memorialization of the *tlatoanis* (leaders) of Anáhuac.²⁵ His “Sentiments” also illustrate the important connection between restorative revolutionary thinking and the destruction of Tenochtitlan, a site of popular Indigenous rule that the Anáhuac Congress claims has been relocated to Chilpancingo as Mexico-Tenochtitlan. Morelos's prayer also proves useful for contextualizing the decolonial and postcolonial principles that moved republican Mexico. The Anáhuac Congress opens with a decolonizing gesture that decenters Spanish history and centers experiences of Indigenous enslavement and

²⁴The speech was first written by Carlos María de Bustamante. Morelos later removed all mentions of loyalty to Ferdinand VII and instead emphasized republican fraternity.

²⁵Moctezuma (Tenochtitlan), Cacamatzin (Texcoco), Quautimotzin (Tenochtitlan), and Xicoténcatl (Tlaxcala) all led wars against Spain and underwent public sacrifice after conquest.

the murder of its leaders. This genealogical stance in turn legitimizes the postcolonial vision of the Anáhuac constitution, which works from American identities in its broader rejection of European colonial rule.

This is not to say that the Anáhuac constitution lacked engagement with European republicanism. On the contrary, the document displays a contentious relationship toward European republican texts. The constitution drew from the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man*, Rousseau's *Social Contract*, and Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*, as well as the U.S. Constitution (Andrews and Guzmán Pérez 2018; Ibarra 2015). Rather than simply adopt the political prescriptions of these texts and thinkers, however, the Anáhuac constitution transformed them to speak to Mexican and American experiences. This is apparent in the document's immediate protections on the religious, plebeian, and hemispheric commitments that initially founded the movement. Section 1 declares that "the Catholic religion would be the only one professed in the state." Articles 19 and 20 declare that subjection to the law is a "sacrifice of intellectual particularities to the general will" and reinforces Indigenous and Black rights by eliminating all formal racial and ethnic categories (Constitution of Apatzingán 1814). These measures eliminate the Spanish *sistema de castas*, a caste system that regulated social mobility and tributary practices for racialized communities.

Not all of the Dolores republicans' plebeian commitments mapped onto the constitution. In a clear concession to creole conservatives, chapter 5 of the constitution, titled "On Equality, Security, Property, and Liberty of the Citizenry," protects private property and "fair advantages" for certain members of society (Constitution of Apatzingán 1814). The constitution also excludes women from the republican order, an example of how republicanism's gendered language fit into the already patriarchal hierarchies of nineteenth-century New Spain. These concessions point to the limitations of the conservative-radical coalition organized under Morelos. It is crucial to recognize, however, that insurgents were not merely adopting the elite and gendered components of early modern European republicanism. Rather, the Anáhuac constitution translated and transformed republican principles as Mexican insurgents saw fit. In this case, the constitution protected Indigenous and free-Black rights by eliminating caste hierarchies but maintained patriarchal order and merely implied the abolition of chattel slavery.

Most innovatively, the Anáhuac constitution offers an exceptional case in which insurgents attempted to institutionalize a hemispheric conception of republican

fraternity as part of their nation-building efforts. Although the constitution declares the independence of "Mexican America," it disregards any connection between nationality and citizenship. Articles 1 and 13 of the constitution grant rights of suffrage to all people born in the Americas, "without class or country distinction," via naturalization (Constitution of Apatzingán 1814). In a reassessment of popular sovereignty, the constitution also defines the "base of national representation" as all *nationals* and *foreigners* committed to the preservation of the republic (1814, Section 1, Article 7).²⁶ The Anáhuac Congress pursued national independence as a necessary measure but decentered nation-state boundaries in favor of postcolonial commitments for unifying its nascent body politic. As in the Dolores "Manifiesto" and *El Despertador Americano*, these principles appear under the language of American community and a collective pact for the pursuit of liberty (Constitution of Apatzingán 1814, Section 1, Article 14). Unlike those texts, the Anáhuac constitution exemplifies an attempt to institutionalize these hemispheric commitments as a necessary condition for the success of the Mexican republic.

The Constitution of Apatzingán was promulgated in October 1814 but was never implemented because Morelos was captured and executed in November 1815. This has led most scholars to study the 1814 constitution as an incomplete or failed project (Andrews 2014; Brading 2004; León-Portilla 2010). Situating this project within the broader context of Indigenous insurgency and hemispheric republicanism, however, illustrates the importance of returning to the Anáhuac movement as an event that highlights the political innovations of marginalized actors at local and hemispheric levels. I suggest that political theorists can turn to "incomplete" projects as avenues for studying marginalized postcolonial imagination and its political investments. In this case, tracing the importance of Indigenous genealogies for the Anáhuac movement demonstrates that Indigenous groups played a central role in defining the plebeian, religious, and hemispheric dimensions of Mexican republicanism. Further, contextualizing these demands in local and hemispheric context clarifies the position of the nation-state as a contingent outcome among a broader set of postcolonial possibilities.

²⁶The constitution assumes that all citizens would be committed to the Catholic faith. This was likely a unification strategy, especially given that many other Latin American revolutions connected Catholic devotion with republican revolution at the time (Entin 2018).

Reassessing the Political Theory Archive via Marginalized Claims-Making

The Mexican revolutionary context offers one example of the prominent role Indigenous groups held in the reception, translation, and transformation of radical republican thought during the Age of Revolutions. In the case of Mexico, I argue that insurgents deployed Indigenous genealogies to pursue a *restorative revolution*—a form of revolutionary change that emphasized memorialization as a decolonial practice that decentered European history and legitimized postcolonial futures. By deploying memorial and restorative practices, Mexican insurgents revived histories of Indigenous resistance that betrayed the contingent nature of colonial subjection and surfaced long-standing histories of popular self-rule. These efforts linked the Spanish conquest of the *cem-anahuac*, the homeland of the Nahuatlaca peoples, with the rise of popular rebellion in the nineteenth century. As a result, the Anáhuac movement understood revolution as a restorative, rather than foundational, project.

The restoration of Anáhuac transformed core principles of republican thought by mobilizing around religious, plebeian, and hemispheric identities. These three characteristics problematize current interpretations of republicanism as a distinctly secular, national, and elite-oriented enterprise (Connolly 2014; McCormick 2011; Pettit 1999, 177; Viroli 2001, 94). I trace these novel interpretations across popular discursive practices and print materials surrounding the Dolores republicans, a majority-Indigenous group of republican insurgents who reconfigured core republican concepts like popular sovereignty, equality, and the general will to speak to their experiences as subjected actors. This emphasis on popular thought in turn reveals the importance of collective practices like poetic performance and public memorialization as sites of political theorization through which Mexican insurgents critiqued, subverted, and resignified their position as Indigenous and mestizo actors living under colonial rule.

The Indigenous genealogical components of the Anáhuac movement were not insulated from the broader, hemispheric context of the Age of Revolutions. As I demonstrate, the leaders of the Dolores insurgency were invested in portraying the movement as forming part of a Pan-American community and instrumentalized hemispheric discourse to legitimize their demands. The rhetorical power of hemispheric vernaculars is apparent in popular print documents like Hidalgo's "Manifiesto" and the dedicatory issue of *El Despertador*

Americano, both of which appealed to Pan-American emancipation. Insurgents attempted to institutionalize these hemispheric commitments under Morelos and the Anáhuac constitution, which defined the body politic in terms of collective belonging to the Americas. Indigenous communities and their demands were a prominent component of this Pan-American narrative, but these histories and political innovations remain understudied.

Retrieving the contributions of Indigenous political thought to the history of republican and American political thought requires a critical reassessment of political theory's interpretive and archival priorities. A need remains for political theorists to study marginalized groups by starting from their respective textual, discursive, and collective practices—especially when these operate beyond the conventional parameters of Western archives and epistemologies. In the case of New Spain, I draw from marching poems, pamphlets, manifestos, and other archival ephemera to demonstrate that Indigenous groups theorized colonial subjection *in collectivity* rather than from exceptional individual voices. Tracing these episodes of popular theorization throughout the restoration of Anáhuac reveals a moment in which republican conceptions of popular self-determination remained unbound from the nation-state and instead found unity in shared experiences of—and responses to—subjection.

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