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Diasporic Indigeneity: Indigenizing Indigenous Immigrants and Nativizing Native Nations¹

By Erich Fox Tree

Anyone who has periodically attended Native American inter-tribal pow-wows, university cultural fairs, or pan-indigenous political and religious gatherings in North America over the last two generations can testify to an increasingly visible presence and acceptance of indigenous immigrants from Latin America. Such events today feature Maya weavers, Native Andean musicians and instrument-makers, Aztec dancers, and diverse other Latin American indigenous craftspeople, vendors, storytellers, ritual specialists, cooks, activists, students, and social organizers—all of whom were rarely seen two decades ago. The growing presence of indigenous Latin Americans at such pan-indigenous events corresponds to a major shift in identity, as Native attendees increasingly self-identify as Native Americans and are recognized as such by members of North American Native nations. These shifts correspond to a larger phenomenon I call *diasporic indigeneity*. Although immigrants from Latin America who were considered indigenous in their home countries and now choose to identify as Native American once in North America² may be a minority, their situation is nonetheless significant because of their growing visibility, their interactions with Native North American peoples, and their effect upon non-Native outsiders' perceptions of Native people(s). This study defines and describes the phenomenon of diasporic indigeneity and explains how it works to both indigenize indigenous immigrants and nativize Native nations.

Diasporic indigeneity is an emergent mode of identity characterized by immigrants claiming indigenous status in their new place(s) of residence, based on their status as colonized indigenes in the place(s) where they or their ancestors lived formerly, and a corresponding re-imagining of their homeland as a geographic super-territory that includes both places. This mental (and sentimental) re-territorialization is somewhat irredentist, by asserting a super-territorial homeland. Yet different from popular irredentist movements, diasporic indigeneity does not necessarily aim to politically (re-)unite, recover, or rule over that entire homeland. A degree of local autonomy and recognition of special connections to lands or resources may be more important than reunification and domination of the whole super-territory. While diasporic indigeneity does not reverse colonialism, it nonetheless does represent a small-but-growing popular challenge to the colonialist and nationalist mythology, morality, and political-economic domination experienced by all Native peoples across the Americas. Diasporic indigeneity is likely strongest and most productive where it (re-)connects or builds common cause between *locally indigenous* and *immigrant indigenous* populations. In the Americas, it is epitomized where indigenous peoples from one or more countries immigrate to a new country, where they and the original local indigenous peoples of that new country whom they encounter come to mutually recognize one another as Native Americans with special status in the new homeland. Examples of this can be seen in interactions between mostly-Guatemalan Maya immigrant populations and local Algonkian “tribal nations” of southern New England.³

While the increasing proportion of the population of the USA derived from Latin American immigrants has undoubtedly increased the number of indigenous immigrants in the USA since the 1960s—especially from countries ravaged by wars and economic pressures promoted by the USA

in the intervening years, such as the Guatemalan civil war of 1960-1996 or the war-like violence and instability that has ravaged that country subsequently—the new visibility of diasporic indigeneity in the USA raises two crucial and complementary questions: First, why do some Native immigrants choose to persist in identifying as indigenous in particular contexts in the USA? Second, why do members of indigenous Native nations from the USA accept these immigrants as Native Americans? Answering these questions requires study of how identities shift in contexts of interactions between non-immigrant indigenous people and indigenous immigrants.

Rather than exhaustively identifying and measuring multiple explanations of diasporic identity, the current study examines how diasporically indigenous identities manifest in the interactions of immigrant and non-immigrant indigenous people. The study highlights mutual and complementary benefits both groups enjoy. In particular, it focuses on collaborations between Mayas and members of Native nations from New England in public contexts, and the important (dis-)appearances they enable. It argues that such collaborations tend to help immigrant indigenous people, such as the approximately one million Mayas in the United States, appear more US-American, while it also helps purportedly mixed or numerically small and typically English-speaking Native nations look and sound more Native. All too often, however, the process relies not just on the shared or complementary interests of different types of indigenous people, but also on outsiders' pervasive inability to distinguish and identify specific Native American peoples of the Americas, let alone their respective interests. The formula is especially applicable in public religious events such as pan-indigenous protests, prayers, and pow-wows, as well as in more secular and mundane (but no less symbolic) encounters in workplaces such as casinos or construction sites.

Disappearing Difference

In the award-winning 1983 film *El Norte/The North*, K'ichee'-Maya siblings Enrique and Rosa Xuncax flee their home village in the highlands of Guatemala and make their way across Mexico to the United States to escape war and exploitation, after their father has been murdered for trying to unionize the exploited peasant-laborers of a coffee plantation (Nava). Before leaving, Enrique has a conversation with a Maya elder, Ramón, who warns him to conceal his identity: "*Recuerda, en México tú estás ilegal. Y si te agarran sin papeles, corrientito que te regresan por este lado, y eso... es tu muerte.*" ("Remember, in Mexico you're illegal. If they catch you, they'll send you right back here. And that means death.")⁴ The elder further advises Enrique that Enrique needs to *be* Mexican, and that in order to do so, he needs to *sound* Mexican:

Decí[d], "hace un calor de la chingada." Los mejicanos por todos lados dicen "chingada.": "Chingada" aquí; "chingada" allá. Y si pasan cinco minutos, y si no dices "chingada," ya saben que vos no sos mejicano. Si alguien te pregunta de donde sos, decí[d] que de Oaxaca. La mayoría de gente no se da cuenta que no sos de allá. Piensan que todos los indios son iguales.

[Say, it's a "fucking" hot day. Mexicans are always saying "fucking" this, "fucking" that. Five minutes without saying "fuck"... and they'll know you're not Mexican. If they ask where you're from... say Oaxaca. Most people can't tell the difference. They think all Indians are alike.] (Nava)

Later, when Enrique and Rosa are caught by *la Migra* while crossing into the USA near San Diego, they only get deported across the border to Tijuana, because Enrique's prolific swearing successfully convinces the police that he and his sister are illiterate indigenous Mexicans. After

sneaking across the border a second time, the protagonists attempt to settle into menial jobs alongside Spanish-speaking Mexican immigrants and non-immigrant Chicanos, all-the-while concealing their indigeneity even more than their immigrant status.

Scenes depicting Ricky (as Ricardo is called after he begins to study English) and Rosa's humble adaptation to life in *El Norte* while they play Mexican-Americans offer much-needed comic relief from the otherwise traumatic storyline. Yet they also show how discrimination and economic competition push and pull many Mayas and other indigenous immigrants to acculturate or pass as generic Hispanic, Mestizo, Latino, Chicano, or Mexican residents of the USA. All too often, those assumed identities come with a presumption of second-class status in the eyes of whites and non-immigrants. That status may sometimes appear to be public recognition of success and an opening for further advancement over the underclass status of so many undocumented immigrants, not to mention oppressed indigenous peoples in their home countries. Yet it minimizes or obscures both the statistical realities of unfair discrimination against immigrants from Latin America (not to mention Native Americans) in the USA, and the profound socio-economic successes some achieve even in the face of such obstacles. Moreover, while *El Norte* captures aspects of a reality lived by some immigrants, many immigrants perform more than just low-skilled or low-paying work, especially given that they typically enter the workforce in the USA with education, skills, and professional experience gained in their home countries.

Only a fraction of Maya immigrants self-identify primarily as indigenous, however. The 2010 United States Census, for example, reports only 175,494 "Mexican American Indians" and 27,844 "Central American Indians" (Norris, Vines, and Hoeffel, 17; cf. Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, and Albert, 14), even though there are likely more than one million Mayas alone in the USA, mostly from Guatemala, but also from Mexico, Belize, and Honduras (Smithsonian). The census' massive under-estimation of the Maya population is supported by the popular intuition of Guatemalans themselves, who often estimate that about one-tenth of their national population of over 15 million people is currently in the United States. The 2010 census counted only 1,044,029 people of Guatemalan ancestry living in the USA—nearly three times the number counted in 2000 (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, and Albert, 3-5)—yet perennial difficulties locating, counting, and interviewing undocumented immigrants guarantee that the real number is much higher. Nonetheless, even an (under-)count of just one million Guatemalans in the USA should have meant a corresponding (under-)count of some 400,000-700,000 indigenous Guatemalans, given that most of the Guatemalan population in the USA is comprised of recent immigrants or their descendants, and that 40-70% of Guatemala's current population is Maya, depending on who is counting (Tzian).

Maya immigration is only part of a larger demographic reality: a significant and growing population of indigenous people from Latin America who live in the United States. The number of first-, second-, and third-generation immigrants from Latin American indigenous communities in the USA likely exceeds the approximately three million people on federal and state "tribal" rolls.⁵ The potential immensity of the immigrant indigenous population is evident when one considers Mexican immigration. Since at least the 1980s, the peoples traditionally classified as *indios* or *indígenas* who constitute about one-eighth of that country's national population have been no less likely to emigrate than other Mexicans. According to the 2010 census, 28% of the over 40 million immigrants in the United States are from Mexico. That suggests that nearly 1.5 million first-generation indigenous Mexican immigrants, and an even larger number of second- and third-generation descendants of these immigrants potentially live in the USA, although the vast majority of them do so without claiming to be Native American for the census. An even higher proportion—and potentially the majority—of immigrants from the neighboring country of

Guatemala since the early 1980s could also count as indigenous, given that the violence and social pressures created by the genocidal counter-insurgency of the civil war, the post-war “unrest” and “gang conflict,” and predatory economic policies that drive emigration have long targeted the country’s large Maya population. Yet, as was the case with the fictional Guatemalan Mayas Enrique and Rosa, situational concealment, intentional passing, and systemic mis-identification by outsiders reduce how many people get counted as indigenous once they make it to El Norte. How people define or mark who is indigenous may be of more fundamental importance, however. Across the Americas, factors that may tend to disqualify people from indigenous status in the eyes of outsiders include genetic mixture, language shift, cultural adaptation, wealth, and even the assertion of rights and participation in non-Native government systems. As Nagengast and Kearney noted in 1990, only a “miniscule percentage of contemporary Mexicans (primarily elites) have no indigenous ancestors at all, and Spanish-speaking urban mestizos are often genetically indistinguishable from the Mixtec-, Zapotec-, or Mayan-speaking indios whom they despise” (73).

Today, assuming the power to define *indigenous* for themselves, some immigrants in the USA are claiming Native American identities, and are having those identities accepted both by non-Indigenous outsiders and by the indigenous communities of their new homeland, including the original or pre-existing Native nations of specific localities. While members of local Native nations know that their ancestral ties to local lands and resources, as well as treaty agreements with settlers, put them in a separate status from immigrant indigenous peoples, they nonetheless recognize a common identity and common cause. Sites such as pow-wows, religious ceremonies, protests, and even workplaces may be central to re-defining indigeneity to embrace those in diaspora because they bring together Native peoples from North, Central, and South America to cooperate, to recontextualize their struggles, and to see their identities from new pan-indigenous perspectives.

Pan-Indigenous Prayers in Plymouth

Cole’s Hill in Plymouth, Massachusetts overlooks both the town’s ocean harbor and the pillared shrine around the rock that devotees of national mythology carved (and caged)⁶ to commemorate the arrival of the Mayflower. Every fourth Thursday of November since 1970, a multi-ethnic crowd of protesters has gathered on the hill to partake in the annual Day of Mourning rally and march that the United American Indians of New England (UAINE) have organized there (Neisser; UAINE “Background”). The event typically consists of an opening prayer, followed by a series of podium speeches challenging both the Thanksgiving holiday and centuries of continuing colonial injustices committed by settlers, their descendants, and the governments they dominate. Carrying diverse banners advocating political action in favor of both indigenous rights and a variety of generally left-wing causes, protesters then partake in a peripatetic review of the “true history” of European colonization, conveyed via a march to local icons and sites bound to the nation’s sacred colonial mythology: Plymouth’s pet rock, the Mayflower II replica, and the area where English colonists displayed the head of the Wampanoag sachem Metacom on a pike for twenty years after his assassination in 1675, so that they could self-righteously demonstrate their vengeful might and their purported moral superiority over Native peoples whom they had displaced or killed.

On November 27, 2008, for the first of three times in recent years, I returned to Plymouth to observe and partake in the Day of Mourning. I had come sporadically to the event with my family when I was younger, more than 25 years previously. Much had changed. There were no

longer counter-protests and there was less police surveillance, presumably because of an agreement reached between UAINÉ and the Town of Plymouth after the unprovoked arrest and beating of participants by police in 1997 (UAINÉ “October”). The crowd of 300-400 seemed larger than before, and it was probably more ethnically-diverse, too, judging by the more visible presence of folks from Latin America, not to mention more people of Asian and middle-Eastern ancestry. Yet those in the crowd still wore a motley of outfits representing different ethnic or political solidarities, while carrying diverse political buttons, banners, and armbands, calling for nearly every leftist anti-colonial cause from Leonard Peltier’s release from prison to the ending of the USA’s oil-based militarism in the Mideast and South America. Going by conversations, accents, and clothes, I estimated no more than 10% of the crowd would likely have claimed to belong to Native American groups. Those individuals represented local Native Nations of New England—such as Narragansetts, Wampanoags, and Pequots—as well as groups from places as far away as California, Oklahoma, Central America, and the Andes.

Since the 1990s, immigrant Native people from Latin America have played a more prominent role in the Day of Mourning, not only as part of the audience, but also as speakers. Their speeches have advocated political action by exposing the continuing dirty history of colonization in Massachusetts, in the USA, and across the Americas and the rest of world. Ironically, several recent speakers have spoken out against the mistreatment of immigrants and urged the decrease of documentation requirements, even though much of the Day of Mourning frames European colonization as illegal immigration. Some protesters have even defied the cold of November to display T-shirts with the caption “Homeland Security: Keeping America Safe since 1492” framing a photo of Goyathlay/Geronimo’s band of Apache fighters or other armed Native Americans.

Particularly striking for me at the 2008 event was a Maya *AjQ’ij* or “Daykeeper,” Juan González, a spokesperson for the hard-to-pin-down “Council of Maya Elders.” Identified as an immigrant from both Mexico *and* Guatemala, the Maya ritual specialist conducted a Maya-style ceremony at noon to start off the event, as he had been doing for nearly a decade, since the death of at least two elders from local New England Nations, including one Wampanoag Medicine Man who had formerly led the inaugural prayers. González lit a traditional Mesoamerican offering of copal incense in a ceramic pot decorated with indigenous motifs that he had placed near the base of the romantically half-naked, green bronze statue of Massasoit Ousamequin, the Wampanoag Chief Sachem who greeted the Mayflower’s passengers in 1620.⁷ Then he bowed in prayer to the east, north, west, and south while making a standard K’ichee’-Mayan⁸ call to the divine forces and ancestral spirits *Uk’u’x Kaaj*, *Uk’u’x Uleew*, “The Heart of Heaven, the Heart of Earth,” and *Qataat*, *Qanaan*, “Our Fathers, Our Mothers.” With meditational theatrics reminiscent of a first-day yoga class, the crowd awkwardly mimicked González’s ritualized genuflections. He invoked the names of the first four men and the mythical founders of the terminal post-Classic K’ichee’ state in Guatemala: B’alam K’itze’, B’alam Aq’ab’, Iq’i B’alam, and Majukutaj⁹ (although he pronounced them with less etymological precision than my own transcriptions suggest). His prayer included the Nahuatl (i.e., non-Mayan) names of spirits: *Quetzalcoatl* (“Quetzal/Feathered-Serpent”) and *Tonantzin* (“Our-Mother”). Metonymically connecting to Native New England spirituality, the Daykeeper also mentioned the Algonkian Supreme Spirit-Being, *Manitou* (a name which probably originated as a general word for “spirit”) and the phrase *N∞shun Kusukqut*, “our father in the heavens,” which might have been pulled from the Christian *Lords’ Prayer* in Puritan missionary John Eliot’s 1661 translation of the *New Testament* (Matthew 6:9), or any of numerous subsequent books that reproduced it, including the early 19th-century work of Pequot activist William Apess (1836, 56; 1992, 308).¹⁰

Of those gathered for the Day of Mourning, perhaps only the Daykeeper, his partner, and myself noted this code-switching: an inter-digitation of sacred language from at least three indigenous groups and at least as many religious traditions. The combined knowledge of K'ichee'-Mayan, Nahuatl, and Wôpanâak (Wampanoag) sacred terms would have been a rather esoteric pre-requisite, especially given that years ago, the prayers of convocation used to be given almost entirely in English by elder members of local New England tribes whose own languages had gone extinct. Nonetheless, it is a regular practice at pan-Native American events—such as meals at indigenous centers or university events—for elders to offer words of thanks in *any* indigenous language, even if no one other than the speaker understands them. So, when González prays, a handful of people might catch a word or two they recognize, such as *Manitou* or *Quetzalcoatl*, but almost everyone gathered likely understands the prayer as a generically (pan-) *indigenous* thank-you. It conforms to the generally pan-Native nature of the Day of Mourning, even if the majority of attendees are non-indigenous. UAINÉ is a pan-Native or “pan-Indian” organization founded in the 1970s. Signs and speakers invoke the name and causes of another, even older pan-Native group: the American Indian Movement (AIM). While Day of Mourning speakers inevitably mention the history and concerns of local Native nations, the event always invokes and connects the causes of diverse indigenous groups around the Americas.

Year after year, no one questions the legitimacy of an immigrant from Mesoamerica offering a multilingual, multi-faith invocation at an event founded by an Aquinah Wampanoag activist.¹¹ How many miss or forget that González is regularly introduced as a “Mayan elder,” and presume that he is speaking Massachuset or Wôpanâak? How many people simply presume that the man who does the prayers is a generic Native priest or “shaman” expressing religious sentiments that are pan-indigenous, if not universal? How many think a prayer in one Native language is as good as any other? It may not matter if the prayer is in K'ichee', Wôpanâak, or Lakota, since, like those who could not distinguish a Guatemalan from a Oaxacan in the film *El Norte*, most in Plymouth cannot “tell the difference.”

In short, González and his Maya ceremony are authentically *pan*-Native American, in just the way that gathered protesters want. He mixes languages and deities, while uniting people from Native groups from across the hemisphere on the site of the annihilated Wampanoag community of Patuxet. González even pronounces the latter place-name [pa-TU-shet] instead of [pa-TUK-set] during his speech on stage, as if it were a Native Latin American term transcribed by early colonial scribes or by more recent indigenous authors.

From Passing to Politicking

Diasporic indigeneity should not be boiled down to cents and sentiments. While shared feelings of belonging, the experience of colonialism, cultural similarities, and political-economic goals all matter, context is crucial. In situations where non-indigenous people are present, pan-indigenous activities are orchestrated to influence their perceptions. Collaborations between local and immigrant indigenous groups in the USA take advantage of non-indigenous outsiders' usual inability to identify or distinguish between different types of indigenous peoples: the same fundamental flaw that Enrique had been advised to use to his own advantage in the film *El Norte*.

The general public's inability to tell the difference allows indigenous people to pass while helping them to build pan-indigenous identities. This is especially important in contexts where diasporic indigeneity depends on mutual collaboration and complementary benefits between local and immigrant Native communities. Perhaps nowhere is this more true than in areas of the USA where the local Native nations are small, no longer speak their original languages, live interpolated

with non-indigenous people, have visibly mixed heritage, lack government recognition, or have only recently been recognized or re-recognized.

Most of the original Native nations in southern New England are of this type today, having for years suffered under schemes and broken treaties pre-dating the establishment of the USA, not to mention the unfair processes of more recent Indian “Reorganization,” “Termination,” “Claims,” “(Re-)Recognition/Restoration” and the new era of what some have called “Rescission” (Schaghticoke Tribal Nation). Prior to 1980, for example, the federal government of the USA recognized only two Native American nations in New England, the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot of Maine, even though New England states themselves recognized over a dozen. Federal recognition was extended to the Maliset of Maine in 1980; Mashantucket Pequots of Connecticut and Narragansetts of Rhode Island in 1983; Aquinah Wampanoags of Massachusetts in 1987; Aroostock Micmac of Maine in 1991; Mohegans of Connecticut in 1994; Eastern Pequots of Connecticut in 2002; Schaghticoke of Connecticut in 2004; and most dramatically, the Mashpee Wampanoags of Massachusetts in 2007, reversing a 1991 federal court decision that had denied the Mashpees recognition (Brodeur; Campisi; Clifford). Nonetheless, recognition is a precarious status, as demonstrated by the federal government’s official policy of Indian “Termination” (1940-1968) and by more recent efforts to end or deny Aboriginal rights and standing treaties. Some mostly-Euramerican “nativists” argue that Indian “preferences” unfairly discriminate against native-born citizens (Johansen, 42-53). In 2005, the federal government reversed its earlier decisions and *un-recognized* the Schaghticoke and Eastern Pequots, after Connecticut politicians (including the long-time public opponent of *all* “tribal” status, former Democratic senator and vice-presidential candidate Joe Lieberman) successfully lobbied for changes in federal recognition (Schaghticoke Tribal Nation).

Given this situation, all New England Natives, regardless of recognition status, continue to struggle to recover lands and rights, all-the-while understanding that it is helpful for surrounding communities to accept them as separate, self-governing, and authentically “Indian.” Even large and long-recognized Native nations are constantly working to protect their public-image or authenticity in order to resist near-perpetual threats, including efforts by the non-indigenous community to subsidize their own economic status by denying that Natives nations deserve rights or resources. Collaborating with other groups in pan-indigenous events is one easy—though not sufficient—way of promoting acceptance of indigenous authenticity, especially given that popular assessments of ethnic or cultural authenticity are so flawed, variable, and changing. For long-existing Native groups in Massachusetts, the growing Maya population is a prime source of potential collaborators.

Mayas in Massachusetts

From an initial trickle of recognized and unrecognized refugees who began fleeing the Guatemalan counter-insurgency in the late 1970s or early 1980s, there are now thousands of Mayas living in the Bay State, concentrated around Boston and the southern port city of New Bedford, not far from communities where Wampanoags live. The Mayas of New Bedford, and of Massachusetts more generally, are primarily K’ichee’-Mayas: members of the largest indigenous ethnolinguistic group of Guatemala.

Today, K’iche’iib’ (the plural for *K’ichee’*) likely outnumber the combined membership of all the state- and federally-recognized Native nations of the region. During an interview I conducted with him in 2008, Anibal Lucas, the K’ichee’ founder and then-president of the

Organización Maya K'iche' (OMK), a social service association based in New Bedford, Massachusetts, estimated that the number of Mayas living and working in that city alone might exceed 5,000. Precise numbers have been hard to fix, however, in part because of the intentional invisibility of many undocumented Maya immigrants (Capetillo-Ponce and Abreu-Rodriguez, 62-63; Knauer, 191).¹² That invisibility may have become harder to maintain after Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raided the Michael Bianco leather factory in New Bedford on March 6, 2007, which resulted in the arrest of 361 male and female immigrants, most of whom were K'ichee'. The raid earned national attention as one of the biggest in United States history in terms of the number of arrests. Some have argued that it "forced" the local Mayas to build new alliances and strategically deploy Maya identity (Knauer, 194-195), or even re-identify themselves publically as "Native American" (Capetillo-Ponce and Abreu-Rodriguez, 69-75). Nonetheless, a visible minority of Mayas was likely already opting to identify not only as "Mayas," but also as "Native Americans" years earlier. A CensusScope map based on the 2000 census shows that for multiple counties of southern New England, including the area around New Bedford where the Maya population is concentrated, the "tribes" with which the largest number of residents self-identified were aggregated by the Census Bureau as "Latin American Indian" (Social Science Data Analysis Network).

Assertions of Native American identity in the press, online, and in person attempt to negate immigrant status by rooting Mayas in America. They also reflect growing attempts to build solidarity with local Native groups. When I interviewed him, Anibal Lucas unequivocally asserted that Mayas in the USA are not even immigrants, but rather "indigenous brothers" of members of Native nations from the USA. He even claimed to have made efforts to get the local school board and other groups to stop referring to local Mayas as "Guatemalans" or "immigrants," and instead refer to them not merely as "Mayas," but as "Native Americans" and "indigenous people." Keeping with these claims, the downtown office of the association he headed was decorated with posters and symbols evoking Native peoples of both Mesoamerica and North America. A Mesoamerican calendar, Maya weavings and crafts, and photos of picturesque landscapes and colorfully-dressed people from Guatemala shared the room with dream-catchers, eagle feathers, and photos of the North American countryside and horse-mounted Natives from the plains. The latter, together with some books in the office that emphasized supposedly pan-Native religious themes, potentially revealed under-acknowledged New Age sympathies of the organization's founder or staff members.

Recent collaborations with local Native nations, such as spiritual ceremonies co-organized with nearby Wampanoags and regular co-participation in Native events, including protests, cultural discussions, and pow-wows, may have been crucial to the Nativizing of Mayas. In September 2007, for example, twenty K'ichee' Mayas, led by a Maya priest or *AjQ'ij* flown in from Guatemala, conducted a Maya ceremony on the Mashpee Wampanoag reservation, by invitation of the Wampanoags. The Mayas reportedly did so to teach and share ceremonies, as well as to give thanks for assistance they had received after the raid of the Michael Bianco factory (Evans; Knauer, 204 n. 88). According to Mayas whom I have encountered at (pan-) indigenous events, other smaller ceremonies have taken place closer to New Bedford, too, attended by Wampanoags whom the Mayas ironically reported were the ones who *really* needed them, presumably because of court cases and impending economic matters.

Although the Mashpee Wampanoags had gained federal recognition in February of 2007, after nearly a year of provisional recognition and many decades of legal wrangling and politicking, they continued to negotiate land and the right to build a casino-resort that is likely to be both

lucrative and life-transforming. Originally planned for New Bedford, the casino is now scheduled to be built in the nearby town of Taunton. In the meantime, other mainland groups, including the state-recognized Assonet Wampanoags of New Bedford, continue their own efforts to gain federal recognition and opportunities for economic development.

The Strength of Pan-Indigenous Diversity

The collaboration of Native Latin American populations benefits Native North Americans in ways beyond the supposed supernatural influence of mixed religious ceremonies, or even the social solidarities or learning experiences such rituals might bring. Collaboration augments crowds at political and cultural events, while offering opportunities for cross-cultural sharing. It can even be commercially beneficial for both immigrant Natives and Native peoples of the USA. The most obvious evidence of this can be found in pow-wows and Native American cultural fairs, since a diversity of indigenous people and products is a major attraction for attendees. More attendees generally means more potential customers for indigenous vendors' stands or stalls. Attendees may even *expect* to see goods produced or sold by certain indigenous groups or even by specific vendors, because of what they remember from prior events. While organizers of cultural events generally do not want too many vendors representing any particular craft or culture, they now must regularly plan to include a selection of immigrant indigenous vendors to satisfy event-goers' expectations of hemispheric cultural diversity. Moreover, exchanges *between* salespeople are a regular, though not always visible, part of many fairs and pow-wows, as vendors and artisans network to learn of upcoming events, form potential partnerships, and acquire new suppliers of goods or materials. It is not uncommon for Native North Americans to buy sculpted beads, textiles, crystals, incense, or even herbal teas from Maya vendors so that they can either re-sell them at other events, or combine them to craft other goods, just as it is not uncommon for Maya vendors to acquire items such as leather or gemstones that they can incorporate into their own crafts.

Mayas or other immigrant indigenous peoples are not technically allowed to market, sell, or even display their crafts as "American Indian." The *Indian Arts and Crafts Act* of 1990 stipulates that within the United States, items labeled "American Indian" must have been produced by members of state- or federally-recognized Native nations (Title 18 Part I, Chapter 53, § 1159). Yet this law is not a problem for Mayas (or for many Native peoples anywhere in the Americas, for that matter) because they generally prefer not to call themselves "Indians." Moreover, it is perfectly legal to sell art and crafts made by Native peoples indigenous to places *outside* of the USA as "Maya," "Aymara," "Carib," "Native American," or even "indigenous."

Because so many Mayas choose to wear traditional clothes and because their phenotypes generally show less ancestral mixture with non-indigenous people, outsiders tend to presume they look authentically Native. Juxtaposed in the right contexts, Mayas can also make the local nations *sound* more Native to a non-Native majority who cannot tell the difference. Even though language shift is taking place among Maya immigrants, many still speak their Native languages, and those who grew up in Guatemala normally speak English or Spanish with noticeable accents. On the other hand, the Native Algonkian languages of Massachusetts died out more than a century ago, and only a single Aquinah Wampanoag family currently speaks a revived version of Wôpanâak as its primary language (Lutz 6-7).

Of course, the uninformed public is much more likely to guess that Mayas might be members of southwestern North American nations; more than once, while attending intertribal pow-wows and cultural fairs in the Northeastern USA, I have overheard visitors impressed by

Mayas' clothes, crafts, or language ask from "which pueblo" they come. Maya textile artist Julia Gómez Ixmatá makes note of such encounters in her poetry, too (1). Nearly 5% of the so-called Native American vendors and artisans whom I have observed at nearly twenty pow-wows and Native fairs in the Northeastern USA over the last eight years were from Latin American Native groups: Mayas, Nahuas, Kunas, Runa Simi, and others, many of whom still spoke their indigenous languages. Indeed, even while a dwindling percent of Native Americans in the USA are learning to speak the languages of their heritage, diasporic indigeneity makes pow-wows and cultural events appear to show off the strengths of Native (North) American cultures and languages, because most who attend cannot tell the difference.

Sometimes, however, there is no difference to tell. Families formed by marriages between members of different indigenous groups may belong to multiple groups simultaneously, or blend or shift between them. Consider the case of the Tlacopan Aztec Dancers, a dance troop "composed of indigenous Mohawk performers from Canada as well as indigenous dancers from Mexico, who perform in spectacular plumed headdresses and beaded regalia" (Native American Festival, 1). Some of the Aztec dance troop's members also participate in Haudenosaunee song and dance groups, because core members of the troop belong to a mixed Haudenosaunee-Mexican family.

Collaboration's Visible Benefits

Public collaborations between established- and immigrant-indigenous groups have visible benefits to members of both groups. Co-participation in both pow-wows and protests increases the visibility of the continued existence of indigenous people in the Americas, and in so doing, supports the shared political objectives of both groups. The most obvious of these are lofty anti-colonial aims shared by most indigenous peoples, such as recognition of continued physical and cultural survival; political recognition; collective rights; self-determination; increased socio-political and economic autonomy; promotion of culture(s) and values; freedom of religion; access to and protection of sacred sites; return of sacred items and stolen property; representation in political decisions of larger political entities; freedom from exploitation; control of land and resources; economic opportunities; access to education; and control over indigenous schools and improvement of the curricula and materials in non-indigenous ones. Each of these is tied to specific local cases for individual groups, such as freedom for a particular political prisoner or protection of a specific environmental resource or sacred site. Yet they also reflect broader, harder-to-pin-down, and more idealistic aims shared by millions of non-indigenous people around the world, such as the end of war and imperialism; fair wages; social justice; cultural diversity; biodiversity; self-sufficiency; food security; population control; or environmental conservation. All of the aforementioned aims are reflected in the myriad causes for which both indigenous and non-indigenous activists lobby, whether at annual protests like the Day of Mourning, or on the streets and at countless meetings, university lectures, art installations, and lunchroom debates.

All the while, certain potential benefits of tribal-Maya collaborations and indigenous local-immigrant collaborations go unstated. Benefits may be personal and emotional ones that people forget to mention or find hard to summarize in words, but they are no less real: happiness, solidarity, or the confidence one might feel when surrounded by family or by others with similar traditions, cultures, personal experiences, collective histories, goals, religious beliefs and rituals, or notions of what is sacred or beautiful. Other benefits, especially economic ones, may be so obvious that no one has to state them. For example, as already described, when diverse indigenous groups participate in a pow-wow, there is at least some obvious economic motivation.

Playing on the Invisibility of Difference

Some of the benefits of the mingling of indigenous immigrants with members of Native nations rely on invisibility for success. About a decade ago, while visiting a large cultural event at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Cultural Center with a K'ichee'-Maya who always wears hand-made Maya clothes, we were approached one-by-one by several male Maya immigrants employed directly or indirectly by the prosperous reservation. None of the men wore traditional Maya outfits, but rather their respective server/caterer or guard/guide uniforms. All ostensibly wanted to introduce themselves to my companion as her ethnic and national compatriots, yet ended up getting trapped in brief (and somewhat furtive) one-on-one conversations with me about the local Maya community. Impressed with the Pequots' prosperity, all seemed proud—if not lucky—to attend the somewhat lavish inter-cultural event, even if they had not been invited participants or guests. While I was not so crass as to inquire about the immigration status of the men, the reality of the undocumented status of many of their Maya friends and family members in the surrounding communities was clear as we discussed the sorts of jobs many local Mayas held: day-care, cleaning, food-service, and construction.

Much of the local construction boom at the time was actually being fueled by the Mashantucket Pequot and Mohegan nations, whose successful Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun casinos had brought prosperity to these Native nations, while simultaneously shifting a major part of the economy of Connecticut to tourism and entertainment. Both the local nations and local Maya immigrants (as well as non-immigrant, non-Native members of the state) benefitted financially. Yet, some Mayas likely benefitted additionally, since much of that construction was taking place on tribal lands, where state governments have no legal jurisdiction. Under federal law, Native tribes, like all other employers in the USA, must make good-faith efforts to verify that employees are legally permitted to work and pay required federal taxes. There is no evidence that Native American reservations have higher rates of employment or even presence of “undocumented” immigrants than non-reservation areas. Indeed, high rates of poverty, unemployment, and dysfunctional infrastructure on most reservations would even suggest that they probably have much *lower* rates. Yet immigrants working (or potentially even living) on tribal lands are nonetheless under less state police surveillance and less likely to experience the periodic molestation of state officials seeking to find petty criminals or verify immigration status. Even law-abiding “documented” immigrants benefit. Given the national proclivity of police (not to mention vigilantes) to racially profile and target brown-skinned people, indigenous immigrants such as Mayas can benefit especially.

No one has shown that Native reservations have preferentially hired large numbers of indigenous immigrants from Latin America. Over the last decade, I have occasionally noticed Mayas and members of other Latin American indigenous immigrant communities who worked at Native casinos and entertainment businesses in the northeastern USA, but never under peculiar circumstances. Nonetheless, immigrant indigenous peoples such as Mayas can legally qualify for “Indian Preferences” under an exception to Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, as modified in 2000 (*Civil Rights Act*), given that the act does not define certain terms, such as “American Indian” in a way that would exclude them. Instead, agencies across the federal government (not to mention the states) apply hemispherically inclusive definitions of “Native American” based on the OMB's definition of “American Indian or Alaska Native” as “a person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal

affiliation or community attachment” (as quoted by Norris, Vines, and Hoeffel, 2). Even without ethnic preferences, tribal nations in the USA can hire and have hired Maya immigrants preferentially, based on their ability to speak “Native American languages,” which can legitimately qualify as a special skill for certain jobs on reservations related to the promotion of general (pan-)Native culture(s). Virtually any job on a reservation can count as culture-promoting, according to a Native from a pueblo in the southwestern USA who had formerly worked for a tribal casino that she said had employed numerous Mayas in the 1990s. As she recalled, employment of Mayas had had a special benefit for the casino, since Mayas were frequently mistaken for members of the pueblo, making the pueblo look both more numerous and more engaged in the (sometimes menial) day-to-day activities that made the casino successful.

In general, the visibility of indigeneity and the simultaneous invisibility of differences between indigenous people may encourage Native nations in the USA to employ immigrant indigenous people from Latin America or just associate with them. Such collaboration can promote tolerance between non-indigenous groups and indigenous ones, whether immigrant or local. Non-indigenous people in the USA perennially discriminate against Native people, especially when they perceive Natives to be too successful due to supposedly unfair advantages or racial preferences, and even more so when they perceive Natives to be inauthentic or “not real,” based on unrealistic criteria or superficial appearances. But a non-indigenous person might be less disturbed to discover that an indigenous group is sponsoring a social project, event, construction site, or successful business venture—whether on a reservation lands or not—if the non-indigenous person can see a few generically indigenous-looking people involved in it, even if he or she can’t distinguish between them. Thus, making Natives look *more Native* has mutual benefits for local and migrant Native nations alike.

Capitalizing on Collaboration

The inter-indigenous collaborations that epitomize diasporic indigeneity are built, fundamentally, on the exchange and the investment of different forms of capital. These include not just the economic income earned through cooperation in the marketplace, but also the cultural knowledge and skills that enable social advancement, social resources that enable the collective organizing of both indigenous peoples and non-indigenous sympathizers to support specific projects, and the more individualistic symbolic resource of prestige, such as recognition for one’s skills in crafts, adaptability, or visible perpetuation of supposedly authentic distinctiveness.

In short, although few would admit it, collaboration and mutual symbolic appropriation make Native North American peoples such as members of New England tribal nations and the larger population of Guatemalan Maya immigrants in nearby towns both seem more “authentically” indigenous. Alongside Wampanoags for example, Mayas look more Native (North) American, while alongside Mayas, Wampanoags (who have long been criticized as being too assimilated or mixed) look and sound more numerous and less westernized. Someday, large-scale tribal development projects built and staffed, in part, by local immigrants may even shield both groups from excessive police, tax, and cultural surveillance, offering both the political or legal protection of indigenous sovereignty and an equally important strength of numbers and appearances.

Conclusions: The Challenges of Diasporic Indigeneity

In the early 1970s, emphasizing the general political-economic marginalization of Native groups, rather than pre-existing and supposedly shared features of Native American cultures or religions, Chief George Manuel of the Secwepemc (Shuswap) nation of Canada advocated famously for globally pan-indigenous physical, intellectual, and spiritual cooperation in his book *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality*, the work that introduced the concept of a global “Fourth World” (Manuel and Posluns). Nearly half a century later, the sort of pan-indigenous cooperation Manuel supported is a growing global reality, as evidenced in the Americas by indigenous peoples’ regular mutual support of each other’s projects, as well as by real collaborations, ranging from new blended rituals of healing or remembrance, to the now regular presence of Latin American indigenous people as dancers, vendors, and artisans at tribal pow-wows across the USA and Canada, and the regular inclusion of international voices in news and academic media supporting indigenous rights. Yet, as this article has shown, collaboration may be due not only to the simultaneous mobilization, cooperation, and transformation of indigenous resistance in their diverse respective homelands, but also to the physical migration of millions of indigenous peoples across national borders and their collaboration with local indigenous groups.

Because of the new cultural forms and juxtapositions that diasporic indigeneity creates, some might see it as straying from, if not threatening, established Native traditions. Yet cultures have always changed, and many of the elements that either Mayas or tribal nations in New England consider to be most special, sacred, common, ancient, or even pure often have roots in histories of contact, collaboration, or borrowing. Maya costumbre in Guatemala, Mexico, and the USA, for example, often features syncretic reworkings of European Catholicism, not to mention ancient borrowings from Central Mexico. The customs of tribal Nations in New England, on the other hand, often feature syncretic reworking of elements coming from Anglo-American Protestantism, such as biblically-inspired notions of Native chosenness advocated by William Apess in the 1800s (1992, 113-115). Some Native terms are remembered because they were used to translate bible passages. Native customs in New England also feature elements borrowed from the Native cultures of the Plains, such as styles of pow-wow songs, outfits, and dances. And New Age ceremonialism has begun to creep into both Maya traditions in Mesoamerica and tribal traditions in North America, regardless of whether practitioners advocate diasporically indigenous collaboration.

Diasporic indigeneity can empower Native peoples not only by fostering sentimental allegiances and cooperation with political and economic benefits, but also by challenging popular myths about what it means to be authentically “Native.” In so doing, it challenges popular definitions and racist myths that have constrained indigenous peoples, especially the myth of the “vanishing Indian.” At a time when both Native Americans and immigrants face increasing public opposition, the seemingly oxymoronic concepts of “indigenous immigrants” and “diasporic indigeneity” constitute a form of covert activism. They challenge dominant definitions of indigeneity, while also challenging the moral superiority of those who aspire to control definitions, laws, and national narratives. In the polysemously powerful words of Juan González, offered over the podium at the Day of Mourning in 2008, and echoed by him and others in other events,

We are here today in Patuxet [pronounced pa-TU-shet]... to remind you that the struggle, our struggle, is not over yet. We are here today to tell you that we will continue our struggle until this country stops ignoring us in all public debates. We will continue our struggle until no one is considered an illegal immigrant.

What has changed to encourage the growing collaborations between Native Americans from North

and South, and the corresponding rise of diasporic indigeneity? Neither the context of post-modernity nor that of oppression is sufficient to have inspired the emergence of such a phenomenon. Instead, diasporically indigenous collaboration requires both Native North Americans and Native immigrants to mutually recognize a shared common cause alongside a shared identity that they value as true, morally valuable, and pragmatically useful. However, it also simultaneously plays on the larger society's slow perception of the cultural or political diversity of Native groups.

Maya immigrants in the USA are not Native American because they were born in the USA or have lived in the USA for many years, but because they are indigenous *to the Americas*. Indigeneity is neither something one acquires over time, nor an endurance competition with nativist colonizers. Traditionally, indigeneity relates people to land. However, as anthropologists following the ideas of the 19th-century French economist Bastiat (8.36) have long argued is the case with *property*, indigeneity should also be considered a relationship between people *with respect to* land. As such, indigeneity is also a cultural-temporal-legal-bio-socio-ecological status that challenges those in power. Diasporic indigeneity, like all indigeneity, constantly scrapes at the armor of Euramerican hegemony by allying colonized people to offer continuing, perpetual alternatives to colonizers' claims of legitimacy based in force and in biased conceptions of law, truth, and justice.

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Endnotes

¹ This article is based on a paper originally presented at the 2009 American Anthropological Association’s annual meetings in Philadelphia, PA, under the title, “Diasporic Indigeneity: Pan-Native Identities along New England’s Border with Latin America.” I thank my fellow panelists and our discussant, Hugo Benavides, for their input. I also thank Julia Gómez Ixmatá, Dr. Jean Fox Tree, Dr. Regina Schaaff, Pamela Armstrong, and three anonymous reviewers for *Label Me Latino/a* for their comments on more recent drafts of this article.

² “North America” in this paper refers to the USA and Canada: the mostly-Anglophone countries that immigrants from Latin American sometimes refer to as “*el norte*.” These coincidentally also happen to be the countries where Native American pow-wows are common today. Anyone with access to a good world map or globe can observe that this article’s usage defies the geographic reality that the continent of North America encompasses Canada, the USA, Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama. Although non-contiguity, language, and cultural differences have long enabled those in the USA to relegate the most southerly of these countries to the cartographic limbo-land of “Central America,” opinion has vacillated for generations about what to do with Mexico. In the wake of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Mexico, the USA, and Canada that went into effect in 1994, politicians and some textbook publishers in the USA made visible efforts to include Mexico in North America. Yet those efforts are currently fading or being reversed, as was the case with a previous upsurge of inclusion of Mexico in public definitions of North America during World War II and part of the Cold War.

³ Since Columbus first called the Native peoples of the Caribbean *indios*, all general terminology for indigenous peoples of the Americas has been problematic, and all-too-often, degrading. *Tribal* is a flawed term that embodies colonialist ideologies that ignored the political autonomy of indigenous groups, primitivized them, and conflated their diverse social forms. Despite this, many Native nations, authors, and lawyers, as well as activist groups supporting Native causes have continued using this outmoded word in order to acknowledge the importance of a government-codified status to indigenous sovereignty in United States law. Echoing phrases employed in the United States Constitution, for example, the late Vine Deloria, Jr. often referred to the aboriginal people of the USA as “tribal peoples” and “Indian tribes,” not to mention “Indians” and “Indian nations” (1969; 2003, 249). Nonetheless, I eschew Deloria’s standardization of these, in favor of “Native nations,” or less commonly, “tribal nations,” when I must acknowledge the importance of government-codified statuses in United States or Canadian law. By using *Native*, with an initial majuscule, as an ethnonym denoting Aboriginal peoples and cultures of all of the Americas, I follow a literary convention employed by some Native American authors since at least the nineteenth century. I have chosen not to capitalize the term *indigenous* in this article, however, in order to use it as a more neutral socio-political descriptor, rather than an ethnonym.

⁴ While my transcription of Don Ramón’s words attempts to capture his nonstandard Spanish, the English translation I offer is copied directly from the movie’s subtitles (Nava, min. 27-31).

⁵ The estimate of the current population on “tribal rolls” is an extrapolation from Russell Thornton’s estimate that only about one million individuals, or about 60% of the 1.8 million people claiming to be Native American on the 1990 United States Census, were enrolled members of Native nations (37-38). I have supposed a generous growth rate of approximately 4.0 % per year. That growth rate is supported by the 2010 Census, which counted approximately 5.2 million enrolled and non-enrolled Native Americans in the USA, at least .27 million of whom identified as members of indigenous groups from Latin America (Norris et al, 3, 17).

⁶ The cage was purportedly installed to prevent vandals from damaging the rock or stealing pieces of it. Native protestors nonetheless joke that the cage symbolizes the danger of the rock or of the violent mythology it represents.

⁷ Although the statue’s plaque, like most school textbooks in the USA, refers to the late Wampanoag leader by his title of *Massasoit*, or “Great Sachem,” as if this were a personal name, his personal name seems to have been Ousamequin, or “Yellow Feather” (Weeks, 127).

⁸ Scholars working in Mesoamerica typically follow the convention of using the term *Mayan* (with an *n*) only in cases that refer to language matters, while using the term *Maya* (without an *n*) as a term referring to the people associated with the Mayan languages, or to the ethnic identities and cultures of those people. Both terms can be either a noun or an adjective, as in the following contrived sentence: “Mayas, people who share in Maya culture, traditionally speak any of approximately thirty related spoken languages of the Mayan language family, including K’ichee’-Mayan and Yukatek-Mayan, the latter of which is often known simply as *Mayan*.” The plural noun *Mayans* is now antiquated. Scholars usually make exceptions to the standard conventions when taking direct quotes, or when referring to languages used by Mayas that do not belong to the spoken Mayan language family, such as the “Maya Sign Languages” of the Yucatán Peninsula, Chiapas, and Guatemala, which are phylogically non-Mayan languages used by Mayas (Fox Tree, 336). The fact that so much cultural and political activism by Mayas in recent generations has employed ethno-linguistic frameworks for imagining Maya(n) identities has resulted in some significant variation and even alternation between terms by some scholars.

⁹ B’alam K’itze’, B’alam Aq’ab’, Iq’i B’alam, and Majukutaj are mentioned in numerous indigenous and Spanish documents from the colonial era. They feature especially prominently in K’ichee’-Maya accounts of human creation and K’ichee’ political history recorded in the mid-sixteenth-century in the Poopol Wuuj or Popol Vuh (e.g., Colop, 121-172). Whether transmitted orally or through written literature, their names have become a standard part of contemporary ceremonial discourses, including those of members of non-K’ichee’ groups that reportedly had different founding lords whose names were recorded in less well-known and less-revered colonial texts.

¹⁰ Apess claimed descent through his mother from Massasoit Ousamequin’s son Pometacom/ Metacom/ Metacomet, whom whites knew as “King Philip” (Apess 1992, 3-4). The claim may have been more figurative than literal, however. Barry O’Connell has argued that Apess was probably of mixed Pequot and African-American heritage (xxvii-xxix). Nonetheless, Apess was essentially living as a member of the Mashpee Wampanoag “Tribe” by the time he published “Indian Nullification” in 1836, and his daughters even eventually married Wampanoag men (O’Connell, xxxiv).

¹¹ Wamsutta (Frank) James began the event in 1970, after having been un-invited from the official program for the 350th-anniversary commemoration in 1970 of the Mayflower’s landing, because his planned speech had cited colonists’ accounts of offenses against local indigenous people, such as theft of food from indigenous graves (James; UAIINE “Background”).

¹² While scholars often emphasize that many of New England’s undocumented Mayas arrived recently, some have actually been in the USA since the height of the violence of the Guatemalan Civil war that drove the first huge waves of Mayas to the USA in the early 1980s. Having backed the dictatorships responsible for that violence, the USA was generally reluctant to approve Guatemalans’ petitions for asylum (Manz 172, 182-193). This situation drove many to avoid seeking refugee status altogether, including some who actually entered into the country legally as students, but feared returning back to Guatemala once their schooling ended. Even individuals who had refugee status lost that status at the “end” of the war, and were supposed to return to Guatemala if they had not yet obtained permanent residency or citizenship. I know some Mayas who have lived in Massachusetts without legal residency for decades, snagged between fear and bureaucracy.