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Constructing the Mexican White Mestizo Identity: Politics of Race, Culture, and Mexican Comics in Twentieth Century Mexico

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by

Marlene Torres-Magaña

Committee in charge:

Professor Emiko Saldívar, Co-Chair

Professor Dolores Inés Casillas, Co-Chair

Professor Cathy Thomas

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The thesis of Marlene Torres-Magaña is approved.

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Cathy Thomas

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Dolores Inés Casillas, Co-Chair

_____

Emiko Saldívar, Committee Chair

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ABSTRACT

The Construction of the Mexican White Mestizo Identity: Politics of Race, Culture, and Mexican Comics in Twentieth Century Mexico

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This thesis examines how white Mexican elites constructed the image of the white mestizo through the popular Mexican comic book, *Kalimán, el Hombre Increíble*. Given the extensive comic book collection, this thesis focuses on one adventure titled: *El Regreso de la Araña Negra*, printed in 1971. Kalimán, a tall, white, and blue-eyed oriental superhero, has occupied a fixed place in the collective imagination of the Mexican and Latin American public since the 1960s. Despite Kalimán's alleged oriental origin, his whiteness—in both skin and costume—is displaced. Navarro and Vázquez created an oriental character that could look white but not be perceived as white. This is possible because Kalimán's whiteness becomes displaced within a 20th-century Mexican understanding of mestizaje. As a national ideology, mestizaje served as a powerful framework for Mexicans to think through discourses of race and culture. This thesis will show how Kalimán's Orientalized whiteness operates within the context of the mestizo myth and acts as a proxy to creating the image of the white mestizo not rooted in Mexican indigeneity. The character of Kalimán offers a unique vantage point into how Mexican elites neatly packaged ideas of gender, whiteness, racial alterity in an entertaining and consumable format, all while validating racial hierarchies.

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Chapter I: Introduction

In the 2000 Mexican presidential election, conservative candidate Vicente Fox secured the public endorsement of *Kalimán, el hombre increible*, an Oriental white-looking superhero with a turban who first appeared during Mexico's golden age of comics in the 1960s.[1] The Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), Fox's political party, seeked to take advantage of the cultural capital Kalimán maintained in Mexico and used it as a propaganda vehicle to associate the candidate with the crime-fighting "Mexican" superhero.[2] In *Viva La Historieta!: Mexican Comics, NAFTA, and the Politics of Globalization,* Bruce Campbell examined how comic books offered Mexican political elites the language and visuals to project their official interests to the public in an entertaining and reader-friendly format. For example, in 2003, the Fox administration published their own comic book titled "*A mitad del camino*" to explain and promote their economic and social policies. Similarly, in 2004, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, the Head of Government in Mexico City published a comic book titled "*Historias de la Ciudad*" in which his administration shared its position on political events and promoted social programs. The publishing of these government-issued historietas shows us that Mexican political elites recognized the comic book as a valuable form of communicating with the popular masses. According to Campbell, the visual aesthetics and narrative discourse in the comics published by the Fox administration (2000-2006) was centered around discourses of "mobility, private interests and investments, and a U.S.-style, upper- middle-class lifestyle instead of the indigenous culture…[and] revolutionary histories" emphasized under Mexico's long-time ruling

[1] Bruce Campbell, "*¡Viva La Historieta!: Mexican Comics, NAFTA, and the Politics of Globalization*", 2009, 22.
[2] Ibid.

party, Partido Revolucionario Institucional (1929-2000).[3] What better way to push this vision forward than through Kalimán, a character that represents the vision of the white mestizo elites and simultaneously appealed to the popular imagination of the working-class.

Kalimán, el hombre increible has occupied a fixed place in the collective imagination of the Mexican and Latin American public. In 1963, Mexican national Rafael Cutberto Navarro Huerta and Cuban expatriate Modesto Vázquez Gonzalez, two radio broadcasters, introduced *Kalimán, El hombre increible* to the Mexican public as a radionovela. Given Kalimán's success as a radio drama, in 1965, Navarro and Vázquez adapted it into a comic book series. They formed Promotora K; an editorial company for printing the Kalimán comic book. Kalimán is a character well remembered by generations who listened to and read the adventures of the incredible man. For instance, as a radionovela, Kalimán broke all known audience records in more than 80 radio stations in Mexico, Central and South America, and the United States.[4] In comic book format, it circulated without interruption from 1965 until 1991, selling over 2 million monthly copies in Mexico alone for 1,351 issues—the highest record for a publication of its kind.[5] In a study published in 1992 on popular Mexican comics of the 1960s and 1970s, scholars Harold Hinds and Charles Tatum asserted that no Mexican or American superhero title has remotely challenged Kalimán's popularity in Mexico and Latin America.

Academics and fans have referred to Kalimán as a "Mexican" popular culture icon and one of the most representative examples of Mexican superheroes.[6] While Kalimán's physical characteristics parallel American Superman's Caucasian features, in the comic book, Kalimán is

[3] Campbell, "*¡Viva La Historieta!: Mexican Comics, NAFTA, and the Politics of Globalization,*" 2009, 22.
[4] Jose Guadalupe Vázquez Morejón, "*Modesto Ramón Vázquez González, El Creador Primigenio Del Hombre Increíble.*"
[5] Ibid.
[6] See: Harold E. Hinds, "Kalimán: A Mexican Superhero," *The Journal of Popular Culture* XIII, no. 2 (1979).

an oriental superhero from India who is educated by Tibetan mystics. The creators accentuated the character's Orientalized upbringing by dressing him in a sherwani, a traditional Indian outfit for royals and aristocrats in British India.[7] His costume consisted of a white turban with a jewel-encased "K," an all-white suit, and a white flowing cape. Despite Kalimán's alleged oriental origin, his whiteness—in both skin and costume—is displaced. Navarro and Vázquez created an oriental character that could look white but not be perceived as white. I argue that this is possible because Kalimán's whiteness becomes displaced within a 20th-century Mexican understanding of mestizaje. As a national ideology, mestizaje served as a powerful conceptual framework for Mexicans to think through racial and cultural mixing discourses as the defining feature of the nation and Mexicanness.[8] Within this context, Kalimán is understood to be a mestizo who physically looks white but whose cultural background is based in India. In other words, Navarro and Vázquez constructed a character "whose mestizaje resided in name, culture, and behavior; not in the actual physical appearance, but in the appropriation and use of a culturally mixed background."[9] Thus, Kalimán's Orientalized whiteness operates within the context of the mestizo myth and acts as a proxy for the white mestizo not rooted in Mexican indigeneity. The character of Kalimán offers a unique vantage point into the power struggles and alliances between elites to carry out their conflicting visions of Mexicanness and the nation.

[7] The Sherwani originated in 19th-century British India as the European-style court dress of royalty and aristocracy. The general population later adapted the Sherwani as a wedding attire for grooms or a traditional outfit worn on formal occasions..

[8] Christina A. Sue, *Land of the Cosmic Race: Mixture, Racism, and Blackness in Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1; Mónica G. Figueroa, "*Displaced Looks: The Lived Experience of Beauty and Racism,*" *Feminist Theory* 14, no. 2 (2013): 139.

[9] Hector Fernandez L'Hoeste, "Race and Gender in The Adventures of Kalimán, El Hombre Increíble," in Redrawing the Nation: National Identity in Latin/o American Comics, ed. Hector Fernandez L'Hoeste and Juan Poblete (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009): 63.

Research Relevance

In the last few years, cultural studies and Mexican studies scholars have recognized Mexican comic books as important cultural texts. As Campbell writes, the comic medium was uniquely positioned within Mexican society to provide a map of many ideological fault lines and political interests.[10] As a result, several studies have been published using comic books like *La Familia Burron* and *Memin Pinguin* as case studies to examine political issues, discourses of class and gender, and representations of Mexicanness and modernity in Mexico.

Yet few scholars have analyzed Kalimán in that capacity despite this comic book character's unmatched popularity across media formats. For this thesis, I analyze Kalimán: *El Regreso de la Araña Negra* printed in 1971. In this comic book adventure, Kalimán, and his inseparable friend, Solín, face their archnemesis *La Araña Negra* and a voodoo cult of natives terrorizing foreign hacienda owners. This thesis attempts to examine how the image of the white mestizo is constructed through Kalimán? And how does Kalimán, as a cultural text, represent the visions of white Mexican elites? Furthermore, I argue, it allows us to see two ongoing processes at work. The first is the construction of the white Mexican mestizo and, within this context, the representation of mestizo whiteness as the exceptional other. Echoing Hector Fernandez L'Hoeste, Kalimán is a prominent example of how white Mexican elites posited and masqueraded Mexican-mestizo whiteness as the ultimate other within an oriental framework.[11] The second is a deeply rooted anti-indigenous and anti-blackness in Mexican and Latin American popular culture. The creators' reimagining of the Mexican mestizo through Kalimán, a white non-European alternative, advances the racial project of mestizaje: whitening and de-indigenizing Mexico and Latin America. Undoubtedly, Kalimán shows us how Mexican elites

[10] Campbell, "*¡Viva La Historieta,"* 213.
[11] Fernandez L'Hoeste, "Race and Gender in The Adventures of Kalimán," 59.

neatly packaged ideas of racial purity and alterity, gender, and citizenship in an entertaining and consumable format, all while validating racial hierarchies.

Why are Mexican comics important?

From the mid-1930s to 1980s, comic books could be found in every newsstand in Mexico City. Reaching the most isolated corners of the country, comics became the main, if not the only, source of reading for Mexicans. Despite Mexico being the world's largest per capita consumer of comics, Mexican comics did not receive the journalistic or academic recognition they merited until recently.[12] In 1987, a team of cultural investigators presented an exhibition titled "*Puros Cuentos, historia de la historieta en México*" at the Museum of Popular Cultures in Mexico City to memorialize comics as a pillar of Mexican popular culture. Following this exhibition, Mexican scholars Juan Manuel Aurrecoechea and Armando Bartra published *Puros Cuentos*, a three-volume history of Mexican comics from prehistory to the mid-1950s. For these authors, the influence of comics was significant. They wrote:

> "For three generations of Mexicans, [comics] have been a syllabus and a reading book, a history lesson, source of sentimental education, access to exotic worlds and raw material for dreams, vicarious satisfaction of economic, social and sexual frustrations. Comics have created myths and consecrated idols, they have fixed and given splendor to popular speech, they have ratified our machismo and our Guadalupian faith."[13] [*My translation*]

Aurrecoechea also stressed the cultural importance of comics in his welcoming message for Pepines, a digital comic catalog launched in 2019:

> "if we want to investigate how [20th century] Mexicans understood each other…comics are the privileged source. And if popular Mexican comics do not reflect exactly how we were in Mexico at that time, it [does] tells us a lot about how we wanted to be; how we live the [barrio], the idea of the hero, poverty, the transition from the countryside to the city,

[12] Juan Manuel Aurrecochea, "La Historieta Popular Mexicana En La Hora De Su Arquelogía," TEBEOSFERA (REVISTA LATINOAMERICANA DE ESTUDIOS SOBRE LA HISTORIETA , 2001).
[13] Juan Manuel Aurrecoechea and Armando Bartra, Puros Cuentos I: La Historia De La Historieta En México 1874-1934(México: CONACA, 1988), 9.

> gender, racism, power, aspiration for social advancement; humiliation, childhood, sexuality, courtship, marriage, divorce, adultery and singleness. It tells us what we identified with, why we cried and what we laughed at."[14] [My *translation*]

This quote shows that comics' cultural influence on the Mexican public was unmatched. In their book, Aurrecoechea and Bartra emphasized that cultural investigators could not simply judge comics on literary values or plastic virtues; otherwise, popular cartoons and comic series would be left out. Although the authors maintained that during the so-called "Golden Age" of comics (1930s-1960s), most commercial comics were repetitive copies of previous narratives, they still provided an excellent way to understand Mexico's political and cultural processes during the twentieth century. Moreover, while Aurrecoechea and Bartra extensively studied the history of comic books as an indispensable source of knowledge, they failed to analyze the existing tensions between administrations and elite groups over Mexicans consumption of comic books. According to the authors, unlike other manipulative and politicized forms of mass media, the comics of the golden age were relatively neutral. They seldom examined how comic creators and editorial companies constructed mechanisms for commodifying and marketing discourses of whiteness, essentialist representations of Mexicanness, and racist tropes and images within comics that now constitute part of Mexican popular national culture. For them, comic authors and publishers were interested in expanding the market and making money—not indoctrinating. Their thesis is seconded by Anne Rubenstein in "*Bad Language, Naked Ladies, and Other Threats to the Nation:* A Political History of Comic Books in Mexico. She observed that comic book writers and cartoonists designed their stories with the intention to sell comics. Rubenstein further argued that the content reflected in comic books was a direct result of writers and artists adhering to audience demands. Scholars like Juan Manuel Aurrecoechea, Armando Bartra, and

[14] (Aurrecoechea 2001)

Anne Rubenstein have failed to analyze comic books from a critical race perspective. Of the authors that have discussed race in Mexican-authored comics, for instance Hector Fernandez L'Hoeste in his essay "Race and Gender in The Adventures of Kalimán, el Hombre Increible," few, if any, have explored the construction and representation of mestizo whiteness in comic books. The significance of this thesis lies in analyzing the alliances forged between the Mexican state and cultural media elites and how the image of the white mestizo is constructed through Kalimán. I challenge Anne Rubenstein's conclusion that there is "not much point in applying the tools of art history or literary criticism" to comics because their massive popularity did not mean that they had "any influence over their millions of readers."[15] As this thesis will show, comic books were useful tools for readers to consume discourses of race, identity, nationhood in an accessible, entertaining, and affordable format.

Methodology

I located a sizable collection of the Kalimán comics through an Etsy vendor. The original Kalimán collection comprises over 37 adventures with 1,351 weekly issues published between 1965 to 1991. It is necessary to note that the sources present a series of limitations and advantages to my research. While my research includes a general overview of the Kalimán, this research is concentrated on the selected issue. I use a textual analysis technique to analyze the Kalimán comics. Textual analysis involves understanding language, symbols, and pictures in texts to examine how people make sense of life experiences and larger social structures.[16] I use

[15] Anne Rubenstein, *Bad Language, Naked Ladies, and Other Threats to the Nation: A Political History of Comic Books in Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998). 164.
[16] Hawkins Morey Jennifer. 2018. "Textual Analysis" In the SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods, edited by Mike Allen, 1754-1756. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

this approach to analyze the multiple interpretations the text may hold in addition to studying the sociopolitical, cultural, and historical time the text was created.

This thesis is organized into three sections. Chapter one outlines the importance of comic books and specifically Kalimán in the field of Mexican history, followed by the research objective and methodology. Chapter two presents a historical and critical analysis of the power alliances between the state and cultural media industries and their role in constructing a national-cultural identity in post-revolutionary Mexico. I examine the development of Mexico's 20th century mestizaje ideology and how this racial ideology became fused with an understanding of Mexican identity. Chapter three provides an analysis of the selected 1971 Kalimán issue: *El Regreso de la Araña Negra* and examines how the plot of this comic book mirrors many of the Mexican state's national and racial politics and, at the same time, reflects how white Mexican elite's breakaway from the early revolutionary visions of Mexico and advance their own narratives of nationhood and Mexicanness wrapped around discourses of whiteness.

"*La apuesta por la transformación política encuentra su mayor aliado en el campo de lo cultural. Si no se da la batalla cultural se puede perder la batalla política"*
—Carlos Monsiváis

"Todo cambia, todo se transforma: todo sigue igual"
—Carlos Monsiváis

Chapter II: How the State Talks to the People

The end of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) marked the beginning of a long and complicated reconstruction process for Mexico. President Álvaro Obregon (1920-1924) and his successors worked quickly to establish social and political order to improve the country's public image. To set this process in motion, the federal government built state agencies to oversee labor, commerce and industry, education, health, agriculture, social welfare, public finance and public works.[17] Among them was an education bureaucracy and rural schools to integrate and control the peasantry during this period of political instability. The Mexican state heavily invested in cultural policies and educational projects designed to modernize the dispersed and divided country.[18] Mexican leaders recognized the need to develop some form of cultural literacy to learn "the codes of language and culture, [that would] equip them with the cultural 'know-how'…to function as culturally competent subjects."[19] Cultural media industry sectors such as visual media (e.g., murals and telenovelas), print media (e.g., comic books), and radio programming proved to be persuasive collaborators for developing a national culture in a racially, economically, and geographically ruptured Mexico.

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[17] Mary Kay Vaughan, *The State, Education and Social Class in Mexico: 1880-1928* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982), 128.
[18] Joy Elizabeth Hayes, Radio Nation: Communication, Popular Culture, and Nationalism in Mexico, 1920-1950 (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2020), xiv.
[19] Stuart Hall , ed., "Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices," *Social Anthropology* 7, no. 2 (1999): pp. 203-217, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0964028299310168, 22.

This chapter presents a historical and critical analysis of the power alliances between the state and cultural media industries and their role in constructing a national-cultural identity in post-revolutionary Mexico. To accomplish this, I begin by examining the state's efforts to resolve the literacy problem and how Mexico's cultural media industries were critical for promoting the idea of the Mexican citizen and, consequently, *mexicanidad* as literate and modern. For this chapter, I use the concept of entertainment-education pioneered by Televisa producer Miguel Sabido.[20] I draw from Benedict Anderson's *imagined community* to emphasize the impact that fusing education, culture, and commercial entertainment had in building nationhood and promoting nationalism. In this chapter, I discuss the alliances between the state and cultural media industries and the projects that transpired in the post-revolutionary period to assimilate people into the nation and construct notions of *Mexicanidad* in relation to ideas of civility and citizenship, masculinity, modernity, and of who was Mexican and not.

"Educating" the People

In 1921, the Secretaría de Educación Pública (known as the SEP) was created during Obregon's administration and reflected the first series of alliances between the state and organic intellectuals.[21] Since its inception, the SEP, concerned with "educating" the rural campesino into a literate citizen, launched a series of educational and culturally reformative projects. This

[20] Arvind Singhal and Everett M. Rogers, "The Status of Entertainment-Education Worldwide," in Entertainment-Education and Social Change: History, Research, and Practice, ed. Arvind Singhal et al. (Mahwah N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), 5-7. Originally termed "entertainment with a proven social benefit," Sabido purposefully devised and implemented this communication strategy with the aim of creating commercial media that could both entertain and educate audience members' on particular issues, create favorable attitudes, and change overt behavior.

[21] I use Antonio Gramsci's concept of organic intellectuals. He defines an organic intellectual as those tied to the economic and political needs of the dominant class and whose primary business is to shape and influence culture, morality, and political agendas. In this chapter, I use *organic intellectual* and *state-sponsored intellectual* interchangeably.

marked the beginning of the state's commitment to education as a unifying ideological force and national culture necessary to instill citizen loyalty to the new state.[22] In 1921, José Vasconcelos was put in charge of the SEP as the first minister of education. Although he only held the position until 1924, his doctrines on education and democracy set Mexico on a path to modernization. The main component of his philosophy was to use education to uplift the Mexican people. In *Aspects of Mexican Civilization*, Vasconcelos stated:

> Mexico is not a hopeless backward country, but a wonderful promise […] Many of our failings arise from the fact that we do not know exactly what we want. First of all, then, we ought to define our own culture and our own purposes and educate ourselves to them. […] in order to make democracy a solid practice in our land […] this means two main remedies: public education [and] political propaganda.[23]

As demonstrated above, Vasconcelos maintained the idea that Mexico would not be able to progress if the people were not educated (i.e., school educated). He established the link between citizenship (the citizen) with literacy and included it in national education projects. Despite his short tenure as head of the SEP (1921-1924), Vasconcelos's education projects became the leading ideological framework that would inform the educational policy of subsequent governments.[24]

Vasconcelos dedicated himself to addressing the problem of popular education. Aware of the political situation, he reasoned that Mexico needed honest civilian leaders willing to undertake the educational and cultural revolution that followed the armed revolution. Thus, he dedicated himself to defining the basic principles of his projects and the organizational

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[22] Vaughan, *The State, Education and Social Class in Mexico: 1880-1928*, 134; Mary Kay Vaughn, "Nationalizing the Countryside: Schools and Rural Communities in the 1930s ," in *The Eagle and the Virgin Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940,* 157-159.
[23] José Vasconcelos and Manuel Gamio, Aspects of Mexican Civilization, Lectures on the Harris Foundation 1926 (Chicago, Ill,: The University of Chicago Press, 1926), 34-93.
[24] Rosario Encinas , "José Vasconcelos (1882-1959)," *PROSPECTS: Quarterly Review of Comparative Education* XXIV, no. 3-4 (2002): pp., 2.

framework necessary to carry them out.[25] The ministry of education was divided into three central departments: schools, libraries, and fine arts. The SEP also established two independent sub-sectors: the Department of Indigenous Culture and Literacy Campaign programs. The two sub-departments were formed as temporary measures to extend schooling efforts and increase literacy in rural areas. Despite his racial determinism, he believed that although the Indians lived in a backward condition, they could be redeemed and join the "cosmic race" with proper education. Vasconcelos further argued that unlike the United States' approach to their "Indian Problem," the Mexican state viewed education as a tool to "integrate" all Mexicans, including its indigenous population, into the national community. With the establishment of these departments, the national projects were outlined: "schools and teachers would assimilate the peasants and Indians into the new national culture; libraries would warehouse and promote the literary canon; and the arts would picture and put into words and music shining examples of the *new* Mexico."[26] In effect, Vasconcelos's 1920s national education projects were a racial assimilation project that materialized into other cultural projects throughout the twentieth century. Of the many actions that the SEP put into motion to educate and transform Mexico into a modern and civilized nation, I focus on four that were key to accomplishing this: murals, literacy campaigns, radio, and comics.

Murals

In a country with low literacy rates and limited access to schools, cultural media helped construct narratives of culture and identity for a race and class-stratified Mexican society.

[25] Encinas, "José Vasconcelos (1882-1959)," 3.
[26] Leonard Folgarait, *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940: Art of the New Order* (Cambridge (United Kingdom): Cambridge University Press, 1998), 19.

Parallel to schooling, the Mexican government realized that to transform the country, teaching people to read and write would not be enough to redeem the Mexican people and integrate them as productive members of the nation. The literacy process had to occur from all angles. As part of their educational reform, the SEP sponsored a series of murals to be painted in government buildings to orient the masses about Mexico's cultural and historical patrimony. Although the muralism movement is not part of the cultural media industry, I stress the importance of examining murals as critical cultural and pedagogic vehicles for disseminating populist values, developing national iconography, and visually communicating stories about the nation's people. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the role of murals in providing the framework of shared national experiences and values to further mobilize the state's assimilationist projects.

As stated earlier, for Vasconcelos, Mexico could only become a democratic nation through education and political propaganda—murals accomplished both. As public and visual, murals conveyed messages of modernization and progress and painted government leaders as the best guides to this development.[27] With the state as patron, Vasconcelos instituted an education and cultural policy for Mexico that favorably assisted the government in creating a "political system of control through the unification and classification" of the masses as Mexican.[28] Since Vasconcelos' firmly believed that "art and knowledge [would] serve to improve the condition of the people,"[29] He devised a cultural program where artist-intellectuals assumed the role of "redeemers" of the "oppressed."[30] In 1921, the Minister of Education commissioned a group of artists, sympathizers of the Revolution, to paint these murals. Among them emerged Diego

[27] Folgarait, *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico, 80*.
[28] Ibid, 19.
[29] Jose Vasconcelos, *Discursos, 1920-1950* (Mexico City: Ediciones Botas, 1950).
[30] Robin Adèle Greeley, *Muralism and the State in Post-Revolution Mexico, 1920-1970*," in *Mexican Muralism: A Critical History* (University of California Press, 2012), pp. 15.

Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros (known as "los tres grandes") as the leaders of the muralist movement. Mexican muralists, especially "*los tres grandes,*" established themselves as "the voice of the voiceless" and mediators between "the people" and the state.[31] Tasked with decorating the walls of public buildings, these artists elaborated murals that communicated ideas about race and class and figuratively linked the urban worker, the Indian, and the peasant as important agents of national formation in the post-revolutionary state.[32] The depiction of these three national figures represented together in a mural was significant for two main reasons. The first, as a public art, murals played a central role in visualizing the state's departure from the Porfirian exclusionary model and toward an inclusive ideology that constructed Mexico, particularly during Obregon's administration, as a nation of democratic cultural enfranchisement. Secondly, as Leonard Folgarait writes, whether these three figures ever looked at the mural, "it was now understood that they, along with the higher classes, […] for the first time [shared] a place in the new mythic structures of public life.[33] Murals became a powerful tool that best served the government's interest in a much more effective way than any other political discourse—particularly Rivera's populist murals.

For instance, Diego Rivera's first government-commissioned mural, the *Creation* (1922-1923), was an allegorical composition that explored *mestizaje* and the transmission of knowledge at a universal scale—both themes directly aligned with Vasconcelos's notion of the "cosmic race" and the state's national assimilationist projects. In this mural, a mestizo man and woman envisioned to symbolize the mixing of the indigenous and European races were pictured unclothed and seated under floating divine figures representing Western societies' arts and

[31] Greeley, *Muralism and the State in Post-Revolution Mexico, 1920-1970*," 13.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Folgarait, *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico, 28.*

sciences. Undoubtedly, the nakedness of their brown bodies represented the Mexican masses being "uncultured" and "uneducated," waiting to be clothed through knowledge. Through murals, artists like Rivera further advanced the idea that education was the key to assimilating and "rescuing" the Mexican from his "underdeveloped" ways.[34]

After Vasconcelos resigned from his ministerial position in 1924, mural painting briefly halted until the new Secretary of Public Education, Puig Casauranc, resumed the mural cycle in 1925. This time, however, only Rivera continued to work under contract for the SEP. Because Rivera's visual aesthetic and populist vision of the nation's history echoed the state's official views, his role in communicating the idea that the "nation's culture was both the product and the possession of the people"[35] was intrinsic for mobilizing assimilationist projects. As education historian Mary Kay Vaughn acknowledges, "Rivera's murals […] provided the emerging Mexican state with the illustrations of the kind of populism […] that reflect[ed] a government ideology and in effect help[ed] provide one."[36] Mary K. Coffey also contends that "Rivera's 'vision of truth' [for Mexico] succeeded so well that it continues to determine public memory of the events and the people depicted in it."[37] During his SEP cycle (1923-1928), Rivera painted the Courtyard of the Ministry of Education. This is his most revolutionary- left inclined mural. In the fresco "*La Maestra Rural*" (1932), Rivera alluded to the benefits that came about after the Revolution, such as education. In this mural, a brown rural teacher is seated on the ground surrounded by indigenous-looking women, children, and elderly people, looking attentive as she teaches them to read. As *La Maestra Rural* performs this revolutionary act, campesinos are seen

[34]Jose Vasconcelos, *La Raza Cósmica: Misión De La Raza Iberoamericana* , 5.
[35]Desmond Rochfort, *Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros* (Laurence King, 1993) 51.
[36] Vaughan, "*The State, Education and Social Class in Mexico: 1880-1928*," 265.
[37] Mary K. Coffey, *"All Mexico On A Wall:' Diego Rivera's Mural at the Ministry of Public Education"* in *Mexican Muralism: A Critical History* (University of California Press, 2012), pp. 59.

carrying out agricultural work in the background while an armed Revolucionario on a horse protectively watches over the teacher and her students. In effect, murals became an important avenue for the Mexican state to visualize its efforts to bring education and knowledge to all the Mexican people, including rural communities. In other words, schooling was depicted as a form of liberation. The content of the murals: "[Gave] everyone a place in the new order, [made] the post-revolution seem progressive; stress[ed] the need for continued struggle; stress[ed] the need for education."[38] Government officials commissioned murals like the *Creation* and *La Maestra Rural* to visually embed and legitimize their integrationist objectives. That is, the new nation would provide a place and role for the Indian, peasant, and urban workers under the umbrella of mexicanidad.[39]

Literacy Crusades

"To educate is to redeem."[40] This message was conveyed in Rivera's murals and implemented in rural education policies. Instead of addressing the power structures that limited rural communities access to land and capital. The federal government established federal schools to discipline and nationalize the rebellious peasantry. Mexican leaders were convinced that schools would "transform superstitious, locally oriented pariahs into patriotic, scientifically informed commercial producers."[41] Between 1920 and 1940, SEP officials sponsored cultural missions and literacy campaigns as part of the crusade against illiteracy and ignorance. In this endeavor, rural curricula and textbooks addressed Mexican history, national culture, and notions of citizenship and belonging. Beginning in 1922, "missionary teachers" were sent to rural

[38] Folgarait, *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico, 52*.
[39] Ibid, 19.
[40] Ibid, 18.
[41] Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*," 4.

communities to learn about agrarian society. Like the sixteenth-century Spanish missionaries, missionary teachers were tasked with establishing cultural missions, recruiting rural teachers, and forming relationships with the peasant communities to facilitate the state's educative nationalist projects.

However, educational policy shifted at the end of the 1920s, and Vasconcelos' earlier educational philosophy was readapted to fit the objectives of the current administration. For instance, the government of President Elias Calles prioritized the country's industrial development over "Cultural" literacy. This did not mean the state was not interested in improving literacy. Instead, practical learning, like agricultural education, was promoted as a path for economic growth and state modernization. This shift in educational policy became most apparent in the 1930s during Lazaro Cardenas's administration and the state's change in "editorial orientation from scholarly to useful and didactic" advertisements directed to the public for intellectual, social, and economic improvement."[42] As Mary Kay Vaughan asserts in *Cultural Politics in Revolution,* what was new in rural educational policy under Cardenas was a cultural and ideological emphasis on popular mobilization and inclusion (36). Under the left's control, the SEP emphasized a socialist education, challenged the authority of organized religious groups in the countryside, and promoted the worker as the protagonist of the Revolution. Concepts of rebellion, class struggle, and the right to social justice were printed into curriculums and legitimized as essential to national identity.[43] Vaughn further contends:

> The notion of the cultural nation as a multiethnic one made up of a multiplicity of cultures …was the work of the SEP as it negotiated with peasants. The browning of Mexican culture begun by muralist Rivera… was not something desired [but] a political

[42] Verónica Ruiz Lagier, "El Maestro Rural y La Revista De Educación: El Sueño De Transformar Al País Desde La Editorial," *Signos Históricos* 15, no. 29 (2013): pp. 40.
[43] Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*," 40.

> necessity, a sine que non for the creation of a national civil society and for its relatively harmonious modernization.[44]

Federal rural teachers were enlisted as foot soldiers and direct participants in making and carrying out state educational policy in their cultural missions. Assigned the role of cultural renovators, rural teachers served as action-oriented pedagogues, political organizers of peasants and workers, and cultural ideologues, crafting unity and legitimacy through the creation of a national civic culture.[45] Their efforts are best reflected in the SEP's bimonthly journal *El Maestro Rural*. This magazine engaged teachers in publishing articles on local art, organizing cooperatives, and morality plays condemning problems like alcoholism and slovenliness. Teachers shared the SEP's enthusiasm for development, modernity, and patriotism. The spread of knowledge and values did not only occur through the teacher in the classroom; it was also made available to all people through informal education channels like radio, cinema, and comics. Despite the literacy campaigns and state-issued cultural directives, the private cultural media industry began taking control of the education of the masses. This is not to say that the SEP's literacy campaigns failed; rather, as Anne Rubenstein explains, these campaigns contributed to the nationalization of popular culture and successfully linked literacy to the nation, making reading a conduit and prerequisite to access a shared world of Mexican identity.[46] The state established a strong editorial industry to meet the demand for printing material that would help support its construction and visions of the nation, modernity, and Mexican national identity and citizenship.

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[44] Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*," 197.
[45] Ibid, 30.
[46] Rubenstein, *Bad Language, Naked Ladies, and Other Threats to the Nation,"* 171.

Printed Capitalism

Given that the state did not have the editorial capacity to carry out its literacy objectives, in the 1920s, it merged the printing press and workshops of several secretariats to form "Los Talleres Gráficos de la Nación," a single entity that held the exclusive rights as the printer and publisher of the Mexican state.[47] The SEP's first large-scale editorial effort during this period was to translate and print a selection of classical texts like Homer, Shakespeare, Dante, and Miguel de Cervantes, among others, to distribute and fill public libraries. Although the SEP received backlash for misspending public funds to print books in Spanish for a largely 80 percent illiterate population, it reflects the government's commitment to nationalizing and democratizing book production to make reading and education more accessible to Mexicans.[48] Los Talleres de La Nación played an important role in the state's educational, propaganda, and cultural plans by publishing books for children, and women, the "classics," and cultural texts like *El Maestro*. By the mid-1930s, however, Los Tallers and smaller editorial businesses had trouble keeping up with the state's printing demand. President Lazaro Cardenas's (1934-1940) response to this issue was to reduce printing costs and exalt the importance of publishing companies and print media as a commitment to the revolutionary struggle. To ameliorate printing expenses, in 1935, the Cardenista government established Mexico's state-owned paper monopoly, *Productora e Importadora de Papel Sociedad Anonmina* (PIPSA). As Bruce Campbell notes, PIPSA had two functions under the PRI's state-centered political economy: to "subsidize and strengthen domestic cultural production and consumption by holding paper costs low for Mexican newspapers, magazines, and comic books; and [to] operate as a useful mechanism for rewarding

[47] Sebastian Rivera Mir, " Los Trabajadores De Los Talleres Gráficos De La Nación De Las Tramas Sindicales a La Concentración Estatal (1934-1940)," *Historia Mexicana* 68, no. 2 (2018), 613.
[48] Tania Paola Hernandez-Hernandez, "From Universal Literature Classics to Social Sciences: Mapping Three Intranslation Projects in Mexico," Cadernos De Tradução 40, no. 2 (2020): pp. 79.

or punishing publishers, in particular newspapers, when the one-party state determined it politically necessary."[49] With the state subsidizing publishers with cheap paper, tax exemptions, and distribution facilities, the comic industry prospered, and comic books became Mexicans' preferred reading source.

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson emphasizes the critical role that print languages and print capitalism had in laying the foundation for national consciousness. He states that in the 16th century, capitalist entrepreneurs printed their books and media in the vernacular to sell their products and maximize profit. This produced three effects: 1) readers speaking various local languages who found it challenging or impossible to engage in conversation together were now capable of understanding one another; 2) they gradually became aware of the people that shared their language and therefore began to see them as *only* belonging; 3) through this common discourse, readers who were now connected through print came to see themselves as part of an imagined national community.[50] National communities could now form new relationships and establish a shared identity through common customs, myths, and language. This was precisely what was happening in Mexico. Therefore, the SEP's murals, text translation efforts, and rural education policies aimed to unite the nation through visual media and "national print-languages" all while marking reading as a form of civic participation. As Anne Rubenstein explains: "modernity and reading were so connected in the public imagination […] thanks to the legacy of the literacy campaigns, the canonization of certain revolutionary texts, the public identification of the state with education, and the state's material support of the publishing industry."[51] In other words, the private publishing sector benefited from the state's commitment

[49] Campbell, *¡Viva La Historieta!*," 18.
[50] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 44.
[51] Anne Rubenstein, *Bad Language, Naked Ladies, and Other Threats to the Nation*, 16.

to literacy because it helped create a new literate working-class interested in cheap printed materials like comic books.

Radio Literacy

The formation and consolidation of the modern Mexican state would be inconceivable without mass media cultural productions. As Mexico became urbanized in the 1930s, the Mexican public used music, dance, stories, and humor as a source of communication and a tool for community building.[52] Radio became essential for establishing political order and disseminating national projects. During the first decade of the radio industry, the state's general interest in radio broadcasting to reach the Mexican people was coupled with a growing need to build a national consensus for state policies and actions.[53] Like murals and literacy campaigns, Alan Knight writes that the Mexican state used radio "to mold minds, create citizens, nationalize and rationalize the wayward, recalcitrant, diverse peoples of Mexico."[54] As a result, the government enforced radio regulations to set up its broadcasting stations while forming partnerships with commercial broadcasting organizations. One of these regulations was the 1926 Law of Electric Communications which granted the federal government complete control over the radio in times of national crisis and prohibited all transmissions that threatened public order or attacked the established government.[55] With this law in place, it banned Mexican broadcasters from voicing any political opinions over national airwaves, making it an exclusive right of the state. Given the government's intense involvement in the radio industry, commercial broadcasting complied with radio regulations and the main principles of the state's national

[52] Hayes, *Radio Nation*, xiv.
[53] Ibid, 38.
[54] Alan Knight, "Popular Culture and the Revolutionary State in Mexico, 1910-1940," *Hispanic American Historical Review*74, no. 3 (August 1, 1994): pp. 394-95.
[55] Hayes, *Radio Nation*, 37-39.

projects— promoting culture, education, and patriotism. In subsequent decades, the Mexican state combined its broadcasting projects with increased control over commercial radio content to effectively reach the public with its official vision.[56] As the radio industry grew in the 1930s and 1940s, several important radio stations such as the XFX station operated by the SEP, the XEFO controlled by the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR), and the private-owned XEW station went "on air." While these stations do not begin to encompass the magnitude of the broadcasting market in Mexico during this era, for this section, I use these stations to highlight the collaboration between the government and the private sector regarding radio expansion and mass communication policies.

Public-Private Radio

In 1924, the Secretaria de Educación Pública founded the XFX station to create another communication channel with the Mexican public and broadcast its educational and cultural programs.[57] One of the first significant government broadcasting projects, the SEP developed a radio programming schedule designed to educate and entertain. The SEP, PNR, and other government programs issued radios to agricultural communities, rural schools, and urban-working class neighborhoods to reach its geographically dispersed citizenry. By 1933, the SEP had set up a full-day radio agenda—the daytime schedule, primarily targeting children, aired educational programs in language, history, and hygiene, while the evening schedule, intended for the general public, aired cultural programs like *Home Hour*.[58] As Joy Elizabeth Hayes observed, the XFX served two purposes: to "build national cultural unity" and "extend the social influence

[56] Hayes, *Radio Nation*, 62. .
[57] Ibid, 44.
[58] Ibid, 44-45.

of the SEP (and the state)" in every aspect of Mexican civil society.[59] Although the XFX station is not representative of Mexico's broadcasting history, it offers a window into the state's national assimilationist projects and its use and expansion of state-sponsored cultural broadcasting.

Notwithstanding the existing law that prohibited radio use for political purposes, in 1930, President Pascual Ortiz Rubio instated the XEFO station operated by the new official party, the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR). Though the XEFO station was not state-owned, the PNR used it to advertise the party's doctrine, communicate the projects and efforts of the government, and sensitize the proletarian masses (Sanchez-Ruiz 1984) into a "state-guided" (Hayes 2000) national culture. Both the XEFO and the SEP's radio stations significantly promoted Cardenas's reformist politics (i.e., land redistribution, worker unionization, etc.) and socialist education campaigns. "Cardenas saw radio as a material force that could bind individuals together through a shared mentality, wrote Hayes."[60] As a result, the 1930s witnessed an unprecedented increase in official radio stations, with commercial broadcasting surpassing the number of government-operated radio stations. To maintain control of this broadcasting medium, the Cardenista administration imposed regulatory policies to increase the presence and voice of the state over private stations. In 1936, Cardenas created the Departamento Autónomo de Prensa y Publicidad (DAPP), which gave his administration centralized control over the content of most of Mexico's communication media, including radio broadcasting, newspapers, films, books, magazines, and theater.[61] Through this department, another state-operated station emerged, the XEDP station, which also aired propaganda and entertainment programs. An important radio segment that the DAPP instituted was *La Hora Nacional*, a one-hour weekly program composed

[59] Hayes, *Radio Nation*, 46.
[60] Ibid, 88.
[61] Ibid, 66.

of Mexican popular music, documentary dramas of Mexican history, and other radio reading services.[62] Cardenas's state broadcasting policies effectively strengthened educational radio's role in promoting literacy as a civic duty and "encouraging" commercial broadcasters to do the same. Since Mexico's model for development was built on close state-industry relations and had the power to limit competition and aid the growth of monopolies and oligopolies across industries, commercial broadcasters typically compiled with state demands.[63] This was the case with Emilio Azcárraga's XEW-led broadcasting empire and, later on, with Televisa. As other radio scholars have stated, it is impossible to discuss the history of radio development in Mexico without discussing Emilio Azcárraga's role in the consolidation and expansion of commercial radio broadcasting. The Azcárraga Group strategically built a strong nationalistic radio station and, by the end of the 1930s, positioned itself as a "virtual cultural branch" of the state."[64] The state-industry relationship between Azcárraga and the government further solidified when in 1939, the DAPP closed, and XEW studios were entrusted with producing *La Hora Nacional*. This marked a shift in the political economy of Mexican broadcasting—the government left the radio in private hands with the condition that commercial broadcasters continued to collaborate with the state and preserve "national interests."[65]

With the privatization of broadcasting, state-led educational radio programs began declining and, for the most part, disappeared during Miguel Aleman's (1946-1952) administration. Since his vision for Mexico differed significantly from Cardenas' socialist agenda, Aleman's administration no longer found a use for the XEFO and, in 1947, sold the

[62] Hayes, *Radio Nation*, 67. Cárdenas added a radio regulation in 1936 that required all radio programs to contain at least 25% typical Mexican music.
[63] Ibid, 68.
[64] Ibid, XIX.
[65] Ibid, 78.

station and its subsidiary, the short wave XEUZ to the radio industrialist Francisco Aguirre. It is important to stress that the moment that Aleman sold this station, which previously functioned as a vital tool to circulate educational projects and political propaganda during the Cardenismo era, it represented a break with former traditions of using cultural media to promote socialist or populist visions. According to Hayes, Aleman represented a "new" Mexico: his key constituents were no longer Cardenas' peasants and laborers but the growing urban middle-class that desired U.S.-led development and consumer capitalism along with a strong dose of Christian tradition and patriarchal authority.[66] In effect, Aleman opened the door to what Miguel Sabido referred to as entertainment-education— educational efforts shifted from the state to the private sector.

Miguel Sabido developed the basic concept of entertainment education in the 1970s to promote a positive change in social attitudes and behaviors through commercial television. He applied his communication strategy to commercial media, arguing that the serial drama format could best articulate how education could be stimulating and entertainment could be educational. The Sabido method hinged on using the serial drama format to deliver educational messages disguised as entertainment through positive, negative, and transitional fictional characters. As shown throughout this chapter, the Mexican state had put into practice this technique to educate the public on "popular" discourses on Mexican national character—lo mexicano, mexicanidad, and the essence of what it is to be Mexican. This was echoed in murals, songs and dances, school curriculums, and radio programs. This time, however, educating and entertaining the public was primarily left in private, conservative, wealthy hands. When Sabido coined this method and successfully put it into practice, it revealed an existing power shift between the state and the

[66] Hayes, *Radio Nation*, 94.

private industry—elite cultural groups had amassed greater control over the media, market, and social and emotional education of the Mexican public.

Entertainment-Education

It is necessary to analyze Miguel Aleman's government to understand how the private sector's educational strategies differed from previous administrations. As stated before, Aleman's government set a policy of unrestricted support for developing the commercial industry. Beginning in the 1940s, with Aleman in power, a new dominant group began to form that persists in Mexico. This group was made up of a bourgeois faction present since the Porfiriato, but its position was affected by the Revolution, resulting in the post-revolution administration propelling projects that differed from their interests. Because Mexico operates on close-industry relationships, Fernando Mejia Barquera writes that over time the faction became closely associated with the government to the extent that businessmen in the group occupied positions in the public administration, which allowed them to exert direct influence on the government.[67] The best-known case of this state and industry relationship is that of former president Miguel Alemán Valdes who became associated with commercial industrialists at the end of his regime.[68] The partnership between these sectors allowed for the growing dominance of industrial monopolies and oligopolies such as radio networks or "cadenas." Although these networks were formed by small and medium-sized businessmen, large enterprises like the Azcárraga group promoted the construction of these radio chains to maintain political control of the broadcasting industry. One of the most important radio chains that emerged from these

[67] Fernando Mejía Barquera, *La Industria De La Radio y La Televisión y La Política Del Estado Mexicano* (México, D.F.: Fundación Manuel Buendía, 1989), 99-100.
[68] Ibid.

associations was Radio Cadena Nacional (RCN), owned by Rafael Cutberto Navarro Huerta. As a commercial promoter and vehicle for entertainment, the RCN aired various radionovelas to spread Mexican values and take radio listeners to the most unexpected places of the imagination.[69] The most recognized radionovela aired by RCN to date is *Kalimán, el hombre incredible*. As a form of entertainment-education, the creators of Kalimán found imaginative ways of communicating these topics to the public in radionovela and comic format. The successful production and reception of Kalimán is not a singular phenomenon since producers like Navarro and Vázquez had other templates like Memin Pinguin as successful examples.

One of the most well-known entertainers that emerged during the Golden Age of cultural productions in Mexico was Yolanda Vargas Dulché (1919-1999). Before beginning her prolific writing career as an historietista, she wrote scripts for radionovelas and was an on-air radio singer for Mexico City's XEW-AM station.[70] Vargas' collaboration and industry alliances with media moguls like Emilio Azcárraga Vidaurreta allowed her to break into radio, television, and the comic industry. Her most known work is Memin Pinguin, a series created in the 1940s for the magazine *Almas de Niño* as part of Mexico's alphabetization efforts. This comic series details the adventures of a mischievous black boy (with a monkey-like appearance, exaggeratedly thick lips, and wide eyes) who is a dreamer, a trickster, and his three loyal Mexican friends. The characters were meant to represent different sectors of Mexico's national imagined community: the wealthy, the working-class, and the outsider. Vargas also produced several stories for the magazine Lágrimas, Risas, y Amor, which were later adapted into telenovelas. This included: "María Isabel" (1963-1964), which focused on the life of an indigenous woman who fell in love with her

[69] "Qué Fue De ...Rafael Cutberto Navarro, Creador De 'Kalimán, El Hombre Increíble' y De La Cadena RCN," YouTube (YouTube, January 23, 2022), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0H43O2HgdgI.
[70] Rubenstein, *Bad Language, Naked Ladies, and Other Threats to the Nation, 47*.

wealthy (white) boss and became a cultured and admired woman in Europe for her beauty; "El Pecado de Oyuki" (1975-1977) tells the story of Oyuki, a young Japanese woman who fell in love with the son of the English ambassador in Japan; and "Rarotonga" (1973-1975) which featured the story of an Afro-descendant sorceress queen from the island of Puerto Azul who drove all the inhabitants crazy with her voluptuous body and charms. Vargas built a publishing empire and established herself as an icon of Mexican popular culture through her characters and compositions. More importantly, Vargas's work reveals how discourses on race and mexicanidad were adapted and articulated by cultural media producers. Resultantly, mediums like the radio, which broadcasted cultural programs and radionovelas, and later on, printed comic books gave rise to the emotional education of the Mexican public.

Comic books: It All Comes Together

During the Porfiriato era (1876–1911) in Mexico, eight out of ten people over six were illiterate.[71] With education as one of the goals of the Revolution, the state's efforts to increase literacy were manifold. Murals, literacy campaigns, and educational radio programs became popular vehicles for the Mexican government to construct ideas of Mexicanness and address the issue of analphabetism. In the 1930s, the average literacy rate in Mexico was 33%; in 1950, it rose to 56%, and in 1970 to 76% among Mexicans over ten.[72] The Mexican state's commitment to education, the massification of popular culture via radio and art, and a growing publishing and distribution market, set the infrastructure that explains the popularity of comics as cultural

[71] Armando Bartra, "Lectura De Muchedumbres: Nacimiento, Esplendor y Agonía De La Gran Ballena Ilustrada De La Litografía a La Internet, Recuento Histórico Del Comic Mexicano," Pepines: Catálogo De Historietas De La Hemeroteca Nacional De México, July 29, 2019.
[72] Juan Manuel Pedraza Velásquez, "Catálogo De Historietas De La Hemeroteca Nacional De México," Pepines: Catálogo de Historietas de la Hemeroteca Nacional de México, July 21, 2011.

products and their potential to communicate discourses of otherness, morality, and modernity in an engaging format. Though conservative Mexican intellectuals scorned comics and graphic novels for their immoral content, these publications accomplished something that the SEP could not do—increase literacy rates. Mexicans learned how to read so that they could read comics. This helped comic book publishers establish the infrastructure that encouraged Mexican consumers to participate in activities the government had carefully and extensively marked as revolutionary.[73] In their study on Mexico's comic book industry, Hinds and Tatum found four large industrial groups: Editorial Argumentos group, Editorial Novaro, Publicaciones Herrerías, and Promotora "K" Group, accounted for nearly 60 percent of comic productions during the 1970s.[74] Aside from their market dominion, the "big four" also had strong affiliations with influential mass media organizations. For instance, the Argumentos group branched out into television; Promotora "K" had strong ties to Radio Cadena Nacional, and Novaro and Herrerias were affiliated with Televisa Novedades Group. Within these publishing groups, no comic book from the U.S. translated into Spanish or American titles remotely challenged Kalimán or Lagrimas y Risas's popularity in Mexico.

In the case of Kalimán, this character captured the Mexican public's auditory and visual attention. The character's shift from aural imagination to visual print media is significant. Kalimán, as a popular culture icon, signified a disruption in how the Mexican nation and mexicanidad were represented by the Mexican state and cultural media industry. As seen with the murals, school curriculums, and radio programs, Mexican cultural media producers were no longer interested in reproducing Mexican society's revolutionary character as a brown mestizo nation. The postrevolutionary visual economy of the country shifted by the 1940s, and Kalimán's

[73] Rubenstein, *Bad Language, Naked Ladies, and Other Threats to the Nation, 16.*
[74] Hinds and Tatum, *Not Just for Children,* 8.

emergence—a white superhero—in the mid-1960s reflects this change. While the othering of indigenous, black, and Asian people was already present in Mexico through mural narratives and has remained, the rupture I indicate here is how whiteness becomes represented. Beforehand, muralists like Rivera illustrated the white man and whiteness as the oppressor and conquistador. Through the process of mestizaje, the mestizo, as a product of conquest, played a role in the rise of Mexican nationalism and the characterization of the citizen in early twentieth-century Mexico.

To highlight this rupture, I reference *La Maestra Rural*. As aforementioned, the protagonist of this mural was a woman of indigenous descent teaching under the watchful eye of a federal guard as campesinos worked the land in the background. In this scene, the dark-skinned indigenous rural teacher and federal guard were portrayed as leaders of the revolutionary cause, reminding the people that a right to education and land were the goals of the Revolution. However, decades later, the protagonists and teachers have changed. Though the image of the rural teacher is still present, Mexicans now have a white-looking man as a hero and teacher they can look to for guidance. The black and brown bodies, once depicted as the protagonist of the Revolution and nation in murals, were portrayed as low-class villains and outsiders in comics for not conforming to the model of beauty, language, and behavior set by the writers. Hinds and Tatum observed that comics produced in the 60s and 70s "placed heavy emphasis on non-mestizo and non-Indian physical traits."[75] Therefore, Kalimán, as an embodiment of whiteness, is an example of the break away from earlier revolutionary imaginaries of Mexico because he is neither Mexican nor indigenous. In effect, I argue that we see through the Kalimán how a new class of Mexican elites that see themselves as white want to be represented within the nation—not as the oppressors but as guides to modernity. Hence, why Kalimán is important. By looking

[75] Hinds and Tatum, *Not Just for Children,* 62.

at the political economy of culture in Mexico and the different projects that transpired in the process of "educating" the Mexican public, we see the alliances that came about in building the nation and its citizen with the indigenous mestizo and the eventual rupture that led the new elites in power to develop their vision of Mexico as white—both in skin and values.

"No hay fuerza más poderosa que la mente humana
y quien domina la mente lo domina todo."
— Kalimán, El Hombre Increible

"Picture a superhero.
What comes immediately to mind?
Odds are that you are imagining a white man"
—Sean Guynes and Martin Lund

Chapter 3: Mexican Elites Construct the White Mestizo

As discussed in chapter two, after the Revolution, Mexican officials and intellectuals set forth a national project rooted in populist language to consolidate discourses that exalted the "bronzed mestizo race"[76] and the indigenous past as allegorical symbols for Mexico and Mexican identity. Dedicated to constructing a definition of the nation separate from their colonial and European precursors, Mexican elites turned to an "Indian-oriented nationalism" and "forged new artistic orientations that identified particular aesthetic traditions as indigenous and valorized them as "muy Mexicano."[77] A prominent example of this was the India Bonita pageant sponsored by Felix Palavicini, founder of the newspaper El Universal in 1921. The India Bonita contest, like the murals, was implemented to help reorient public opinion about indigenous peoples' place within the Mexican nation.[78] Historian Ricky A. Lopez writes how the contest coordinators identified "suitable" Indian features (oval face, dark skin, straight black hair, and a serene expression) to mark as positive and distinctively Mexican characteristics for the public, especially for Mexico's urban elite. At the same time, Mexican artists began studying the aesthetics of Mexico's popular Indian classes. Rivera's depiction of the revolucionario and

[76] Bronze race is a term used since the early 20th century to refer to the mestizo population.
[77] Apen Ruiz, "La India Bonita: Nación, Raza y Género En El México Revolucionario," *Debate Feminista* 24 (January 2001): 284; Rick A. López, "The India Bonita Contest of 1921 and the Ethnicization of Mexican National Culture," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 82, no. 2 (January 2002): 315.
[78] López, "The India Bonita Contest," 303.

Maestra rural as brown and of indigenous descent is a notable example of the populist orientation in Mexico during this period and what Mary Kay Vaughn characterized as the "browning of the nation."[79] But, as Monica Garcia Blizzard pointed out, having indigenous populations become the "privileged objects of aesthetic expression" was not a simple task.[80] Especially since Mexican elites were constantly in dispute with each other for spaces of power and control over the image of Mexico. As a result, anxiety and tensions arose among elites over the visualization of indigeneity, particularly about how *lo mexicano* ought to be displayed and whether indigenous people were "fit" for artistic representation.[81] Ricky A. López stated that some Mexican leaders rejected the government's project linking Mexican national identity with indigenousness. Whereas some elites preferred discourses that looked to Mexico's Spanish roots, others favored and advocated a mestizaje that minimized or evaded the need to validate the idea of Indianness.[82]

As aforementioned, Miguel Alemán's (1946–52) administration brought about significant interventions in Mexico regarding the development of the media, constructions of Mexicanness, and land reform. Jaime Marroquin observed that "the idea of Mexico, crafted during and after the Mexican Revolution, [was] in crisis" in the second half of the twentieth century.[83] Aleman's administration was populated with a new generation of ambitious leaders who embraced modernizing ethos and a modernist approach to urban design.[84] Unlike early revolutionary elite groups whose goal was to "Mexicanize the Indian," the new elites in power during this period were eager to reconstruct the image of Mexico as a modern, white mestizo nation rather than an

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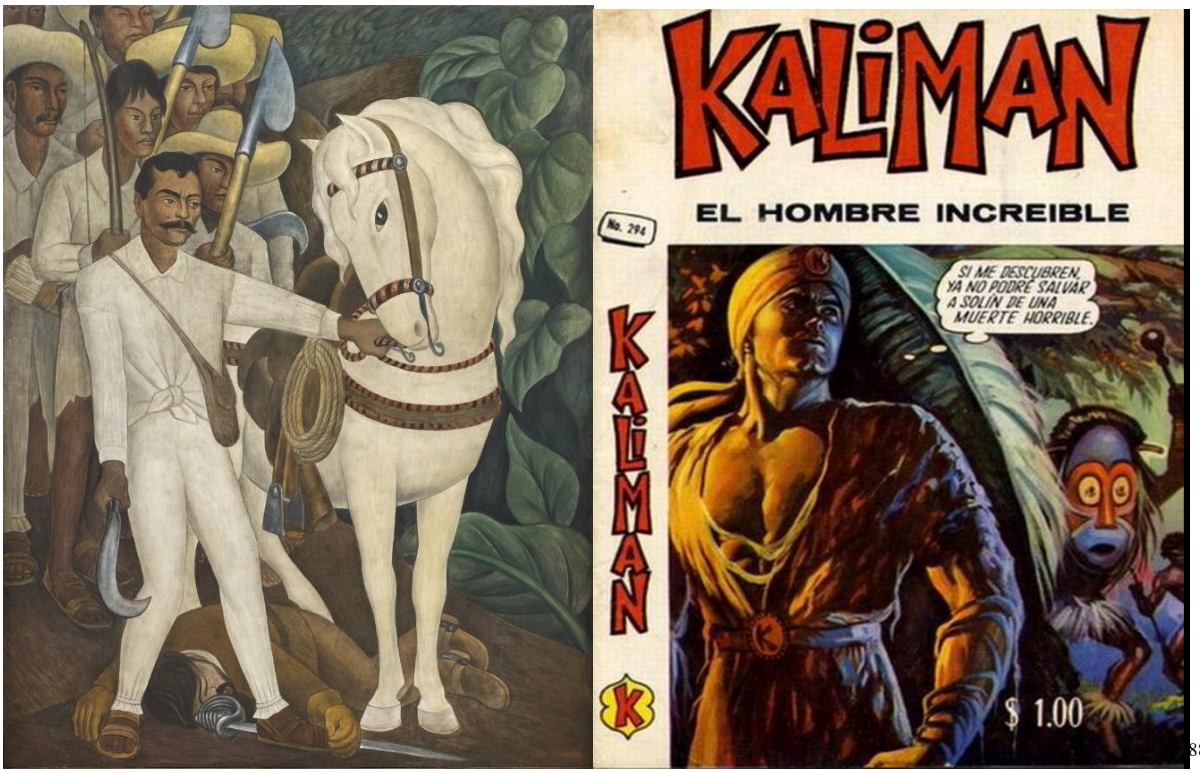
[79] Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution,* 197; López, "The India Bonita Contest," 315.
[80] Mónica Garcia Blizzard, *The White Indians of Mexican Cinema: Racial Masquerade throughout the Golden Age* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2022), 45.
[81] Ibid, 45-46.
[82] Lopez, "The India Bonita Contest," 297.
[83] Jaime Marroquín, "Reinventing Nationalism: Mexico in the Works of José Revueltas," *TRANS- Revue Littérature Générale Et Comparée*, no. 5 (2008), 6.
[84] Ryan M. Alexander, *Sons of the Mexican Revolution Miguel Alemán and His Generation* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2016), 186.

indigenous one.[85] The Alemanista political class was interested in moving from social reform and populist ideas to economic progress and modernization. The shift in racial representation from the India Bonita as Mexico's "Native ideal" and Rivera's Revolucionario and Maestra rural as heroes in the murals to Kalimán, a white-looking (non-European) comic superhero, is an example of elites moving away from representations of brownness and indigeneity. In addition, elites also wanted to visually represent a Mexican character not included in the post-revolutionary national project: the white mestizo. As Anne Doremus pointed out, in the wake of the Mexican Revolution, many Mexicans demanded new articulations of the national identity that reflected the changed historical conditions. Constructions of national identity under Porfirio Díaz, which had privileged wealthy Mexicans of mainly European descent, were no longer valid.[86] We see this reflected in Rivera's 1930 Conquest and Revolution mural: the mestizo Emiliano Zapata, dressed in white peasant clothing, stood victorious over the lifeless figure of the Porfirian hacienda owner as campesinos gathered behind him (see Figure 1). This image represented one of the main revolutionary goals: the redistribution of lands held by a few wealthy owners to peasant and indigenous communities. Thirty years later, alternative narratives juxtaposing Rivera's revolutionary image of Mexico and its national heroes emerged and, with it, a new mestizo hero archetype. Mexican officials and elites wanted to transform how the nation looked to citizens and outsiders. They hoped to reconstruct the mestizo in their own image and in opposition to revolutionary constructions of the brown-mestizo identity.[87] Comic books, entertaining and didactic, were powerful mediums to project official interests, rewrite narratives and recreate characters.

[85] Anne Doremus, "Indigenism, Mestizaje, and National Identity in Mexico during the 1940s and the 1950s," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 17, no. 2 (2001): 377.
[86] Ibid, 378.
[87] Alexander, "*Sons of the Mexican Revolution*," 208.



[88]

Figure 1: Rivera depicted (left image) revolutionary leader and land reform advocate Emiliano Zapata standing triumphant over the exploitative hacendado. The #298 Kalimán cover issue illustrates the Oriental superhero facing an evil cult of natives terrorizing hacienda owners for their lands.

Character Analysis and Narrative Structure

Immortalized as Mexico's greatest superhero, Kalimán entertained generations of Mexicans with his incredible adventures. His iconic proverbs: "*serenidad y paciencia, mucha paciencia*" and "*No hay fuerza más poderosa que la mente humana y quien domina la mente lo domina todo*" remain engraved in the collective imagination and today are remembered with nostalgia. The comic book was a 32-page action-packed series printed on low-quality paper in sepia tones and assembled with staples. Only the comic's front cover, framed with the word "Kalimán," was published in bright colors to complement the illustrations that typically hinted at

[88] Diego Rivera, "History of the State of Morelos, Conquest, and Revolution" mural painted in Cuernavaca in 1930.

the plot. The back and inner pages of the comic featured local advertisements specific to the country printed and a list of radio frequencies to tune in a listen to Kalimán.[89] In Mexico, for instance, Navarro and Vázquez, in collaboration with the national literacy campaign of the Mexican government, included patriotic advertisements on the importance of literacy. The advertisement read: "*La patria confía en tí. Cada mexicano que enseña a leer y escribir a un compatriota, engrandece a méxico y amplía la conciencia de nuestro destino*." And what better way to promote these ideals than with Kalimán, a popular superhero known to Mexicans for valuing intelligence over physical force. Extraordinarily intelligent, Kalimán was portrayed as a cultured individual "cognizant in martial arts, oriental philosophies, linguistic proficiency, [and] Western know-how."[90] He also possessed incredible powers: levitation, telepathy, telekinesis, remote viewing, hypnosis, and superhuman strength, among others, which he explained were the result of training and developing his mind. Simply put, Kalimán was an image of righteousness and superiority. However, one of Kalimán's hidden superpowers is his whiteness and privilege. Whiteness can be defined as hyper(in)visible. The invisibility of whiteness as a structural privilege and the emptiness of whiteness as a racial category makes itself hyper(in)visible to those who are not white and invisible to those who benefit from it. In the case of Kalimán, the character embodied its creators' racial and class position and those favored by the white, ruling classes of Mexico. Although Navarro and Vázquez maintained that Kalimán's complexion was tanned, his strikingly white skin and magnetic blue eyes gave him a Caucasian rather than an oriental appearance.[91] Hector Fernandez L'Hoeste states upper-class Mexicans were willing to participate in national mythology and reassert their indigenous roots in name and culture so long

[89] Itzayana Gutiérrez, "Remediating Kalimán: Digital Evolutions of Eugenic Agents," *Asian Diasporic Visual Cultures and the Americas* 5, no. 1-2 (November 2019): 66.
[90] Fernandez L'Hoeste, "Race and Gender in The Adventures of Kalimán, *El Hombre Increible*," 58.
[91] Hinds and Tatum, *Not Just for Children,* 35.

as their racial superiority remained unquestioned.[92] Kalimán's Orientalized whiteness highlights his "exceptionality as a legitimate outsider"[93] and, at the same time, acts as a benchmark for the cultural representation of otherness.

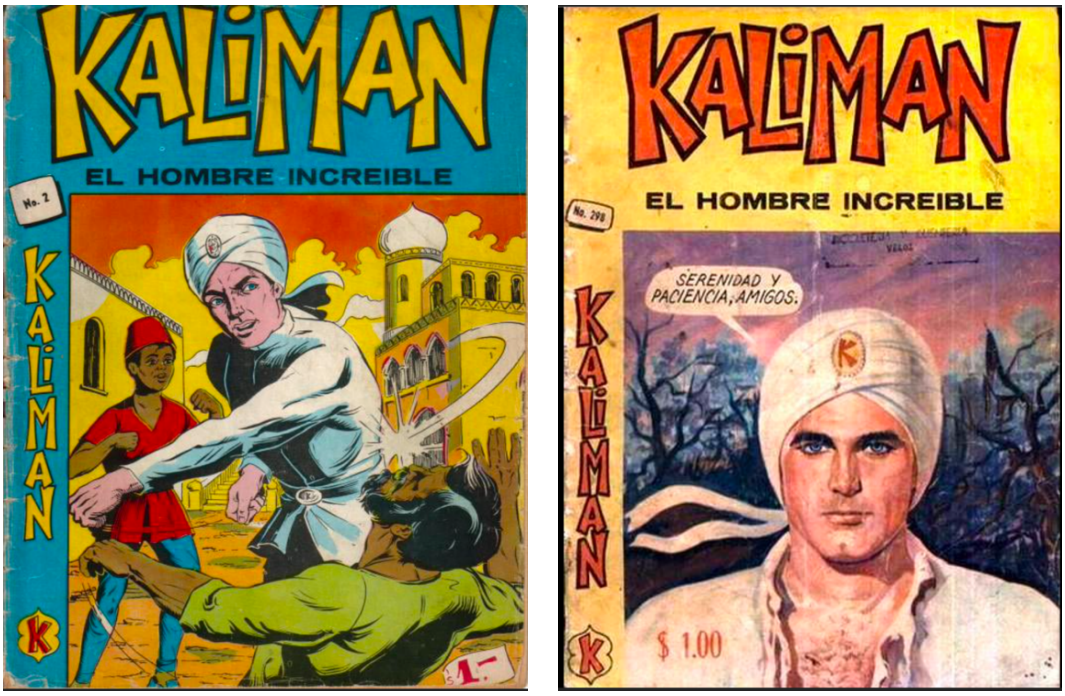


Figure 2: The evolution of Kalimán's appearance in the comic book covers: Kalimán #2 (left) printed in 1965 and Kalimán #298 (right) printed in 1971.

This comic book followed a formulaic narrative in terms of plot structure. Generally, the adventure would begin with Kalimán visiting a new country where he had to solve mysteries and evil schemes, all while fighting heroically and sharing philosophical wisdom with his sidekick Solín and the reader. As for his background, the creators' illustrated Kalimán as a righteous hero who renounced his throne and distributed his wealth among his people to wander the world fighting for justice. As a product of the 1960s, a period filled with political unrest in Mexico due to unequal wealth and land distribution, Kalimán's "robin hood" ways were purposeful. The

[92] Fernandez L'Hoeste, "Race and Gender in The Adventures of Kalimán, *El Hombre Increible*," 63.
[93] Gutiérrez, "Remediating Kalimán," 59.

character's egalitarian attitude was meant to redress Mexico's economic disparities, making it possible for working-class readers to identify with and live vicariously through him. Yet, it remained unclear how Kalimán could afford his philanthropic escapades, and the producers never clarified it in the radionovela or comic book.

In addition to being an egalitarian crime-fighting hero, the creators' emphasized Kalimán's exceptionality via his moral authority and superior spirituality. In an interview with a Mexican media outlet, José Vázquez Morejón revealed that his uncle, Modesto Vázquez , based the character of Kalimán after Mahatma Gandhi, India's non-violent independence movement leader.[94] That is why Kalimán never intentionally harmed or killed his nemeses, believing that even the evilest criminals could be redeemed. Vázquez Morejón said that the creators' fascination with India and the Middle East inspired Kalimán's exotic settings and background as an Indian superhero who was a descendant and the embodiment of Kali, the black Hindu goddess of justice. In his groundbreaking 1978 text, *Orientalism*, Edward Said states, "anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient [...] is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism."[95] Said defines orientalism as a "style of thought based on an ontological and epistemological distinction between the Orient and the Occident."[96] Said contended that Europe (and the West), in constructing its self-image, used this "style of thought" to create the "Orient" as the "Other"' to subjugate and control it. Kalimán's Orientalized whiteness within this comic, I argue, demonstrates how white Mexican elites constructed their self-image as mestizos to distance themselves from a European representation of whiteness and thereby legitimize their power. Within this process, indigeneity and blackness are constructed as hyper(in)visible when

[94] Notimex, "Revelan Secreto Sobre El Personaje De Kalimán," vanguardia.com.mx (Grupo Editorial Coahuila, S.A. de C.V., September 12, 2016).
[95] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 10.
[96] Ibid, 3.

juxtaposed against mestizo whiteness. This becomes possible in the context of mestizaje. As Monica Moreno Figueroa states in *Distributed intensities: Whiteness, mestizaje and the logics of Mexican racism*, Monica Moreno Figueroa, "mestizaje enables whiteness to be experienced as both normalized and ambiguous [and] not consistently attached to the (potentially) whiter body."[97] In other words, the white mestizo identity has the power to otherize itself and "others" and afforded the privilege and flexibility to assimilate an indigenous or oriental identity and forsake it when it has served its purpose. I argue that Navarro and Vázquez's positioning of Kalimán as an oriental Indian who embodies the best qualities of a black Hindu goddess is the process of mestizaje in action. It symbolizes the whitening of indigenous and black bodies in Mexico and Latin America.

Kalimán's exceptionality is also ratified through other characters in the comic book. An example of this is the victims in the narrative. It should also be noted that there are two types of victims in Kalimán. The first victim is cast as good, innocent, and in need of protection. Kalimán's white-looking industrialist friends typically fall under this category. The second victim/villain is generally characterized by black and brown characters. These characters are coded as suspicious and malicious. The creators substantiate these tropes through narrative and graphic privileging: the good white characters are shown as honorable, refined, and well-intentioned, while non-white characters are portrayed as noble savages, criminals, or brutes easily manipulated. Additionally, white characters were represented in realistic styles and light coloring, while non-white characters were drawn with darker strokes and exaggerated features. These narrative and stylistic choices apply to the characters portrayed as villains in the plot. The main villains are greedy and ruthless European or North American industrialists seeking

[97] Moreno Figueroa, "Distributed Intensities," 387.

vengeance or stealing treasures from foreign countries (i.e., Mexico, Egypt, the Caribbean, and Tanzania). However, the three villains repeatedly appearing are Karma, Namilak, and Araña Negra [Black Spider]. Like Kalimán, Karma was raised and educated in a monastery in Tibet. Karma's rugged features and bronzed skin contrasted with Kalimán's flawless white skin and blue eyes. In the comic book, both characters possess the same mystical abilities. The creators use morality to juxtapose the characters: Kalimán is a pure spirit, while Karma is selfish and flawed. Namilak operates as the inversion of Kalimán. He physically resembled Kalimán, same abilities and the black version of the hero's costume, but everything Namilak did was negative and impure. For instance, Kalimán was a righteous man who fought for his people; Namilak was only interested in violence and gaining power and wealth. The third villain and the main antagonist in the Kalimán issue I analyze in this chapter is Araña Negra.[98] Though his identity is never revealed, it was speculated he was of Hungarian nationality. Always dressed in black, with a hidden face, Araña Negra was a fearsome and unscrupulous criminal who stole diamonds, narcotics, or gold from foreign countries. Kalimán's enemies are meant to corroborate two things. First, by giving the main villain a European or American nationality, Navarro and Vázquez speak on Europe and the United States' history of colonization and corruption. Furthermore, the creators' implication that evil and treachery come from the Western world helped validate Mexico's moral superiority. Secondly, the creators use a black-and-white morality trope to highlight Kalimán's supremacy. All of Kalimán's nemesis functioned as an inversion of him. As a result, antagonists are dressed in dark colors to symbolize sin and perversion, while Kalimán's white costume symbolizes purity and righteousness. As Marc Singer writes, superhero comic books have proven "fertile ground for reconciling the

[98] The Araña Negra resembles The Shadow, a North American radio show character.

contradictions between an ideology of democracy and a history and practice of prejudice."[99] In the next section, I provide a synopsis of the main plot in Kalimán: *El Regreso de la Araña Negra*, which runs from issue #280 to #315, followed by an analysis of key themes.

El Regreso de la Araña Negra: Synopsis

This adventure begins with Kalimán and Solín vacationing on an unnamed Caribbean Island. When they arrived on the island, an old local woman approached Kalimán. She warned him about the dangers looming over foreigners. Kalimán learned that two foreign hacienda owners were killed in suspicious circumstances related to voodoo and black magic. Kalimán explained to Solín that the native population on the island was rumored to practice voodooism and black magic. In a paternalistic manner, Kalimán cautioned Solín about the dangers of voodoo and black magic rituals, insisting that only criminals used these forbidden rites for evil and corruption. The narrative shifted to the depths of the Caribbean jungle, where a native tribe gathered in celebration of a pagan ceremony to invoke Naraka, their god of the jungle. Luzbel, the native chief, was depicted fully clothed and wearing a native ceremonial mask that disguised his face, while the natives (as referred to in the text) were scarcely dressed. In a stereotypical dramatization of native practices, the natives were illustrated chanting and kneeling in reverence, waiting for Luzbel to perform the animal sacrifice. Following this ritual, Naraka emerged fully clothed in a mysterious cave surrounded by flames. Visually, Naraka resembled the Christian devil because he had a disfigured face and horns. The pagan god (as Kalimán referred to him) exclaimed in anger that lands on the island belonged to the natives. He decreed that natives had to kill all the foreigners occupying native land to reclaim the lands that were rightfully theirs.

[99] Marc Singer, "'Black Skins' and White Masks: Comic Books and The Secret of Race," *African American Review* 36, no. 1 (2002): pp. 107.

Because Naraka only appeared to Luzbel, the native chief had to rely on the message to the natives, who continued to kneel in submission and fear of their god. On behalf of Naraka, Luzbel ordered the murder of a third hacienda owner. He sent Zulema, a seductive and unscrupulous native sorceress, to eliminate the hacienda owners. She was tasked with these jobs since hacienda owners gave in to her alluring and exotic beauty. As Zulema fulfilled Naraka and Luzbel's bidding, another panel showed a native warrior with war paint on his face and a feathered headdress playing the drums as Luzbel and other natives engaged in antics of war whooping. The drums echoed throughout the jungle, conveying Naraka's message to all natives on the island—the war against the hacienda owners had begun.

A third hacienda owner was killed the night Kalimán and Solín arrived on the island. Kalimán was determined to solve the case and bring the culprit to justice. The incredible man learns why the hacienda owners were being mercilessly killed. According to the country's laws, if a landowning foreigner did not have an heir upon death, his lands would be distributed among native tribes. Kalimán, accompanied by Solín, visited his friend, Coronel Fierro, and his daughter Elsa, worried they would suffer the same fate for owning land on the island. Coronel Fierro introduced his daughter Elsa, who had been studying in Europe, to Kalimán. Elsa was immediately mesmerized by Kalimán. She also expressed relief that Kalimán was there to protect them after an anonymous death threat was sent to their hacienda. Since Kalimán had vast knowledge of all subjects, he immediately knew that the Kulues native tribe had issued the threat when he inspected the blood-stained letter and arrow. Coronel Fierro and Elsa felt bewilderment over the death threats since they were always kind to the natives who worked for them.

The panel shifts to show Zulema sitting outside the Fierro hacienda about to perform a voodoo ritual. Her presence foreshadowed that she would be responsible for Coronel Fierro's

death. Like Elsa, Zulema falls in love with Kalimán at first sight. As the plot unfolds, Kalimán is unsuspectingly trapped in a love triangle between Elsa and Zulema. Angered at how protective Kalimán was of Elsa, Zulema resorted to black magic to force a love bond with the incredible man. However, Kalimán could not be easily overpowered by dark forces. His pure spirit and mind freed him from Zulema's spells. While Kalimán pursued the natives for killing the hacendados, the Araña Negra terrorized Elsa and Solín.

Araña Negra becomes obsessed with Elsa, deeming her the perfect woman. Solín escaped into the jungle, searching for Kalimán so he could rescue Elsa. However, he was taken by the natives and sentenced to death. Before Luzbel could sacrifice Solín to Naraka, Kalimán came to his rescue. The incredible man took the chief native as his prisoner because he knew Luzbel would stop at nothing to harm Elsa and Solín. In a twist of events, Kalimán unmasked Luzbel and discovered he was a white man who had tinted his skin brown to pass off as native. A greedy white-European man had disguised himself as a chief native to manipulate the true natives into carrying out his macabre plan. Before Kalimán could bring Luzbel to justice, he escaped and ordered the natives to massacre all foreigners on the island. The following few panels illustrate how the natives ransacked the haciendas killing several hacendados and their innocent families while the rest fled. In the end, Kalimán saved the day, and justice prevailed. He defeated Luzbel and discovered that Araña Negra had disguised himself as the native god Naraka. The Araña Negra and Luzbel were working together, using the natives to terrorize the hacendados so they could control the land. The natives retaliated, angered that they had been tricked by foreign white men. In a tragic turn of events, Araña Negra ambushed the natives, massacring them with an assault rifle. The series ended with Kalimán confronting his nemesis and vowing to redistribute the lands to the remaining native tribes with the condition that they become peaceful people and

abandon their voodoo practices. The last panel illustrates Kalimán, Elsa, and Solín walking into the distance, leaving the natives and jungle behind.

As we see here, Kalimán is an example of comic books' power in synthesizing multiple narratives and visual representations into one. This comic book provides a gateway into examining discourses of race, class, and gender in Mexico.

Gendered White Patriarchy

In "*The White Indians of Mexican Cinema: Racial Masquerade throughout the Golden Age*," Monica Garcia Blizzard observed how Mexican cinema had a strong pedagogical and socializing function, serving as a "school" in which spectators could learn heavy-handed lessons about race and gender through which Mexican Whiteness was upheld as the aesthetic and cultural ideal.[100] A similar argument could be made about comics, specifically Kalimán: *El Regreso de la Araña Negra*. In the comic, Navarro and Vázquez use racially coded language concealed in discourses of behavior and morality to construct normative masculinity and femininity as white. Kalimán's oriental upbringing and spirituality helps support and regulate constructions of gender present in text and visuals while reaffirming a patriarchal social structure.[101] Considering the media has historically supported hegemonic and patriarchal systems of power, in Kalimán, white men are portrayed as important, whereas women and non-white men are regarded as secondary and dependent on white male characters. Navarro and Vázquez advance historical narratives that privileged whiteness as pure and as the center of national identity while black and brown "natives" are exoticized and portrayed as incompatible with the image of the white, elite nuclear family. As Steve Garner stated, white is the framing position

[100] Garcia Blizzard, *The White Indians of Mexican Cinema,"* 75.
[101] Fernandez L'Hoeste, "Race and Gender in The Adventures of Kalimán, *El Hombre Increible*," 66.

from which other identities have been historically constructed as deviant and judgments made about normality and abnormality, beauty and ugliness, civilization and barbarity.[102] With this in mind, I look at how creators racially distinguished Elsa and Zulema in terms of class to reinforce the idea of white women as respectable and pure and women of color as unvirtuous and sexually lewd.

For instance, in issue #281, when Kalimán arrived at Coronel Fierro's hacienda, the hacendado eagerly introduced his daughter Elsa, who had returned from studying abroad in Europe, to him. In terms of physical appearance, Elsa is illustrated as a white woman with blond hair and light-colored eyes. At first sight, Kalimán commented on Elsa's beauty and virtue before greeting her with a hand-kissing gesture. A gesture that is traditionally considered a respectful way for a gentleman to greet a lady of his same or higher social status. Whereas Elsa is presented as ladylike and refined, Zulema is depicted with straight black hair, penetrating dark-colored eyes, scarcely clothed and barefoot. Though it can easily be argued that due to the sepia tones of this comic, physical appearance or color is prone to interpretation, the text validates these racial differences by contrasting Zulema's animal-like behavior with that of Elsa and Kalimán's decorum and sophistication. For example, in issue #283, page 5 and 6, Zulema attacks the unsuspecting Elsa in the Fierro mansion. Before Zulema can physically harm Elsa, Kalimán comes to her rescue, forcing Zulema to jump out a window to flee the scene. For context, Zulema was at the Fierro estate to issue Coronel Fierro and Elsa another threat, reminding them that all foreigners living on native land would suffer a deadly fate. In page 5, (see Figure 3), we see Zulema about to attack Elsa, who screams for help as Kalimán runs up a flight of stairs calling out to her. The third box in this panel offers a close-up of the attack from

[102] Steve Garner, Whiteness: An Introduction (London: Routledge, 2007), 35.

Elsa's point of view: Zulema with a primal, animalistic expression and sharp claw-like hands. In page 6, the first box is split in half depicting Kalimán sprinting to Elsa's rescue while Elsa looks scared and disoriented. The following section showed Kalimán caringly embracing Elsa, asking what was wrong as she leaned into him for support. Elsa pleadingly asked Kalimán to save her because "esa mujer o demonio," as she referred to Zulema, was going to kill her. However, Kalimán was convinced that the attack was part of Elsa's imagination since the assailant was nowhere in sight. Nevertheless, Elsa reiterated that "una mujer con cara de demonio…como nativa" attacked her (see Figure 4). Throughout the comic book, as we see with these two panels, the reader is constantly given racializing codes about race and gender.

The creators place Elsa into the character of damsel-in-distress, a role that has mostly benefited white women and has been used as an excuse to enact racial violence to protect the purity of white women. Whereas Zulema is placed into the role of the savage native, a dehumanizing and racist stereotype that advances the notion that indigenous people were barbaric and uncivilized. American cartoonist and comic theorist, Scott McCloud writes that "while most characters [are] designed simply, to assist in reader-identification, other characters were drawn more realistically in order to objectify them, emphasizing their 'otherness' [to] the reader."[103]

[103] Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010), 44.

Figure 3. Issue #283: Zulema attacks the white woman.

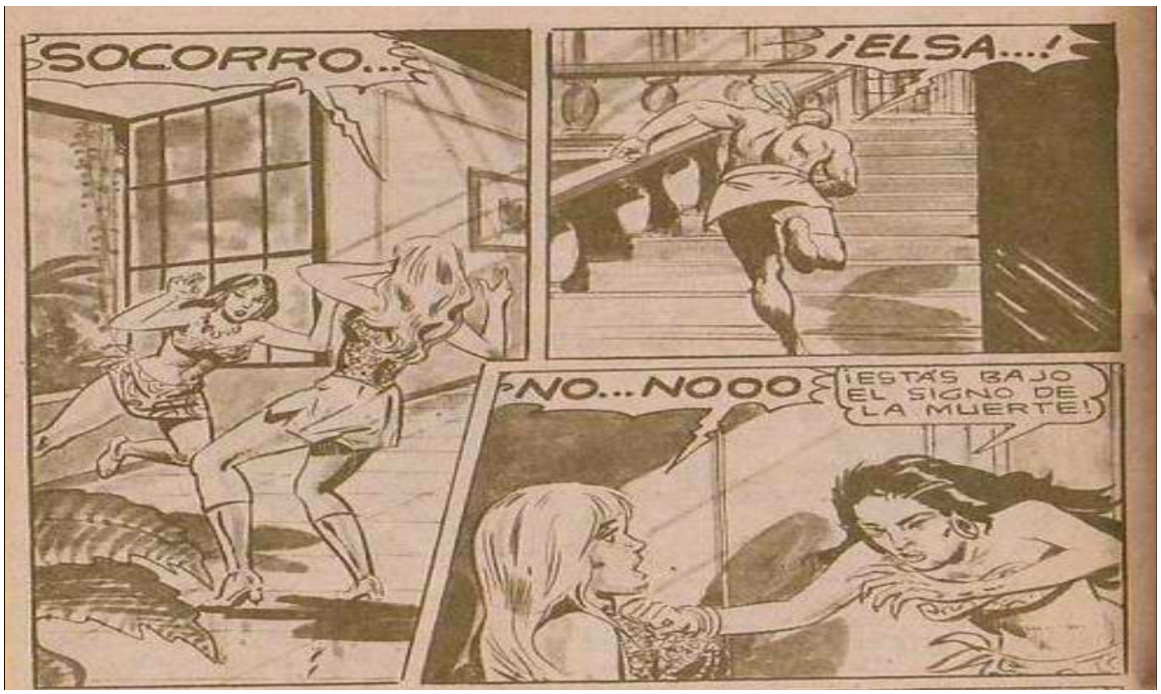
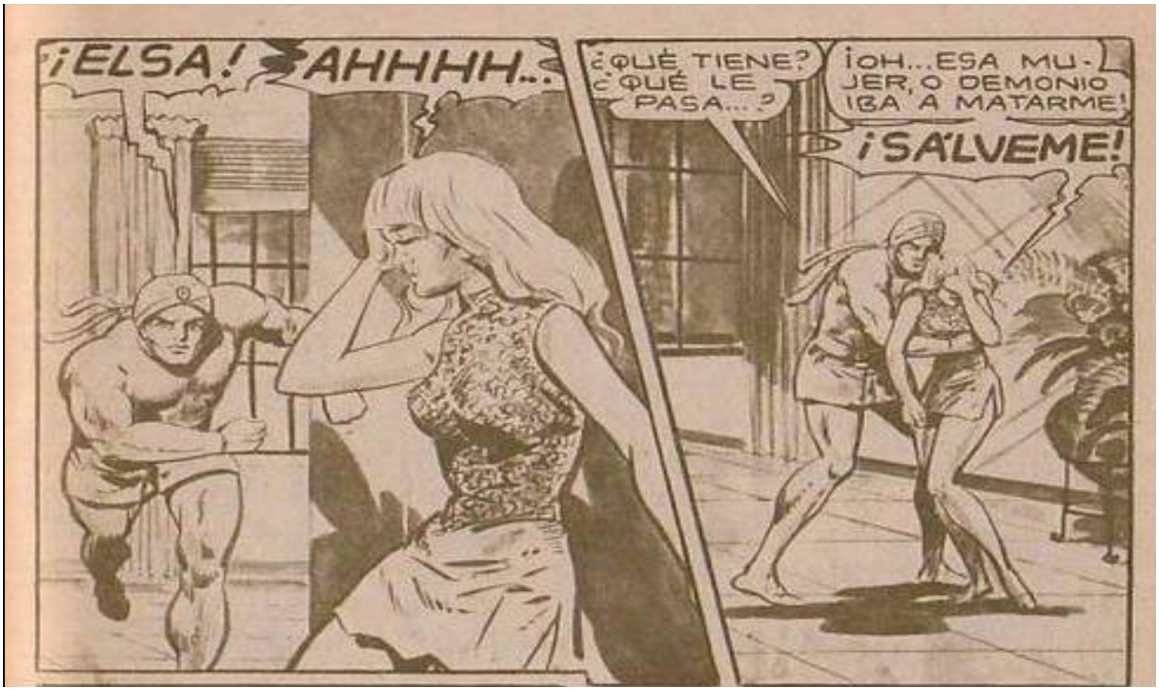


Figure 4. Issue #283: Kalimán saves the white woman.



Furthermore, American writer and cartoonist Will Eisner states how creators stereotype characters along commonly accepted paradigms to speed the reader into the plot to create a compelling narrative.[104] Thus, Navarro and Vázquez hinge on the commonly accepted paradigm of the savage Indian to advance narratives that naturalized Elsa as the embodiment of white femininity while denoting Zulema as both antithetical to notions of national domesticity and disruption to the morality of the nation. A dehumanizing and racist stereotype that advances the notion that indigenous people were barbaric and uncivilized. American cartoonist and comic theorist, Scott McCloud writes that "while most characters [are] designed simply, to assist in reader-identification, other characters were drawn more realistically in order to objectify them, emphasizing their 'otherness' [to] the reader."[105] Furthermore, American writer and cartoonist Will Eisner states that creators stereotype characters along commonly accepted paradigms to speed the reader into the plot to create a compelling narrative.[106] That said, Navarro and Vázquez hinge on the commonly accepted paradigm of the savage Indian to advance narratives that naturalized Elsa as the embodiment of white femininity while denoting Zulema as both antithetical to notions of national domesticity and disruption to the morality of the nation.

In *Redrawing The Nation: National Identity in Latin/o American Comics*, Hector Fernandez L'Hoeste remarked that Kalimán emerged as an "alternative to […] the increased vulgarization of their culture" and as an attempt to "produce a nobler, more honorable, role model."[107] In the 1950s and 1960s, upper-class conservative Mexicans were concerned about the

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[104] Will Eisner in *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative as cited D. P. Royal, "Introduction: Coloring," America:(January 2007): 8.*
[105] McCloud, *Understanding Comics,* 44.
[106] Will Eisner in Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative as cited in D. P. Royal, "Introduction: Coloring America: Multi-Ethnic Engagements with Graphic Narrative," MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States 32, no. 3 (January 2007): 8.
[107] Fernandez L'Hoeste, "Race and Gender in The Adventures of Kalimán, *El Hombre Increible*," 62.

corrupting influence of the mass media and the increased publication of material filled with violence, profanity, and sexually explicit content. In effect, Kalimán was created within the "traditional moralizing scope of the middle-class perspective to appease Mexican conservatives."[108] That said, I want to call attention to the importance Navarro and Vázquez placed on "purity" and the image of the traditional family. In typical issues, Kalimán has at least one romantic interest—the "good" woman or the "sexually" deviant villainess. For this issue, the creators include both. In the first three issues of the series, the creators frame Kalimán and Elsa as complementary to each other—similar class background, education, and respectability. By doing so, the creators pushed forward a new vision of the traditional Mexican family that significantly differed from earlier constructions consisting of the Spanish father, indigenous mother, and the brown mestizo child. As Monica Moreno Figueroa points out, Mexican cultural producers learned to see and "praise" indigenous people as an essential and vital part of national culture and landscape [...] but they [did not have] any desire to 'look' and [act] like them.[109] Hence, why White Mexican elites were distancing themselves from earlier construction of "el Indio" centered as the figures of Mexican national identity. Given the conservative nature of the comic book, Kalimán always desists from all romantic encounters. Nevertheless, the creators hint at the possibility of Kalimán and Elsa as the prototypical couple. This idea about the white Mexican family is reinforced in issue #282 page 18: Kalimán and Elsa sit next to each other at the dinner table while Solín sits across from them and Coronel Fierro as the elder sits at the head of the table. Thus, if Kalimán were ever to consider a romantic partner, it would be the worthy white woman.

[108] Fernandez L'Hoeste, "Race and Gender in The Adventures of Kalimán, *El Hombre Increible*," 62.
[109] Moreno Figueroa, "Distributed Intensities," 393.

Zulema also plays an important role in supporting Kalimán and Elsa as ideals. Whereas Elsa symbolized traditional values and femininity, Zulema symbolized temptation and corruption. Throughout the comic book, the creators frequently allude to Zulema's sexual deviancy, saying that Zulema was tasked with killing the foreign hacendados because her beauty was tempting and irresistible. This is reinforced in issue #285 when Zulema goes to Coronel Fierro's hacienda to ask for a job as a domestic servant. At first sight, Coronel Fierro becomes fascinated with Zulema's beauty, graciously welcoming her into his home. Kalimán has a similar reaction upon seeing Zulema, remarking his attraction for her "primitive" beauty: "[Zulema] me gusta por su belleza primitiva que tiene algo de salvaje."[110] It should also be noted that when Coronel Fierro officially introduces them, Kalimán does not greet Zulema with a hand-kissing gesture but instead leans over her patronizingly. Kalimán does not regard Zulema with the same respect that he offers Elsa. I highlight this scene to address how Kalimán and Coronel Fierro's fascination for Zulema and the sexualized rendering of the indigenous female body reproduce discourses of white male desire and the racial fetishization of brown and black bodies. As Bell Hooks writes, "the presence of the Other [and] the body of the Other was seen as existing to serve the ends of white male desires."[111] In the case of Kalimán, the white oriental superhero is allowed to indulge in his fantasies about the exotic Zulema without repercussions as long as he does not give in to temptation and remains pure. A similar argument could be made about white Mexican elites' ability to gaze across the racial spectrum with impunity as long as they marry white. In effect, Kalimán and Elsa operate as the locus through which Mexican cultural

[110] Kalimán Issue # 287 panel 11.
[111] Bell Hooks, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance ," in Black Looks: Race and Representation (New York: Routledge, 2015), 368.

producers represent the nation as white, modern, and desired, as opposed to the disruptive otherness that Zulema's nativenness symbolizes.

From a Revolutionary to a Benevolent State

The complexity of Kalimán lies in its ability to blur the lines between fiction and reality, especially when addressing important historical and political events through compelling narratives and visuals. In Mexico and Latin America, land reform is a historical and structural problem that has dominated the public and private sectors. Therefore, it makes sense that land is a significant theme in *El Regreso de la Araña Negra*. Before continuing with my analysis of Kalimán, it is important that I provide a brief overview of the causes that led to the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). My purpose for offering this context is to showcase how Navarro and Vázquez's discussion of social and land reform mirrors and deviates from popular interpretations of Mexico's revolutionary history and land struggle to privilege white Mexican elites' perspectives.

The Mexican Revolution was arguably the most important political, social, and cultural revolution in Mexican history. In 1910, armed regional conflict broke out in different parts of the country in response to Mexicans' growing resentment of Porfirio Diaz's regime (1884-1911) and his land distribution policies. Diaz, primarily concerned with modernizing Mexico by promoting foreign investment, granted white, wealthy Mexican landowners and U.S. and European companies privileged access to land and economic resources. By 1910, a few elites owned most of Mexico's land, leaving the peasant communities landless and oppressed. It is important to clarify that the Mexican Revolution was a multi-sided war. A revolution within a revolution. On one side, white and light-skinned middle-class liberals and intellectuals resented the economic

power of foreign industrialists in Mexico. Most of these mestizo elites were interested in re-establishing a democratic process in Mexico and a political reform that would privilege their social and economic interests. On the opposite side, peasants mobilized against the wealthy landowning Mexican classes, demanding land reform. However, upper and middle-class elites who now formed part of the new government were not interested in peasants' demands for land distribution. Indian and mestizo campesinos, led by revolutionary leaders such as Emiliano Zapata, rose in arms, demanding that Porfirian elites return the lands they fraudulently seized from peasant communities.[112] As Arthur G. Pettit writes, peasant armies burned haciendas, destroyed estate titles, redistributed the land, and ultimately forced the new liberal government to hear their demands for agrarian reform.[113] After the Revolution ended, Mexican elites' sympathetic to the Revolutionary cause strategically canalized the indigenous peasantry and their clamor for "Tierra y Libertad" to reconstruct Mexico's image as a democratic nation.

However, as aforementioned, by the mid-twentieth century, the new elites in power were not interested in the image of Mexico as indigenous and revolutionary. A new project and narrative emerged. What is interesting about how the creators approach the theme of land in Kalimán is the narrative that indigenous peoples' historical demand for land resulted from manipulation. For starters, the white Porfirian hacendado is not represented as an exploitative landowner who enriched himself at the expense of indigenous people's lands and labor. Instead, he is illustrated as the victim suffering at the pueblo's hands. Navarro and Vázquez reinforce this narrative on several occasions. For instance, in issue #288, page 7, Coronel Fierro is in his hacienda, armed with a rifle and gazing out the window as native drums echo in the distance.

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[112] Alan Knight, "The Mexican Revolution. Vol. I. Porfirians, Liberals, and Peasants.," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 67, (1987): 36.
[113] Arthur G. Pettit, "Emiliano Zapata's Revolt against the Mexican Government, 1908-1911," *The Historian* 31, no. 2 (January 1969): 242.

Though natives are not present in this particular panel, the creators reference the playing of drums to remind the reader that natives have issued a death sentence to all landowning hacendados. I want to point out that the playing of the drums is a significant component of this plot. In a stereotypical portrayal of indigenous practices, the natives use the drums as their primary form of communication. Aside from Zulema and Coronel Fierro's servants, natives are rarely allowed to speak or display their complexity. The creators' silencing of natives in both dialogue and narrative mirrors how indigenous people's voices in Mexico have been ignored and violently silenced. This becomes evident when Elsa asks her father (and the reader): "*¿Por qué nos amenazan los nativos si hemos sido buenos con ellos…?*" [Why do the natives threaten us if we have been good to them?"]. Coronel Fierro puts his rifle away and responds: "¡*Alguien los debe alentar hacia el delito, por motivos que no conocemos…*!" [Someone must be encouraging them to commit the crime, for reasons we don't know!]. Coronel Fierro and Elsa's bewilderment over natives' "sudden" declaration of war speaks to Mexican elites' indifference and fear to indigenous peoples' demands for democracy. In effect, Navarro and Vázquez present a narrative that indigenous people's anger towards the government and landowning classes was unmerited– a narrative that contradicted reality.

The 1960s and 1970s were a period of unprecedented violence in Mexico. This period, known as the "Mexican dirty war," references the internal conflicts between the Mexican PRI-ruled government and urban and peasant guerrilla groups. In Guerrero, for instance, armed campesino and indigenous guerrilla groups mobilized to protest the injustices and authoritarianism of the Mexican government. Local citizens grew increasingly frustrated at government policies on land usage and environmental resources that benefitted regional political

and economic elites.[114] According to O'Neill Blacker, two major economic projects that demonstrated the consequences of state-sponsored modernization were the Rio Balas Dam and the expansion of Acapulco as an international tourist destination.[115] The land was taken away from peasants and forests were cut down by foreign timber companies, displacing entire rural communities and increasing private land-ownership concentration.[116] In 1971, government efforts to end the militarization of rural communities and defeat guerrilla forces in Guerrero intensified during the administration of Luis Echeverria (1970-1976). This led to the persecution, illegal detention, and "disappearance" of hundreds of campesinos. According to Jorge Mendoza García and Victoria J. Furio, official discourse branded guerrilla groups as criminals and the national press echoed that view.[117] In a speech delivered during the 1974 presidential report, Echeverria asserted that guerrillas were "victims of violence [...] easily manipulated by hidden national or international political interests, who [saw] in them irresponsible tools for acts of provocation against our institutions."[118] The Mexican government delegitimized campesinos and indigenous peoples' political struggle by implying that their demands resulted from being manipulated. As reflected in Kalimán, the Mexican media helped support and disseminate these views.

A scene in Kalimán that mirrors this discourse is in issue #300, page 23. In this scene, Kalimán rescued Solín after he was captured and brought to the native's ceremonial grounds to be sacrificed. The creators' portrayal of the natives as bloodthirsty savages parallels the Mexican

[114] O'Neill Blacker, "Cold War in the Countryside: Conflict in Guerrero, Mexico," *The Americas* 66, no. 02 (2009): 185.
[115] Ibid, 186.
[116] Blacker, "Cold War in the Countryside," 186.
[117] Jorge Mendoza García and Victoria J. Furio , "Reconstructing the Collective Memory of Mexico's Dirty War: Ideologization, Clandestine Detention, and Torture," *Latin American Perspectives* 43, no. 6 (2016): 128.
[118] Ibid, 131.

state and elites' view of indigenous people as threats to modernization and dominant culture. This one-sided portrayal of the natives in the comic book, I argue, served to reinforce the idea of the indigenous person as the lesser other to justify their domination. Such is the case in issue #300, page 23, when Kalimán unmasked Luzbel and discovered that the "native chief" was a white man who had tinted his skin brown to appear native. Additionally, in issue #314, page 7, the reader learns that the natives were manipulated by another foreign white man pretending to be a native. Kalimán unmasked Naraka and discovered that Araña Negra had disguised himself as a "native god" to fool natives into turning against the hacendados. In his analysis of American comic books, Jeremy M. Carnes focuses on the "representational logics" of indigeneity and whiteness. Drawing from anthropologist Circe Sturm's work *Becoming Indian*, Cranes highlights the "racelessness of whiteness; that is, [how] whiteness operates as a racially blank canvas that can adopt racial identities as necessary to maintain control."[119] In the case of Kalimán, Luzbel and Araña Negra's ability to "play Indian" emphasizes the "mutability of whiteness and the subalternity of indigeneity."[120] Furthermore, by revealing that Luzbel and Naraka were foreign white men pretending to be natives, the creators reaffirm the narrative that the people, "el pueblo," have been deceived by foreign political interests that have used them as "tools of provocation" against the Mexican institution.

An example of this is present in issue #308 on page 20. Luzbel ordered the natives to attack all the neighboring haciendas in the region. I want to highlight the visual language the creators use in this scene (see Figure 5). The top panel shows a group of natives approaching a hacienda, clamoring for "death to all white men." The natives are illustrated with war paint on

[119] Jeremy M Carnes, "'The Original Enchantment: Whiteness, Indigeneity, and Representational Logics in The New Mutants," in *Unstable Masks: Whiteness and American Superhero Comics* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2020), 67.
[120] Ibid, 68.

their faces and carrying bows, arrows, and spears. The bottom panel shows a woman playing with her children as the hacendado stands in the background, talking to a native worker. The text in the panel reads: “many innocent [people] will die that day.” It is interesting to see how native people are described as “murderous rabid beasts” while the elite family is referenced as “innocentes” and drawn with blonde or light-colored hair.

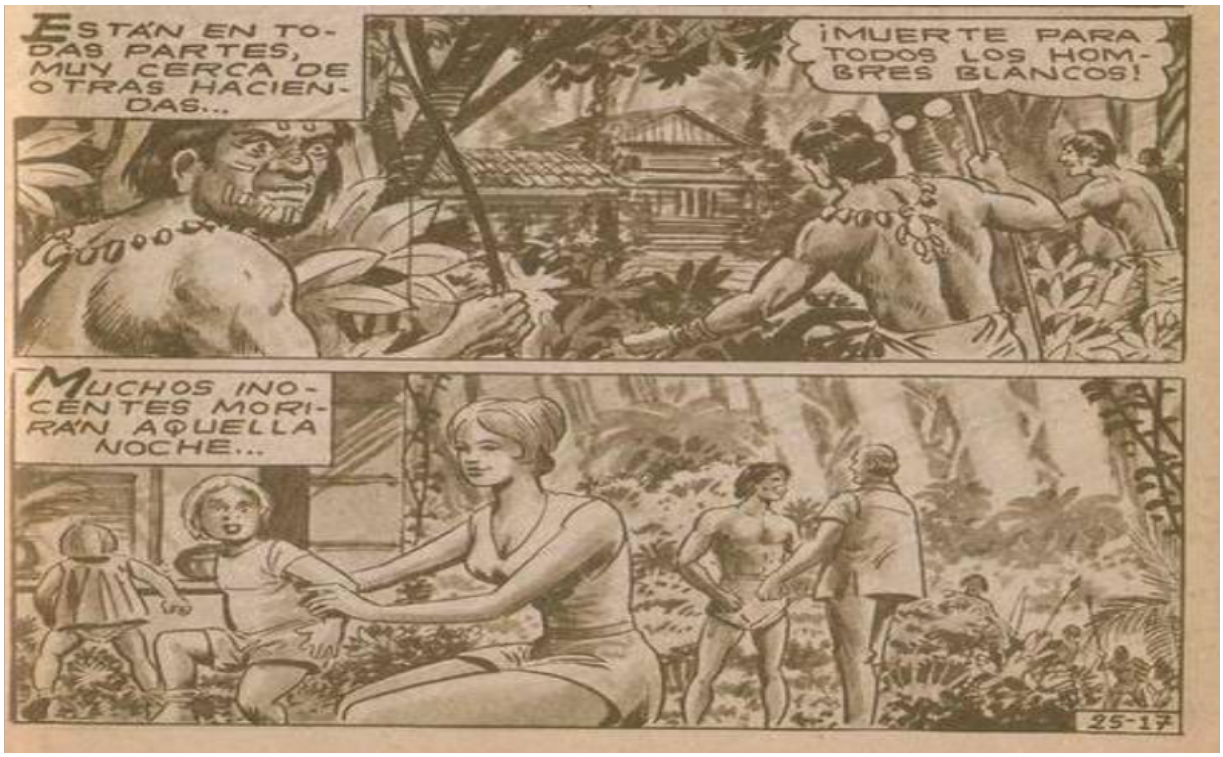

Figure 5. Issue #308: the natives destroy the Haciendas.

The juxtaposition between the image of the “violent” native and the “innocent” white elite family provides the reader with codes and signs of power associated with whiteness. These white codes are also evident through the creators' engagement with the white savior trope. A prominent example of this trope is in issue #314 on page 18, when Kalimán returned the lands to the natives with the condition that they became peaceful people and forgot about their pagan beliefs and practices.

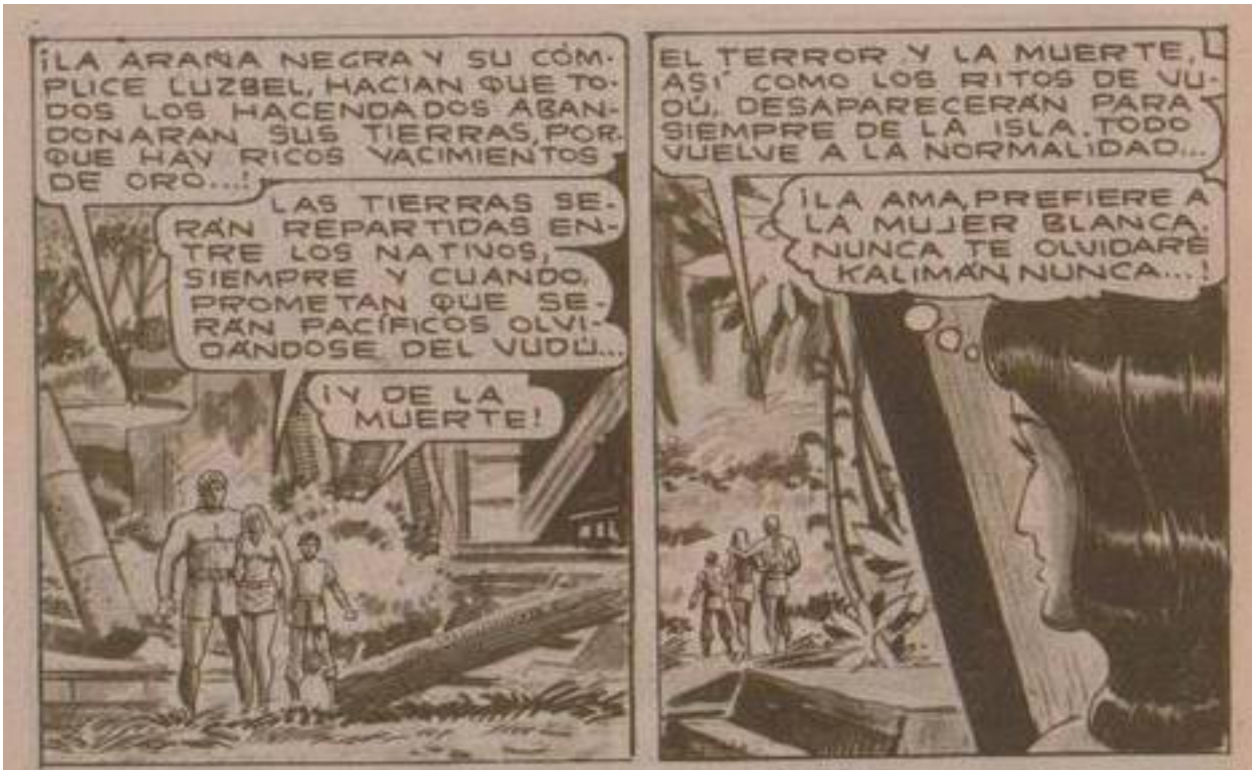

Figure 6. Issue #315: Kalimán redistributes the land.

I want to point out that Kalimán's cultural mission to save the indigenous community mirrors Mexico's educational and cultural efforts in the 1920s to integrate the Indian into the nation. As a result, Kalimán conditionally giving natives the land reinforces the belief that disenfranchised communities need strong, capable white leaders to create change—guides who light the way and rescue them from their helplessness, and in this case, from their own savageness.

Furthermore, Kalimán's concession that natives become "peaceful" people in exchange for land mirrors the Mexican government's "willingness" to provide rural areas with state resources and a new land redistribution program in the 1970s to prevent rebellions.[121] What is interesting about Kalimán being the one to give the land back is how it deviates from the image

[121] Francisco Alonso, "A History of State Repression in Guerrero, Mexico," ROAR Magazine, December 14, 2014, https://roarmag.org/essays/iguala-ayotzinapa-guerrero-repression/.

of the revolucionario Zapata, a mestizo peasant, demanding "Tierra y Libertad." Instead of having the natives defeat Araña Negra and reclaiming the lands for themselves, the creators opted to have Kalimán be the one to save the day. As a result, the narrative changes. Indigenous people get their land back, not because it is their political right, but because of a benevolent white mestizo. This image of Kalimán as the benevolent white mestizo also differentiates him from the other white men in the comic book. Like in Rivera's murals, Navarro and Vázquez illustrate European whiteness as the conquistador and oppressor. Through Kalimán, the creators reconstruct the white Mexican mestizo as benevolent, cultured, educated, and morally superior. As this thesis has outlined, Mexican officials and elites wanted to reconstruct and transform the nation and the Mexican national identity in their whiteness. The character of Kalimán allowed elites to communicate ideas of whiteness, racial alterity, modernity, and belonging in an accessible and entertaining format.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to examine how white Mexican elites constructed and popularized the image of the Mexican white mestizo in Mexican comic books. This was accomplished by analyzing a popular 1960s Mexican comic book, Kalimán, El Hombre Increible, within larger discussions of twentieth-century Mexico's political, cultural, and history. Chapter two, "How the Mexican State Talk to the People," aimed to set the foundation for this thesis by explaining the various political alliances and clashes that arose between Mexican officials and elites to construct and control the image of the nation and Mexican national identity. As stated in this chapter, the Mexican state's commitment to education and dissemination of nationalist themes and folkloric motifs through murals, radio, and a growing publishing industry helped set the infrastructure for Mexican comic books like Kalimán to communicate discourses of whiteness, otherness, morality, and modernity in an engaging format. However, Kalimán is an interesting case because the character represents a disruption from the revolutionary constructions of the nation. Chapter three, “Mexican Elites Construct the White Mestizo,” focused on how Mexican elites constructed the white mestizo through Kalimán by creating an “oriental” character that could look white but not be perceived as white. I argued that Kalimán mestizo whiteness is only possible within a Mexican understanding of mestizaje. As scholars Emiko Saldívar, Monica Moreno Figueroa, Christina A. Sue, and others have argued, the ideology of mestizaje served as a powerful conceptual framework for Mexicans to think through ideas of race, class, and culture. Indeed, comic book characters like Kaliman formed part of the moral education of the masses, perpetually normalizing anti-black and anti-indigenous racism while advancing the Mexican white mestizo as the exceptional other.

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