The Colonizers and Their Colonized

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ABSTRACT

This study is concerned with the Self/Other dichotomy, originally formulated by scholars of South Asian history in the context of European imperialistic treatments of the peoples whom they colonized for centuries, as applied to Mexican history. I have chosen some visual, cinematic, and literary representations of indigenous and other dispossessed peoples from both colonial and post-colonial Mexico in order to gain some insights into the vision of the powerless, (the "Other"), held by the powerful (the colonizers, whether internal or external), especially, but not exclusively, in the context of race. Some public and private works of Mexican art from the 18th , 19th. and the 20th centuries are used to understand the perceptions of the Other in Colonial Mexico City, at the time of Independence, in state-sponsored pre and post-Revolutionary spectacles representing indigenous peoples, cinematic representations of the marginalized and the dispossessed from the Golden Age of Mexican cinema, and in the representation of the marginalized in the literary and photographic works of Juan Rulfo. I conclude that an ambivalent mixture co-existed in Mexican culture through the centuries, on the one hand, honoring the blending that is expressed in the word "mestizaje", and on the other, adhering to a thoroughly Eurocentric world view. This ambivalence persisted from the 18th century through Independence and the Revolution and its aftermath, albeit in different forms.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

Mexico presents an interesting contrast to the United States with respect to the history of race since colonization. The 16th century Spanish conquerors, and the colonizers who followed them, acknowledged the offspring of their unions with indigenous women, setting a tradition that resulted, by the 20th century, in mixed race peoples becoming the major component of the Mexican population. Despite this, there remained a sense in the culture that Europe and those of European descent were still the ideal towards which Mexico aspired, while from time to time, there were paradoxical displays, honoring the ethnic diversity that was New Spanish/Mexican reality. In light of this ambivalence, I have examined some literary and artistic examples of the perception of the colonizers, internal or external, of those whom they marginalized.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the memory of my mother and my father, who each loved language, and books, and talking about meaning.

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My biggest thanks goes to my advisor, Vinodh Venkatesh, without whom none of this would have happened. From gently, but firmly and persistently, persuading me that I, a senior citizen and a faculty member near retirement, could actually get a graduate degree in his subject to guiding me along this new educational path, he has been patient, tactful, and very supportive. I have learned so much from him, both one on one, and in those grueling intensive summer school classes! Any faculty member who is a consistent source of such energetic and perceptive insistence that one think hard, (even on the fourth hour of a summer's afternoon class!) is a very special kind of teacher.

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INTRODUCTION

> The colonial experience has outlived decolonization and continues to be related significantly to the concerns of our own time. (Guha 42)

The quote above is from an essay by Ranajit Guha entitled "Subaltern Studies: Projects for Our Times and Their Convergence." Both the title of the essay and the quote encapsulate the focus of my study. I have chosen some visual, cinematic, and literary representations of indigenous and other dispossessed peoples from both colonial and post-colonial Mexico in order to gain some insights into the vision of the powerless held by the powerful (the colonizers, whether internal or external), especially, but not exclusively, in the context of race. I present some selected perceptions over the centuries of those in power of dispossessed peoples in Mexico, seeking historical continuity where it exists, and attempting to identify fresh beginnings where that is possible. I argue throughout that, over time, those in power in Mexico, be they, depending on the historical context, peninsular, criollo or mestizo, showed an ambivalence which was infused with residual racism and/or class prejudice towards those who were excluded from power, their sometime inclusive rhetoric notwithstanding. What remains as a powerful common thread are the conflicted responses of the colonizers and their mestizo descendants to ancient indigenous cultures of which they have limited understanding. In parallel, or more precisely, in maybe not even conscious opposition, some individual artists made that ambivalence more apparent through a subversion of the colonizing party line.

The context in which I view those relationships owes much to the Self/Other dichotomy originally formulated by Guha, Edward Said, Franz Fanon, and Homi Bhabha in the context of British and French imperialistic treatments of the peoples whom they colonized for centuries, a legacy that persists in post-Independence former colonies. Homi Bhabha invokes the "epic intention of the civilizing mission" (541) of the colonizing British, and a response of the colonized to what he calls mimicry, a process by which, through a combination of education and sheer cultural imperialism, the colonized become some approximate facsimile of those who colonized them. There are many instances of such "civilizing missions" in Mexican history, not the least of which was the original evangelization. In the pages that follow, I discuss some instances of these "missions." Discussing the process, Bhabha argues that "mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge" (541). Bhabha encapsulated the image of the Anglicized Indian emulating the colonizer as a "Mimic Man," raised "through our English School," the "subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" Westernized Indian men (541). According to Bhabha:

> Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal.

> Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power. (541)

This image of the subaltern, the "Other," developed originally in the field of South Asian studies, in particular in the characterizations of the relationship of colonizer to colonized during the British Raj and its aftermath in post-Independence India, has been adapted and applied to Latin American studies by Ileana Rodríguez and Walter Mignolo, among others, to become the area which is now called Latin American subaltern studies. The adaptation is major, however, because of the historical differences between the subject matter, and in fact, its origin in the area of South Asian studies begins to seem somewhat more remote, but nonetheless powerful, upon further study. I enumerate some of the differences between the two specializations below, as a starting point for my study of the colonizers' perception of the colonized in Mexico.

Not the least of the difference between Latin American and South Asian subaltern studies is the relative absence of the voices of the subalterns themselves in the former, and their strong presence in the latter. One does not encounter supremely articulate contemporary, Western-educated, Mayan, for example, voices as an equivalent to Homi Bhabha or the late Edward Said, both of whom were/are highly prominent in 20th and 21st Western academia, and who use the language of European philosophy and French critical theory as a bedrock for their version of subaltern studies. These are Western, but not quite Western, intellectuals who explore subaltern status using their respective ethnic identities and their superb training, and equally superb minds, simultaneously. Walter Mignolo makes the distinction between colonization in South Asia and

Latin America clear: “Contrary to what happened in India, the indigenous population in the Americas was not in a position to accomplish the type of ‘collaboration’ Guha analyzed for the indigenous population of India in complicity with the officers of the British Empire” (439). In other words, Mimic Men that are the equivalent of Bhabha or Said are absent in Mexican cultural circles. In the area of Latin American studies, the field is differently populated, without a comparable resource for scholars. It is categorically not my opinion that identity politics is the sole entry way into an understanding of whichever “Other,” in whichever cultural context, a scholar may wish to study. However, the input of a Said or a Bhabha gives an easier entrée into that world. In that vein, Ileana Rodríguez defines Latin American subaltern studies as most emphatically not “a study of subalterns” (9). Rather, she contends, it is a “radical critique of elite cultures, of liberal, bourgeois, and modern epistemologies and projects, and of their different propositions regarding representations of the subaltern … (and) the incapacity of bourgeois culture to think about its own conditions of discursive production” (9). I have attempted in this study to carve out for examination a small number of works of art and public spectacles that fall within the global aim defined by Rodríguez.

Ambivalence and The Other: First Encounters

According to Mignolo, “the identification of the sixteenth century as the beginning of modernity is a narrative from the social sciences” (435). A crucial starting point for the origin of modernity, as viewed in these terms, in the particular case of Latin America, is the role of

evangelization which was vital to the perception of, and disputes about, the Otherness of indigenous peoples in Latin America, beginning with that sharply defined first encounter documented in Columbus's journals. Timothy Brennan points out, however, that, since the beginning of colonialism, there have been Western thinkers who decried the savage behavior of their countrymen at the time of the Conquest (877). Rodríguez characterizes historical documents as "constructed texts," and the work of historians in reading them as looking through "windows, however foggy and imperfect, into peoples' lives" (4). The vivid image of those "foggy and imperfect windows" is particularly apropos in the case of the earliest documents of the Conquest, given that the dubious morality of imperialistic, European racism was questioned from the very beginning of contact between the two "Worlds." The first expression of that opposition, in a very conscious form, came from Bartolomé de Las Casas, an evangelizing friar from the time of the Conquest and the time of the establishment of the *encomenderos*. The version of Columbus's journals that is most readily available to us was actually redacted by De Las Casas, and thus the ambivalence, named "la duda indiana" (Lantigua 316) is on full display in a contemporary document. Scholars have concluded that he actually inserted comments within the text that were critical of what De Las Casas perceived as the brutality of the Conquistadores (Zamora 188).

Thus, ambivalence towards the indigenous Other was present from the beginning of the encounter between the two "Worlds." From the moment of contact between the invaders and the Amerindians whom they encountered, the question for the Europeans of how to regard humans that were so different from themselves arose. In fact, the conundrum, at base, was whether the naked brown people who were encountered on October 12, 1492 and who, according to

Columbus's Journal ("Ellos andan todos desnudos como su madre los parió" [91]), had no system of religious belief ("Me pareció que ninguna secta tenían" [91]), much less the only true Catholic system, could be classified as human at all. For Columbus the people whom he met were promising subjects for enslavement ("Ellos deben ser buenos servidores" [91]), constituting simply living impediments to the riches that the mythology held was easy to hand in the *terra firma* that had been finally been reached.

However, the professed reason for the Columbian adventure and the events that followed was the harvesting of souls and the expansion of territory for Los Reyes Católicos and their successors. Catholicism was De Las Casas's language, conversion his mission, ("Y creo que ligeramente se harían cristianos" [91]) and his argument was based in theology. Yet the premise of his stand against the excesses of the Conquistadores and the enslavement and brutality that followed, rings as oddly contemporary, and humanistic, to our 21st-century ears. His defense of the Amerindians consisted in an insistence that they were human, and therefore, possessed of souls, souls ripe for conversion, and equal to all other soul. His description of the Amerindians is, however, that of the noble savage, a person who has a natural purity, lacking only an awakening

to the life of the spirit in Christ.[1] Race is immaterial, and conversion is everything. Yet, lest we fall into an anachronistic, and falsely sentimental, trap, we must not forget that the pure and unsullied noble savages of De Las Casas's imagination were souls for the taking, in fact, they were souls for his taking. Cultural imperialism was a given for a Dominican missionary, no less than it was for a greedy seeker of gold.[2]

Enrique Dussel sets this period as the beginning of what he calls the "myth of Modernity," or:

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[1] According to Las Casas, the Indian belongs to the "linaje humano" and "Dios les puso en aquellas tierras" (*Brevísima* 9). God has wrought a "venganza de tan grandes injusticias" on the Conquistadores for their sins (9).

[2] De Las Casas' position was challenged in Spain, culminating in a public debate between him and Ginés de Sepulveda in 1550-1551 in Valladolid in which both sides, presented their arguments on "la duda indiana" (Summarized in Duvoils "Introducción" xxi -xxiv). The morality of the excesses of the Conquest and De Las Casas' objections to the behavior of the Spanish, was evidently in sufficient doubt to merit this very public forum.

> the idea of European superiority over the other cultures of the world-began to be sketched out five hundred years ago. Ginés de Sepúlveda was certainly one of the first great ideologists of Occidentalism (the Eurocentrism of modernity) and Bartolomé de Las Casas the creator of the first "counter-discourse" of modernity, established from a global, center-periphery perspective. (Dussel 341)

It is somewhat startling to this reader to encounter the beginnings of modernity couched as also the origin of racism, although they do seem to have arisen during the same time period and in the same place. Since modernity is synonymous with Western values and Western technology, however, the link is actually quite evident. Furthermore, as I have argued above, although the "counter-discourse" alluded to was couched in more humanistic terms than that of the opposing side, it was, nevertheless, a colonizing voice. The subaltern is to be civilized, and not murdered, enslaved or worked to death. The "civilizing mission" described by Bhabha for British India starts in Mexico with religious conversion, and it persists, in various forms over time, becoming quasi-secular with Independence and infused with slightly different rhetoric after the Revolution. However, the fundamental belief that the origin of the highest form of "civilization" and "civilized" people is to be found across the Atlantic does not disappear. This is Dussel's "myth of modernity."

Perhaps, most importantly, an equivalent to the central role of miscegenation in Latin American culture is entirely absent in the discourse of South Asian scholars, and may actually not be a significant part of the culture of post-colonial South Asian states. That "reformed,

recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*" so vividly evoked by Bhabha, metamorphosed over the centuries in Mexico into a majority population of mestizos while the Mexican miscegenation origin story itself remains as a powerful myth, represented in literature and works of art through the 21st century, two of which I discuss in this study. The sexual union of Cortés with his indigenous slave and interpreter best known as La Malinche that has received very different treatments over the centuries, has recently been the subject of rigorous scholarship by Frances Townsend, Camilla Townsend, and Frances Karttunen, among others, including the study of relevant documents in Nahautl. La Malinche is described by an indigenous source as: "Una mujer, de nosotros los de aquí, los viene acompañando, viene hablando en lengua nahual. Su nombre, Malintzin, su casa, Teticpac. Allá en la costa la cogieron*"* (León-Portilla 36). Her linguistic, and diplomatic skills proved invaluable to Cortés (Townsend 42). Bernal Díaz del Castillo, a Spanish chronicler of the time describes her as "Doña Marina, como desde su niñez fue gran señora y cacica de pueblos y vasallos…. Le dieron de noche a los indios de Xicalango y los de Xicalango a los de Tabasco, y los de Tabasco a Cortés" (Díaz 61). It is important to Díaz del Castillo to claim that La Malinche, now transformed into a dutifully Catholic Doña Marina, is of noble blood, as though to soften her Otherness through Christian piety and some imagined aristocracy. However, her enslavement by the indigenous and the Europeans alike merits no comment. The "myth of modernity," to use Dussel's term, does not blink at enslavement of the subaltern. The gift of a human being to a Christian also raises no eyebrows for Díaz del Castillo. Likewise, the sexual services provided by indigenous women to the Spaniards do not provoke horror in commentators who, by

definition, were rigorously pious Catholics. (Although, it must be said, some of those unions became marriages, including the eventual marriage of La Malinche to a soldier in Cortés's entourage, more indication of the ambivalent nature of the colonizers' views of the colonized).

From those uneasy unions of male colonizers and the female colonized, arose the ancestors of the 19th-century, mestizo-populated, Mexican state, and, eventually, out of the memory and tradition of that miscegenation, the concepts of mestizaje and mexicanidad which were to be the foundational ideas of post-Revolutionary, 20th century, Mexico.

Mimicry, Mestizaje, and Lo Mexicano in Modern Mexico

The legacy of the origin story is apparent in the Enlightenment-influenced racial classification scheme that existed in colonial Mexico, a scheme that included Afro-Mexicans as well as mestizos, while the terms used for the various racial categories are echoes from medieval Spain, as I discuss below in Chapter 1. According to David Dalton:

> Mimicry extends beyond the public transcript and into the "hidden transcript," which is performed "beyond direct observation by powerholders" (J. C. Scott 4). One example of this within Mexico occurred as state-sponsored discourses of cultural nationalism asserted internal empire—exemplified by the modernization of the indigenous body—as a key

> component of mexicanidad. Mestizo colonizers' own colonized experiences clearly informed their understandings of race and modernity. This complicated history led state officials to assert that national progress could be born only out of projects of racial domination. At least within Mexico, then, the hidden transcript often ceased to be a site of liberation and instead became a space from which the subaltern could articulate their own dreams of imperial grandeur (*Mestizo* 144).

It is not clear to me whether the majority mestizo population can be regarded as exactly "subaltern," as I understand the term, but it is very clear that the tradition of the Spanish colonizers persisted as internal colonialism in post-Independence Mexico, and that their "dreams of imperial grandeur" were expressed as a desire for racial domination. The particular brand of mestizaje, and thus, the cultural reality of Mexico that existed at the time of emancipation, is a direct result of the Spanish colonizers' view of race.

From the 18th century on, however, some individual artists successfully subverted the cultural imperialism of the colonists, while others perpetuated it. Put another way, some artists celebrated the existence of those subalterns who were officially inferior beings to the colonizers. The 18th-century sets called "casta paintings," produced only in New Spain, were intended to depict various races and racial mixtures, as curiosities for those in power. Interest in the casta paintings has grown within the past two decades, with the pioneering work of Ilona Katzew, Susan Deans-Smith, Magali Carrera, and Rebecca Earle. The work of these scholars, especially that of

Earle and Carrera, has highlighted the degree to which the paintings subvert the overtly racist intent of the patrons for whom the artists worked.

In the early 19th century, the theological legacy of colonization supposedly vanished with Independence. That was the claim of the new Mexican state, although the presence of the Church remained powerful, and classification based on race persisted within that institution, as Michael O'Hara has shown. The colonial spirit that lived on in the Mexican state altered in tone with the Revolution, however. Michael Gonzalez has compared a Porfirian public spectacle portraying indigenous people with a comparable event that took place immediately after the Revolution, elegantly illustrating the change in official rhetoric that occurred at that time, from blatant racism to what, superficially, passed for respect for non-Hispanic culture.

With the institution of the post-Revolutionary State, and the promotion of the ideal of a nation-building mestizaje, ambivalence towards the Indian subaltern took on an altered, but nonetheless recognizable, form. Pedro Ángel Palou and Charles Ramírez Berg each analyze the social role of film in early and mid 20th-century Mexico. Their analyses serve as a reference point for my discussion. Ramírez Berg provides invaluable information about the intricacies of the film industry during that Golden Age.[3] Palou has analyzed the expression of the mestizaje model in

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[3] In stark contrast, a fascinating example of the image of the Indian subaltern from popular culture from the mid to late 20th century has been studied by Seraina Rohrer, in the films of María Elena

film and literature, invoking the national miscegenation myth as one source, among others, including the trope of the absent father, which he relates to mestizaje. In the midst of this, the national longing for whiteness persisted as Palou points out: "un país cuya vasta mayoría es mestiza y los blancos una minoría que no obstante son *el fenotipo ideal de la nación*" (107). A rare phenotype remained the ideal, and colonizing discourse persisted, or as Dalton notes, "far from an inclusive, anticolonial construct, mestizaje functioned as a strategy of domination articulated through a European model" (144). That European model was much in evidence in José Vasconcelos's educational reform campaigns of the early 20th century, one manifestation of Vasconcelos' proto-fascistic, utopian, vision of *la raza cósmica*, analyzed afresh by Ignacio Sánchez Prado and Palou.

In this study, I discuss some public and private works of art from the 18th and the 20th centuries, the perceptions of the Other at the time of Independence, state-sponsored pre and post-Revolutionary spectacles representing indigenous peoples, cinematic representations of the marginalized and the dispossessed from the Golden Age of Mexican cinema "buoying nationalistic and statist doctrines" (Dalton 146), "Mexico's right, even duty, to domesticate the Amerindian"

Velasco, in which classic slapstick is used to challenge the internal colonizing discourse of urban Mexico.

(Dalton 157), and finally some examples from mid 20th-century literature, and photography, in which the effects of internal colonialization on the subaltern is made more explicit. Palou's exposition of the expression of the post-Revolutionary ideal of mestizaje in film and literature is my frame of reference for much of my discussion of early and mid-20th century films and literature, as are Amit Thakkar's detailed analyses of Juan Rulfo's work (*Fiction*) and Bill Richardson's acute placement of Rulfo's stories in time and space in his native Jalisco. A recent analysis by Thakkar ("Studium") has now revealed Rulfo's success in deepening his visual depictions of indigenous people with political resonances. I have invoked, (and sometimes disputed!), these scholars' readings throughout.

Chapter 1 is devoted to the 18th-century casta paintings, which were intended to depict various races and racial mixtures, using degrading terminology that originated in medieval Spain. With a growing Enlightenment interest in classification, it became possible to produce secular art that depicted the specifics of Nature, including the racial "taxonomy" of the peoples of New Spain. The paintings' patrons were the clergy of New Spain, well-to-do criollos, and Spanish aristocrats. The people and racial groups depicted in the casta paintings, the subalterns of their day, are rendered with sympathy and precision, subverting the racist Eurocentric, classification terms that they are intended to represent. Some of the very skillful artists who produced the sets were themselves racially mixed, which betokens a stratum of society in Colonial New Spain that, I argue, can be regarded as a harbinger of the foundation of the post-Independence, Mexican, state.

In Chapter 2, I present 19th-century, post-Independence, theories about the origins and perceptions of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, the position of the Church on Indians and their respective languages, and, finally, expressions of these issues in art and politics into the early 20th century, especially immediately before, and directly after, the Mexican Revolution. Public spectacles depicting the indigenous as the Other, from the Porfirian era and in the aftermath of the Revolution are discussed and compared with each other, as are the public murals commissioned by José Vasconcelos for buildings in Mexico City to celebrate the new state, as described by Desmond Rochfort. I argue that a strand of resistance to the inherited racist tradition of the colonizers was very much alive in the early 20th century in Mexico in the post-Revolutionary period, as evidenced by the work of the muralists who were employed by Vasconcelos.

Chapter 3 is devoted for the most part to selected films from the Golden Age of Mexican cinema in which the image of the indigenous subaltern is central. During this period, Mexican film served partially as propaganda for an admixture of cultural myths and political messaging. I examine some cinematic examples, and one related literary one, to understand more about internal colonizing messages concerning Indians, women, and the urban poor in post-Revolutionary Mexico, subalterns all. A refreshing contrast is afforded by the "lowbrow," low-budget, India María films from the 1940s through the 1970s, in which the figure of a risible, but ultimately, triumphant, clumsy Indian woman serves to mock the colonizing *status quo.*

Chapter 4 is devoted to the work of Juan Rulfo, arguably one of the greatest Mexican writers and photographers of his time. His world is the rural, struggling villages and people of

post-Revolutionary Mexico of the mid 20th century. In his short stories, and in his photographs, Rulfo is concerned with the fate of the peasant subaltern, *campesinos*, and Indians alike. The stories in *El llano en llanas* are set in the writer's native Jalisco and are suffused with his ironic commentary on the rural Mexico of his time, his acute sense of place, and his acquired knowledge of, and respect for, the ethnography of his country. We see Rulfo's portraits of indigenous people, presented as dignified outsiders and observers of their Other, the urban Hispanics, the old *civilización y barbarie* dichotomy reborn (or revived). This is a new *lo mexicano*, in a socially committed register that differs from that of official post-Revolutionary rhetoric, and of the films of the Golden Age. In the world created by Rulfo, I argue that the observed are also now the observers. The *campesino* subaltern speaks in the stories and the indigenous subaltern watches in the photographs. This is a new modernity.

My study ends with the work of Rulfo, in the time period when theoretical formulations of la mexicanidad, such as that of Octavio Paz, were beginning to be in vogue. It would be quite a stretch to relate these cultural theories in any literal way to the literary and artistic examples discussed here, although, in some profound sense, they must indeed be related. This is a definite moment in time when the post-Revolutionary state is taking stock of itself, as expressed both philosophically and artistically.

In conclusion, I contend that the colonizing spirit that drove the rulers of New Spain persisted through Independence and the Revolution and its aftermath, albeit in transformed states. Drawing upon the work of Dalton, Earle, Katzew, Palou, Ramírez Berg, Richardson, and Thakkar,

among others, I have examined some visual and literary depictions of race, miscegenation, and class as they were expressed in Colonial and post-colonial Mexico, and argue that clear continuities are apparent from the 18th through the 20th centuries. A subversive ambivalence towards colonialism in the form in which it lingered into the 20th century is a compelling additional facet of that historical thread. Out of that mixture of post-colonialism and ambivalence came *lo mexicano* in its various forms.

CHAPTER 1. RACE AND IDEOLOGY IN 18TH CENTURY MEXICAN CASTA PAINTINGS. REPRESENTATION AND SUBVERSION

The 18th-century sets called "casta paintings," depicting various races and racial mixtures were an exclusive product of New Spain.[4] However, the casta system itself is older, dating back to the period when persons of mixed race began to appear in Imperial Spain's colonies. The idea of

[4] "Established in 1535, New Spain initially included all land north of the Isthmus of Panama under Spanish control, subsequently upper and lower California, the area that is now the central and southwestern portion of the United States, and territory eastward along the Gulf of Mexico to Florida. The Viceroyalty of New Spain was also charged with governing Spain's Caribbean possessions under the jurisdiction of New Spain" ("Viceroyalty of New Spain").

racial mixing embodied in the term *mestizaje* came from Spain, stemming from the infamous notion of "pure (or purification of) blood" or *la limpieza de sangre*.[5] With the arrival of the Bourbons in Spain and its colonies, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and an attendant growing Enlightenment interest in classification, it became possible to produce secular art that depicted the specifics of Nature, including the racial "taxonomy" of the peoples of New Spain. Painting as a profession was not highly regarded in New Spain, and so it was open to men of mixed race, such as the prominent artists, José de Ibarra and Miguel Cabrera (Katzew 202). In fact, casta classification itself was not especially rigid in the New Spain of the eighteenth century. It was possible to declare oneself "Spanish" if, over a lifetime, a person had risen to a high level in his profession. It was possible for a line of descent classified originally as Indian-Spanish (*mestizo*) to become transformed into a "pure" Spanish line after multiple "infusions" of Spanish "blood," but this improvement in status was ostensibly not possible for persons of African descent. However, a

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[5] "Purity of blood (*pureza* [*limpieza*] *de sangre*) was an obsessive concern that originated in mid-15th-century Spain, on the basis of the biased belief that the unfaithfulness of the "deicide Jews," (god-killing Jews) not only had endured in those who converted to Catholicism but also had been transmitted by blood to their descendants, regardless of their sincerity in professing the Christian faith" (Maryks).

demonstration of the superiority of those of actual Spanish descent was obligatory for casta painting. Nonetheless, many casta pictures depict the humanity of each subject and each family, regardless of their respective taxonomic status, except, in some cases, for persons of African descent, and for non-Christians, in other words, unconverted Amerindians. The humanization of the images of races and classes in 18th-century casta painting was a combined consequence of historical circumstances, the relatively humble origins of its practitioners, and the development of a mature New Spanish art with its own history. In summary, eighteenth century casta painting reflects the contradictory elements of the relatively flexible, yet historically rigid, society of the New Spain of that period, representational and subversive simultaneously.

An example of the official cultural imperialism of the period was expressed in an 18th century European view of miscegenation in Latin America, in a 1774 history by Edward Long, a contemporary Englishman, in which he declaims: “Let any man turn his eyes to the Spanish American dominions, and behold what a vicious, brutal, and degenerate breed of mongrels has been there produced, between Spaniards, Blacks, Indians, and their mixed progeny” (327). The notion that being of more than one race assures that a person is “vicious, brutal and degenerate” strikes the modern reader as outlandish and morally offensive. This is the world in which the casta paintings were produced. The paintings were produced exclusively in New Spain between 1711 and 1790, with only one example from outside New Spain, in Peru. Most of the paintings consist of 16 small panels, each with an inscription. Deans-Smith explains: “The series usually depict a man, woman, and child, spatialized according to a hierarchy differentiated by race and status, the latter increasingly represented by occupation as well as dress by the mid-eighteenth

century" (171). The series depict the process of *mestizaje*, and the inscriptions, showing the taxonomy of the casta system, together with additional visual documentation on professions traditionally associated with each casta, and some natural history of the region. Since the artists' patrons were criollos and native-born Spaniards (*peninsulares*), the pictures were intended for that elite public. I will examine the historical context in which the casta style appeared, the various contradictions that existed between the racial identity of the painters and the classification terms used, and, the pictures themselves as works of art. I will argue that the conflicting functions of the casta paintings genre—to represent "scientifically" a highly-ideological system of classification based on race—exposed the underlying instability of that system itself. The artists themselves were not mere illustrators for hire, but rather produced expressive works of art which explored issues of identity that could not have been merely neutral or "scientific" to the artists themselves, many of whom began as possible "objects" of such ideological classification but whose work as artists actually put them in positions to overcome such social classification in their own lives. Thus, while the paintings certainly were designed to represent and to re-enforce an ideological racial typology, and were considered valuable for that reason, they also called that same ideology into question, subverting it both through the biographies of the artists themselves and in the sympathetic ways in which they artistically represented supposedly inferior racial types and, above all, persons of mixed race.

Historical Origins. Two Republics, Emergence of One Mixed Population.

When the colony of New Spain was established in the sixteenth century, two "republics" were set up, one Indian, and one Spanish (Carrera 34). Within the Spanish republic, every citizen

had privileges, regardless of his original social status in Spain. According to Katzew: "One of the most significant divisions of Spanish society was that between nobles and plebeians, which the Spaniards brought with them to the New World … Spaniards became the aristocracy of Mexico, regardless of their origins or occupation" (39). In fifteenth-century Spain, society was divided into *pecheros* and *vilanos* with the former class paying taxes and the latter being exempt. When Mexico City was built, two corresponding separate parts were constructed with a transformation of Spanish class distinction into racial terms. The *traza,* where the *peninsulares* and criollos were to live, was well kept, while the barrio, where the *indio*s were to live, was neglected. According to Magali Carrera:

> The *repúblicas* conceptual and political separation was given physical form as the capital city was built … Initially, for protection from the Indians, the Spaniards lived in an area … called the *traza,* where the houses were made of well- dressed stone …The Indians' section had ramshackle housing, haphazardly arranged streets, and limited municipal services. (34)

However, in other parts of the city, the *parían* and the *zócalo*, sections of the Plaza Mayor, this separation was non-existent. Markets were held for all in these areas, regardless of social status (Carrera 35). A pictorial depiction of the market appears in a 1763 casta painting by Miguel Cabrera (Fig. 1), where an Indian woman appears as a seller of fabrics, which are marked as Indian, together with a Spanish man, whose face is hidden, indicated as such solely by his clothing. The man is presented in the inscription, as the father of the girl that the woman, her

mother, is holding by the hand. The woman looks intently, and a little warily, at the father of her child, but with a strong sense of her own strength and dignity. The man has a hand on his daughter's garment and is gesturing towards the woman with his other hand. The scene appears to be a conversation between the parents. The warm tones of the side of the scene occupied by the woman and her stall of highly colored fabrics contrast with the cooler shades of the space occupied by the man, and yet, his hand on his daughter's shawl bridges the gap between the races. One hesitates to infer an equal relationship between the couple, given the historical circumstance, but, on the other hand, the grace of the female figure, and the attention to detail lavished on her and her stall betoken both respect for her station in life and respect for her as part of the couple.

The inferior space occupied by the Indians in the social hierarchy that was 18th century New Spain, was, however, much better than the position held by those of African descent. 36, 500 Africans were imported into New Spain between 1521 and 1594 to be the property of either *peninsulares* or *criollos*. As the prized property of their white masters, the enslaved Africans were part of the Spanish republic, but without any civil rights, as one would expect. "For several generations of white Spaniards, to own African slaves functioned as a mark of superior status, because they were viewed as material possessions" (Katzew 40). The historical root of the prejudice against Mexicans of African descent was Medieval Europe and an apocryphal Christian myth of the ancestry of Africans: "The Black race stemmed from Cush, a son of Cain, and grandson of Noah, claiming that black skin was settled on Cush and his descendants through a curse uttered by Noah" (Carrera 11). The Africans were the cursed descendants of Cush and the stain of slavery resonated with the permanent stain attributed to Jews and Muslims in Spain, and the idea of *la*

limpieza de sangre. According to Martínez, "in the 16th century, race attached itself, like a parasite, to religion" (26).

To enter into the world of the casta paintings, it is necessary to understand the terminology used in the inscriptions that accompany each work. Multiple, specialized terms were used to designate social and racial status in New Spain, terms which reflected the racial complexities of seventeenth and eighteenth-century colonial life. To understand these terms, the casta system needs to be placed in its historical context. With this understanding, its' use in the inscriptions on the casta paintings becomes clearer. The casta system was already in place in New Spain in the seventeenth century. According to Martínez (25-28), the terms *calidad, castizo, casta*, *mestizo* and *morisco* had long histories in the Spanish-speaking world. Some of these terms (for example, *calidad*, *castizo*, and *morisco*) have no direct English equivalents. In the early days of the Empire, a child of Amerindian and Spanish parents was classified as Spanish, but, around 1530, the cultural climate began to change, and the category of *mestizo* was created. The term *mestizo* began to be associated with illegitimacy around that same time as well. As *mestizo* and *mulato* did not fall into the original categories of Spanish, Indian, or African, the new category of *sociedad de castas* or *sistema de castas* was invented in the seventeenth century

According to Katzew, the *sistema de castas* "developed out of the essentially medieval European idea of the natural hierarchy of man … This system existed concurrently with others … *gente de razón* (rational people) versus *los indios* … (o) *gente decente* (decent folks) versus the plebs" (43), the plebs being the equivalent of the *villanos* de Spain translated into racial categories

in New Spain. It is interesting that the word *razón* was used to define the criollos and the *peninsulares*. The clear implication is that those who are not white lack what we might call intelligence, or, perhaps, decency or uprightness, words which can connote honorable living in English.[6] The entire system was quite simply a hierarchy in which each person had an assigned place, based on the proximity of him or her to whiteness, which was equal to being Spanish. "Caste terms were claims about an individual's proximity to colonial power, expressed through a language of lineage" (Earle 434). Carrera cites Francisco Ajofrin, a friar who traveled to New Spain in the eighteenth century who disapproved of the racial mixing there "castas de gentes, ha resultado en diversas generaciones, que mexcladas todas, ha corrompido las costumbres en la gente popular" (36). Racial mixing is viewed as having corrupted the way of life of the common people, although it is not clear who those "common people" might have been, since all Spaniards had elite status in the colony, by definition. It is, perhaps, a simple expression of the horror of the Spanish visitor at the notion of miscegenation, which he would have brought with him from the Spain of the Inquisition. Katzew makes the historical context clearer: "The stability of the Spanish social order rested on the difference between Spaniards and Indians, the maintenance of internal stability within each republic, and the effective restriction of the rights and obligations of the Africans and the

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[6] Such translations are, by their nature, imprecise, since it is very difficult to avoid anachronisms, not to speak of rendering the (imperfectly understood) flavor of 18th-century New Spain into 21st-century US English!

racially mixed" (40). The orderly division, and attendant racial segregation, set up by the colonists, depended on clear distinctions and equally clear social separations. The reality on the ground in New Spain was very different, and much more complex, then this supposedly neat ordering of the population by race and class.

The terms *mestizo* and *mulato* pre-date the notion of the casta system. They appeared in the seventeenth century, persisting at least until Independence. In Spain, the term *mestizo* carried with it the sense of interbreeding of different animal species. *Mulato* is derived from the Spanish word for mule, which is a sterile hybrid animal. a "sport of Nature."[7] The racial insult is clear in the invocation of mere beasts, and monstrous beasts who cannot reproduce, into the bargain, in the case of the word *mulato.* The clear implication in the unfounded notion that the union of black and white humans is a sterile offspring is, in modern biological terms, that the two races are not the same species, as in the union, for example of a horse and a donkey, the offspring of which is an actual (sterile) mule. Thus, the union of white and non-white is a supposedly "unnatural" mating. "Nature" is a very fraught term.

Christian prejudice was also a major contributor to the anti-African racism of Spain, and subsequently, of its colonies. The term *morisco*, for a person of mixed African and Spanish

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[7] "lusus naturae" = mutant, variant, variation, freak, freak of nature, deviant, monstrosity, monster, deformity.

descent is derived from *moro*, carrying with it the possibility that the person was of Muslim descent, since his or her ancestors came from Africa. The tradition of *la limpieza de sangre* is evident here, with the idea that *la sangre impura* (impure blood) of one's, in this case, African, ancestors remains as a permanent "stain" on the descendants of that line, the same as the "stain" on persons descended from Jews and Muslims in Spain: "To those contaminated with the Negro strain … be it the first union with an Indian or Spaniard or a mixture of those … even the effective chemistry cannot purify" (Deans-Smith and Katzew 1, citing Pedro Alonso O'Crouley, 1740-1817).[8] Furthermore, since the first Africans of New Spain were enslaved, there was no proof that their conversion to Catholicism was voluntary, a (much abused) pre-requisite for true conversion from the time of the Conquest, indeed, one would imagine that it was most likely to be otherwise. In addition, since slavery most likely meant that family bonds had been ruptured, it might not be possible to investigate a person in order to detect supposed Afro-Mexican genealogy at all, and, therefore, searching for "stains" of any kind, be they racial or religious, might not even have been feasible.

In contrast, the term *castizo* was used in Spain to denote a person of good breeding. A *castizo* line, people living in New Spain of mestizo and Spanish descent, could become "purified"

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[8] The proposed impossibility of "purification," of the washing away of the "stain" of African ancestry, is close to that of the "one drop rule" of the Spanish colonists' neighbors to the North.

into a white line, a transformation that was not permitted for a *morisco* line; "African–descended people could not be recognized as pure because ... blackened blood (*sangre denegrida*) never disappears, because experience has shown that, by the third or fourth generation, it pullulates, so that two whites produce a black, called *tornatrás*," (Martínez 39, citing officials of the Mexican Inquisition 1773), see Figure 2, an earlier work by Juan Rodríguez Juárez. Despite this unsavory context, the figures in the 1715 Juárez painting appear prosperous and unafraid. The woman is wearing a richly detailed garment and seems tranquil and caring. Both parents are looking at their daughter, whom the father is entertaining with music. The entire composition leads the eye of the observer towards the child, with the darker background behind the (whiter) woman giving way diagonally across the canvas to the lighter, blue background that highlights the darker-skinned father and their child. Despite the fact that, according to the casta scheme, this union is not a beneficial one, since there is no gain in whiteness for the child, there is no sense of degradation or shame in the relations of the family depicted here. Dignity, self-respect, and a sense of unity prevail.

Yet, the racist myth persisted, despite the humanity shown in the actual paintings. An English visitor to Spain made this observation about some casta paintings that he was shown in 1772: "This remarkable circumstance of the children of almost white parents, as specified in the tenth and sixteenth races being quite black, was confirmed to me by don Antonio de Ulloa at Sevilla, but as I cannot pretend to demonstrate it, I leave it as I found it" (Deans-Smith 190-91). It is possible that this belief, the genetic reality of which occurs so seldom, (and can go both ways), as to be almost non-existent, was based on a fear of the potential political power of Afro-

Mexicans in eighteenth century New Spain.[9] Although the *criollos* and the *peninsulares* used the categories and insulting terms of the casta system, according to Katzew (44), it was rare in the cases of the plebeians. Insulting terms such as *tente en el aire* (suspended in the air) and *salta/torna atrás* (going backwards, see Figure 2) were reserved for unions that did not increase whiteness between, for example, the offspring of a mestizo and an Afro-Mexican. A union that did not result in an increase in whiteness provoked such insults and was also associated with poverty. This is illustrated in Figure 3, by Cabrera, in which both the father's (he is a *lobo*) and son's clothes are rags (the son is a *coyote*). Despite the lowly status of the group, according to casta standards, we do not see suffering, shame, or degradation here. This is a family of four, in a crowded space, filled with people, in which a plump child of perhaps four or five is urging on a donkey that he is riding, while his handsome, and rather dashing, father is close by the donkey's head. The Indian mother looks fondly at the father of her children, the younger of whom is strapped to her back. In the language of that 18th century Englishman cited above, these may be "mongrels," but they do not seem to be suffering because of it. The casta system is being represented but subverted at the same time.

The imaginary threat of *sangre negra* and the emphasis on the castas in the eighteenth

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[9] In the era of genomics and DNA testing, we know that all humans are mixed. The possibility that white-appearing parents could produce a darker-skinned child is as equally probable as the reverse.

century may have been the expression of anxiety on the part of *criollos* and *peninsulares* over the possibility of a future loss of control of New Spain (Katzew 39). The desire to keep the racial classes separate was sufficiently important for the authorities in New Spain that it was reflected in the method used by the churches to record life events. In the seventeenth-century, the churches kept separate records for whites, Amerindians, and castas, while the supposedly rigid system was actually becoming less and less stable. In fact, towards the beginning of the eighteenth-century, white women began to marry non-white men, even though the racial and social categories from the past persisted, as we see in the casta paintings: "By the end of the 18th century, ca. 25% of the population was racially mixed" (Katzew 40). With this change, came the possibility of defining oneself in terms of *calidad*, an idea that was not exactly synonymous with race. *Calidad* was conceived of as having many components, comprising the person's profession, his virtue, his honor, and his mental agility (*agilidad*): "By the early eighteenth century, the formal casta system in Mexico City had broken down, with racial terminology in flux. Individuals manipulated their own racial classifications over time and attempted to raise the status of themselves and their offspring" (Cline 222). With this loosening of the rigid casta system, came a new term, *limpieza de oficio,* which was related to *calidad*, but resonating, also, with the now centuries- old notion of purification, or cleanliness of one's ancestry (Martínez 28) attainable, now, on the basis of achievement.

Representing Difference: "Science," Ideology, and Casta Paintings

At the same time, perhaps because of the racial mixing which was increasing during that time, the ruling classes began to be fascinated with the human "Other" as a part of Natural History. From this new interest arose a desire for artistic depictions of the taxonomy of these Others, which took the form of the casta paintings, ostensibly illustrations of the rigid social hierarchy including the multiple pejorative terms described above, which were incomprehensible to foreigners. The paintings were very popular in New Spain, and in Spain itself. Richard Twiss, an Englishman, wrote in 1772:

> In several houses in the seaport towns of Spain, I observed paintings of the different colored races of beings, which are produced by the Spaniards intermixing with the Indians in America, and under the paintings were inscribed the names of those races . . . I caused the inscriptions which are under sixteen pictures I saw in Malaga to be copied; they are as follows, though they may appear somewhat unintelligible. (332-33)

Despite this great fascination, there was great fear as well. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the colonial authorities were worried about the possibility of an alliance being formed between the Afro-Mexicans and the Amerindians against the ruling class. There was good cause for their concern because, in 1692, there was a rebellion of the Amerindians, together with other oppressed classes, against their rulers. The market in the *zócalo* was robbed and the mob set fire to the Viceroy's palace: "When Indians and castas attacked the palace, they shouted 'Death to the Spaniards' and 'Is this not our land?' Why do the Spaniards want it?'" (Katzew 42). Before that, there had been two other uprisings, one in 1611 and another in 1624:

"In 1611, the burial of a black woman purportedly flogged to death by her master led to a major Riot in Mexico City that gathered approximately 1500 Africans in ardent protest" (Katzew 41). These rebellions presage the Independence movement which started at the end of the eighteenth century. It is interesting that the colonial authorities did succeed in maintaining control of New Spain throughout the eighteenth century. It is likely that the reforms set in place by the Bourbons, which consolidated and increased the power of the *peninsulares* in the colony at that time, were a major reason.

The changes brought about the Bourbons in New Spain were part of a twofold effort: to increase the productivity of the colony, and to present the Empire to the outside world as a modern, Enlightenment state. Bourbon government was established in Spain in 1700, with reign of Phillip V, the nephew of Louis XIV of France. The first casta series was produced in 1715 by Juan Rodríguez Juárez (see Figure 2, for an example). Phillip's successor, Charles III, (who reigned from 1759 to 1788) was more ambitious in his desire to change the method of government of the colonies. The Bourbon kings' primary focus in reforming New Spain was to organize and better control the colony in such a way as to eliminate disorder and crime so that the colony would produce more revenue for the Spanish Crown. In this, we see that "many Bourbon reformist policies designed to develop metropolitan and colonial resources emphasized the need to eradicate vagabondage and drunkenness, to educate and train the populace, and to improve hygiene and sanitation, problems shared by bureaucrats in both Spain and America" (Deans-Smith 177). It is certainly true that the reforms were successful, from the point of view of public revenue. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, revenue from New Spain was two million

pesos per year, while by the end of that century, it was 23 million pesos per year (Carrera 32). One of the consequences of the Bourbon reforms was an enrichment of the *peninsulares* and a decrease in the power of both the criollos and the Church (Carrera 32). Such a shift in the power structure away from the criollos may have increased their sense of a Mexican, as opposed to a Spanish, identity, with more resentment of the *peninsulares*, culminating in the struggle for Independence early in the nineteenth century. In fact, Catelli cites evidence that the authorities in Spain chose whom to send to New Spain partially on the basis of the candidate having no family ties in the colony, increasing the chances that that Spanish official would remain apart from the criollo classes, and reinforce the separateness of the *peninsulares* from those whom they were sent to govern.

An obsession with natural history and classification, or taxonomy, was a guiding principle of the Enlightenment, and the interest in the casta system, and the paintings that depicted it, was a logical extension of that cultural focus.[10] Casta paintings were actually included late in the

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[10] "Philip V established the Royal and Public Library of Madrid, in which he gathered books, manuscripts, and other curiosities. A royal order of 1712 authorized the collection of books and rare artifacts from the American colonies. Orders were sent to viceroys, (and) governors, to collect 'unusual things, be they minerals, animals...or of any other genus that is not very common, but extraordinary for its species, for its size, or for other properties' Images or knowledge of los cuadros de castas may have caught the attention of Viceroy Linares since he commissioned a

century in the Gabinete Natural in Madrid (founded in 1771) together with exhibitions of the flora, fauna and geology of New Spain. It must be said that the implication that non-white human populations can be classified by white rulers as one would plants or non-human animals, strikes this 21st-century scientist, at least, as barbaric. An important point arises from one's repulsion at this notion. It is crucial to understand that although we, as moderns, have an image of the Enlightenment as the dawn of an age of reason and methodical scientific inquiry, and, so, very close to us in spirit, it was, in fact, a period quite distant from us in terms of fundamental ideas: Deans-Smith states: "Natural history, rather than a neutral satisfaction of intellectual curiosity, was in fact deeply complicit in the mechanisms of empire 'the scientific enterprise of ordering the natural world could help pave the way for the imperial mission of ordering other peoples and cultures" (177).[11] According to him: "A new knowledge of nature was gained against a

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castas set from Juan Rodríguez Juárez" (Deans-Smith "Creating" 181).

[11] Lest we feel too confident about our progress as modern scientists, in particular, and moderns, in general, towards what we now regard as "enlightenment," with a small "e," we should be mindful that acts of barbarism in the name of science are still with us in the modern age. Scientific atrocities of the 20th century, such as the experiments on humans that took place in Nazi Germany, and in the US, the Tuskegee experiments, show us that science remains a potential creature of political and racial ideologies. We do believe in the "neutral satisfaction of intellectual curiosity"

background of social intercourse, while the collections, pieces of fresh information, discoveries and hypotheses which resulted from travels or excursions provided subjects for exchange (which) formed the basis of the networks along which travelled texts and objects" (181).

Nature was all the fashion, and, consequently, casta paintings were in great demand in the Empire: "The commission and/or possession of a set of casta paintings may be construed as a reflection and display of a patron's broader interests and self-presentation as an individual of enlightened sensibility who moved within cultural and intellectual networks inhabited by like-minded individuals such as 'polite naturalists' and 'elegant curiosos'" (Deans-Smith "Creating" 171).[12] Casta paintings were possible also, because Enlightenment views meant that it was

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as Deans-Smith stated, but that does not mean that our culture is immune from the harnessing of the results of that curiosity to terrible ends.

[12] There was, in effect, a competition among European monarchs concerning the importance of their respective art collections. "In order to demonstrate that the Spanish monarchs possessed antiquities collections comparable to those of other European monarchs, Isabel de Farnese (the wife of Phillip V) ordered a scholarly description of the new Museo Real. The (royal) interest in collections may have contributed to the growing popularity of both private and public collections, (among the elite) of which casta paintings were but one object." (Deans-Smith "Creating" 178)

possible for artists in the Spanish Empire to produce secular pictures, with no religious connections. The paintings were exotic objects for Spanish patrons, and a mark of cultural identity for those criollos who produced the works, and for those who bought them (Olson 312), expressing the growing sense of Mexican nationalism that increased in the colony throughout the eighteenth century.

Ideology and Identity: The painters, their works, and family life

A mixture of fascination by the Spanish with "exotic" America, their obsession with *la limpieza de sangre*, and the spirit of the Enlightenment resulted in the appearance of the casta paintings. The persons who appear in the pictures, with few exceptions, are presented as model citizens, inhabitants of an idealized Enlightenment world. Even the poor family shown in Figure 3 is well nourished enough, and the family is united by the obvious tenderness between the parents. The message is that Bourbon policies are so effective that even the lives of poor people are not distressed:

> Familiar tropes of the idle, vulgar, and drunken proclivities of castas are only occasionally depicted in scenes of domestic conflict. Instead of the beggars, vagrants, and drunks that populated travelers' accounts and endless bureaucratic reports, viewers gaze upon scenes of prosperity and domesticity, of subjects engaged in productive labor, consumption, and commerce, and on the new generations of colonial subjects, the children, the future of the

Spanish empire. (Deans-Smith “Creating” 173)

The profession of painter was not especially high in the colonial hierarchy, and consequently, persons who were of the casta classes were permitted to become artists.[13] It was possible for mestizos to change their status through a change in their *calidad.* Actually, some of the most successful 18th-century painters of New Spain were castas, even though when they become established in their profession, they identified themselves as Spanish. José de Ibarra had a *morisco* father and a *mulata* mother. His famous student, Miguel Cabrera, made pictures for the Archbishop of Mexico. Cabrera was very proud of his own American art (he signed one of his pictures “americanus pinxiebat”) and also of his knowledge of European art, and was most likely either a

[13] The profession of painter was well established in Mexico City by the 18th century. There were whole dynasties of painters there from at least the 17th century on, some family based, and some united by the traditional relationship of master to apprentice. (Deans-Smith “Dishonor” 45). For example, Juan Rodríguez Juárez was the descendant of a line of painters going back to a great-great-grandfather. José de Ibarra, Miguel Cabrera, and Morlete Ruiz all belonged to “families” of masters and apprentices. Given this length of history, it is not surprising that the painters of New Spain had developed their own by the time of the casta paintings.

mulato or a mestizo (Katzew 202). Deans-Smith describes a Cabrera painting in which the artist displays his connection with Flemish painting:

> In another of his casta paintings, (Cabrera) depicts a tobacconist and his family (a casta trade) in their shop, while a Flemish print is hanging on the back wall (Figure 4). The inclusion of this engraving may be interpreted as Cabrera's deliberate intention to display not only his knowledge of Flemish genre scenes but to locate them within the frame of a distinctive New Spanish genre, that of casta painting. ("Dishonor" 56).

Carrera (293) suggests that the engraving is based on "The Fat Man" (1634), by Adriaen Brouwer, a Flemish artist (Figure 5), however, it is unclear whether this is the case, since, to this viewer, at least, it is almost impossible to see the details well enough to make a judgment. The tone of the Brouwer work, which seems almost like a caricature, however, seems quite distant from the warmer style of Cabrera, although the bulk of the figure in relation to pictorial space and the sense of three dimensionality may have been an inspiration for the New Spanish artist. It is disappointing that so little information is available about the European styles known to the casta painters, other than the existence of some 17th-century Dutch and Flemish prints and pictures in the possession of Cabrera.

The 17th and 18th-century painters of Mexico City were quite ambitious. As their profession was low down in the hierarchy, they were anxious to improve their standing. In order to rise in the hierarchy, it was required by the colonial authorities to exclude non-white racial groups, those "*de*

color quebrado" (Catelli).[14] This would have been extremely difficult for the racially diverse group that were the casta painters, had there not been the possibility of claiming *calidad.* The group of painters most likely saw themselves in terms of *calidad* because they petitioned the viceroy for a change in status once in 1674, and once in 1728, to no avail, sadly. Each time the viceroy simply ignored their request. We do not know the reason for the viceroy's lack of response to the painters' repeated requests.

The casta system, on the face of it, was rigid and racist, in modern terms. However, since a person could better himself through invoking *calidad*, neither physiognomy, nor skin color functioned as reliable indicators of that person's position in the social hierarchy of New Spain. Therefore, we have the paradoxical situation in which the painters assume "Spanish" or white status by invoking *calidad*, while the persons depicted in the casta paintings are classified by their clothing and their occupation, only sometimes using skin color to identify social status (see, for example, Figures 1 and 2). In the world of casta paintings, each category, however, has its designated occupation: "Spanish men are often portrayed as men of leisure or professionals such

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[14] Catelli is convinced that *de color quebrado* only referred to those of African descent. However, it is unclear, and rather unlikely, whether an *indio bárbaro* (an unconverted Amerindian) would have been admitted to the painters' group, and so the precise meaning of *color quebrado* remains elusive, in my opinion.

as notaries and possibly as merchants, blacks and mulattos as coachmen, Indians as food vendors, and mestizos as tailors, shoemakers, masons, and tobacconists. *Mulatos* and mestizos are often represented as cooks and spinners" (Deans-Smith "Creating" 171). We can add that "likewise, certain tasks, such as preparing chocolate (see Figure 6) or serving *pulque* (an agave beer), are performed only by specific castes. Clothing and activities are often a better indication of caste than appearance; despite the rich variety of skin tones employed by casta artists, it would be difficult to distinguish between different castes on the basis of appearance alone" (Earle 436). For example, in Figure 7 by Juan Rodríguez Juárez (1715) (discussed further below) there is a woman who is wearing a *huipil*, an Indian garment, a *rebozo* (an Indian shawl), and a "folded cloth headpiece" (Carrera 28), all garments being parts of traditional Indian dress. (The woman in the Cabrera panel in Figure 1 is also wearing Indian dress.) The man in Figure 7, on the other hand, is wearing French clothes, as was the fashion in the Spanish Empire with its French King. According to Earle, the mere presence of a *huipil* served to identify a figure as an Indian woman: "For example, certain castes routinely wear characteristic items of clothing—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that certain characteristic garments determine the caste of their wearer. This garment in itself makes these women into Indians or descendants of Indians" (436). In this particular example, it is possible to identify the figure as Indian by her skin color, but not by her facial features.

There is a clear change in the form of casta painting before and after 1760, which is connected with additional Bourbon reforms.[15] Pictures from earlier in the century show the figures in a relatively shallow, undifferentiated, space (for example, the picture by Rodríguez Juárez in Figure 2). After 1760, the space deepens, with details that place the figures in a context, for example a workplace, as we see in Cabrera's work (Figure 1) in which the woman is presented in the market with her merchandise. It can be argued that the inclusion of objects and settings, in addition to the traditional family group, is an expression of the need to more precisely define the casta system in terms of occupations. The change can also be seen in a picture by José de Alcíbar, Figure 6, (1760-1770). Earle describes the family in the painting as:

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[15] In political terms, according to Lara Catelli, the mid-century reforms resulted in the exclusion of criollos from holding positions of power, in addition to the other groups who had always been excluded. Both Katzew (*Casta* 111) and Catelli see this exclusion as fodder for a growing sense of national (Mexican) identity among the criollo elite, and the stirrings of what would grow, in the future, into a revolutionary movement. In effect, in the long run, with the exclusion from power of all but the Spanish-born, the opposite to the desired effect of strong political control of the colony was eventually brought about, as the criollos got increasingly resentful of the Bourbon regime. The *peninsulares* insisted on more extensive documentation of the casta system mid-century, with precise indications of occupation and work place for the families that were depicted.

> The mulatto son approaches his Spanish father with the deference appropriate to his likely status as the son of an enslaved woman. He bears a brazier to allow his father to light a cigarette. His mother, meanwhile, prepares chocolate (an indication of casta status). The differences in the parents' clothing—he sports a stylish and expensive banyan, or loose housecoat, made of painted cotton imported from India while she wears a modest laced bodice—further hints at their different social positions, even as this domestic scene reveals the intimate nature of their relationship. ("Pleasures" 438)

Family intimacy is clear here, a family, it must be said, in which the parents are not of equal status, but both father and mother share a tenderness towards their child. Both parents are leaning in towards the child, forming a closed space, as an expression of mutual protection of their offspring.[16] The love of the father of the family for his child is clear in Figure 2 also. In Figure 8, a family is united in love for a baby in the picture by José Joaquín Magón in which a mother is cleaning up her dirty baby with a diaper, while the father, who is a cobbler (a casta profession) tries to distract the baby with a toy. According to Earle:

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[16] The presentation of the group as a family, without embarrassment, without deceit, and with respect, is a striking contrast with what was possible in the contemporary US.

> In this painting, the parents are shown as both loving and industrious; the mulatto father has paused in his work as a cobbler to distract his child. The pair of lovebirds at the front of the composition reinforces the air of domestic harmony. Although a number of savants on both sides of the Atlantic claimed that mulattoes were sterile, the caption tells us that this mulatto has fathered the little baby. (429)

The age-old calumny is being flaunted, a sign of independence of New Spanish artistic norms from those of their colonial rulers. The visual language used to describe the family groups who are classified by their clothing is quite distinct from the US notion of "passing," which meant a circumstance in which an African-American was successful in deceiving white people into perceiving him or her as white. According to Earle, the sense of what is presented in the casta paintings is that of transformation. Proof of this appears in the archives. "The colonial archive is full of complaints about individuals who changed their clothing or living habits and thereby "became" a different caste. It is worth noting that such documents use a language of transformation, not of "passing" (Earle "Pleasures" 436). *La limpieza de oficio,* would not have been possible in the US of the time, although the complaints from the New Spanish government make it likely that *la limpieza de oficio* was not universally accepted, at least by these colonial authorities. It seems, also, that the authorities/*peninsulares* were not in control of every aspect of life in the city, since these transformations did take place, betokening a society that was relatively fluid, with the real possibility of upward social mobility.

Only one group is portrayed differently from this social, quasi-melting pot of races and mixtures, and those were unconverted Amerindians. They are classified as *indios bárbaros,* seen in Figure 9, shown as warlike, very graceful nonetheless, complete with bows and arrows, with little clothing except for their blankets. Since clothing was the defining feature of the figures who appear in casta paintings, the absence of clothes makes the immense distance of the *indios bárbaros* from the rest of New Spanish humanity all the clearer. This exclusion has never been entirely erased, to this day. The Otherness of not being Christian seems to have persisted since its origin in the Conquest. The symbolic significance of those *indios bárbaros* was ambiguous in the 18th century, however, Katzew (*Casta* 147) cites a document from 1735 in which the observer notes that heathen Indians were regarded either as people who "live in the wilderness reluctant to harm anyone," the embodiment of the 18th century idea of the noble savage, or as people who are "always willing to exercise their cruelty by killing Spaniards." Such ambivalence did not disappear in subsequent centuries.

The task of the casta painters was, therefore, to produce images of an imagined system, in the face of a different, less orderly, reality. The painter's patrons, criollos, *peninsulares,* and Spanish patrons alike, belonged to a hierarchy that must have had a complicated relationship with the social realities around them. Since classification was all the rage, somehow the viceroy, or the Archbishop, or the Spanish aristocratic patron of the arts, was able to admire the curiosities that were the casta paintings without a sense of any kind of threat of ongoing, or impending, social change. Perhaps a preoccupation with the ideas of natural history and taxonomy left no room for the idea of a possible future revolution, of a plausible further shift in the changing

society, which was presented in those casta paintings that were so prized.[17]

The groups in the casta paintings are idealized, but not sentimentalized, families. One senses, also, the shadow of the long-held convention throughout the West of portraying the Holy Family, in such terms, as peaceful, calm, and saintly, with the occasional playful Christ Child playing with his mother's veil. Such images would have been part of the internal landscape of the patrons' minds, in addition to their desire to be up to date by being interested in how to order Nature. For these people, the casta paintings were perhaps more a dreamlike fantasy than a demonstration of the realities of life in New Spain.

Conclusion

[17] The missing piece here, to this modern's eyes, is any sense of change, of evolution. We think of the taxonomic distribution of current living species as the result of evolutionary processes, processes that are ongoing. It would be anachronistic to find fault with the 18th century art patrons for not knowing what we know now. In a world that was thought of relatively fixed, compared to our own, perhaps it is not surprising that the contents of the curiosities that were prized by art patrons were not regarded as harbingers of the future.

According to Katzew, "the family trope served to stress … the success of the colonial enterprise by showing a society glued together by the bond of 'love'" ("Casta" 93). I do not agree with the implication that the casta paintings functioned simply as propaganda vehicles for the Bourbon regime nor that they were solely the purveyors of false sentiment (denoted by 'love' in quotation marks). They were, indeed, propaganda for the *peninsulares,* and perhaps the criollos, but they were also produced by artists who took pride in their work and in their American identities. The relationship of patron to artist has probably often been a mixture of these two parallel threads. The art of painting in 18th century New Spain was independent and mature, conveying great sympathy for the plebeian families who populate the pictures, because the painters themselves were plebeians, like their subjects, or, at least, they had plebeian origins, albeit their status was gradually elevated because of their professional *calidad.* The works of Magón, Rodríguez Juárez and Cabrera were not the result of a simple application of a formula dictated by their upper-class patrons. Casta paintings, produced in an artistic language uniquely Mexican, by artists who were masters of their craft, portrayed a society in flux, although using a, rigid, inherited, taxonomy. The humanity present in the depiction of the family groups in the casta paintings functioned almost as a resistant force to the rigid casta system, a paradox that arose from the unique circumstances that were 18th century New Spain, soon to become an independent Mexico. Subversion and representation existed together in these 18th century works of art.

Although it is known that Miguel Cabrera owned two works by the Flemish painter David Teniers the Younger (Katzew "Casta" 106), overall, the major influences on, and artistic sources for, the casta paintings are still far from being thoroughly explored. A more detailed investigation

than is possible here is warranted to uncover stylistic influences on the style of Cabrera and his fellow artists. To date, the focus has been on the, very essential, cultural significance of the pictures from New Spain, and much less on their possible art historical lineages. Mention was recently made of European costume books, Italian Renaissance painting, and painted series of sibyls as possible sources (Alcalá 297), but much more work is needed to substantiate these suggestions. Such investigations could enrich our understanding of the range of cultural life of 18th century New Spain, since it appears likely that the casta artists were exposed to multiple sources, as yet unknown, which they used in the construction of their own, unique, American, genre painting. As respect grows for casta painting, so will efforts to uncover a more complete understanding of its' origins.

The casta system was officially abolished with independence, and the descendants of the subalterns who populated the casta paintings were declared citizens of the new Mexican state. In subsequent chapters, I address Mexican responses, official and otherwise, to the diverse populations that made up the new nation.

Chapter 2. Mestizaje, and Its Antecedents. Ideology and Ambivalence Surrounding Race in Early 20th Century Mexico.

The goal of the Mexican Revolution was to establish "el ideal divino de una patria para todos" (Palou 13), a country in which the social and racial barriers of the past would be no more. In order to better understand this Revolutionary ideal, I will provide some context with its historical antecedents in previous centuries from the Conquest on, and then focus on expressions of these issues in art and politics into the early 20th century, especially immediately before, and directly after, the Mexican Revolution. Specifically, I will discuss how groups that were marginalized by virtue of race were perceived. I will argue that a strand of ambivalence towards this issue persisted through the early 20th century in Mexico.

Theological difficulties surrounding the status of indigenous people began with the Conquest (see Introduction, above). Although the Pope decreed that the Indians were fully human in 1537, questions about whether they could be truly converted to Christianity did not cease with this Papal edict. A theological problem arises if indigenous peoples are declared to be non-human, because this would make a mockery of the conversion process, and indeed, of the entire Spanish colonial enterprise. In accordance with the Papal position, Francisco de Vitoria, a 16th century member of the School of Salamanca, invoked Aristotle in proposing that the Indians were "natural children," thus avoiding the conclusion that they were not fully human, and granting them powers

of abstract reason, but attributing their "foolishness" to their "barbarous education" (O'Hara 29). Societies of indigenous peoples must undergo complete spiritual transformation, to be put on the path to salvation. O'Hara cites a 16th century source describing the goal of the conversion process as "nothing less than to transform ferocious beasts into beautiful angels" (30). Despite their stated position about their full humanity invoking the images of "ferocious beasts" as the state of unconverted Indians, betokens a very different view of indigenous peoples.

Despite the avowed desire of the colonial Church to produce fully transformed and pious Christians, (Spanish-speaking Christians, ideally), indigenous languages were not actually eliminated, even into the second half of the 18th century (O'Hara 63), and indeed, into the 20th century (see below). In 1770, the environs of Mexico City contained parishes where Nahuatl and Otoni were spoken, and bilingual priests were sought for those parishes (63). The Archbishop at the time (Archbishop Lorenzana), conforming to the stricter Bourbon control of New Spanish institutions, disapproved of this multilingualism, arguing that "there is no civilized nation in the world that does not spread it language along with its conquests" (63). The juxtaposition of "civilized" with "conquest" rings strangely in our 21st century ears, but the existence of this problem for the late 18th century Church betokens an ongoing ambivalence towards Indian culture at the same time. Since few non-Spaniards could become priests (O'Hara 74), one can infer that many criollos or even, perhaps, *peninsulares,* gained sufficient mastery of Nahautl, Otoni or other indigenous languages, to hear the confessions of, and otherwise communicate with their non-

Spanish speaking parishioners.[18] Since only the priest could hear Confession and give absolution, one may assume that there must have been direct communication between the priest and the faithful, although "lay assistants acted as cultural mediators between Indian parishioners and their Spanish priests" (O'Hara 129). Two centuries of Colonial rule had not resulted in the universal imposition of Spanish throughout the colony. Indigenous languages were still spoken in the 19th

[18] Interestingly, convents for Indian women were set up in New Spain/Mexico during the 18th and early 19th centuries (O'Hara 80). Entrance into the orders was allowed only for the daughters of caciques, and proof of "pure" lineage had to be provided (O'Hara 83), an application of the original *limpieza de sangre* idea in a different context. By placing a daughter in a convent, the entire family's status increased. The prominent, Spanish-speaking, indigenous, families who promoted the convents were called *indios ladinos*, providing a stepping stone to greater social standing in the colony as a whole. Indian women were considered to be suitable for convent life because of their "docile minds" (O'Hara 85). Since priests had a great deal of power, being the backbone of their respective parishes, it is perhaps not surprising that it was made difficult for an Indian man to enter the priesthood.

century, despite the establishment in the Indian parishes of hundreds of Spanish language schools during the previous century (O'Hara 64).[19]

The recurring question concerning the nature of the Indians lead to a search for their origin, since, the thinking went, the closer they could be "proved" to being "civilized" in their native state, the more plausible their conversion to full Christians would be. An early 17th-century text, *Origen de los indios del Nuevo Mundo* by a Spanish Dominican, Gregorio García (1607), contained accounts of the various origin myths for the Indians. This compendium was an important resource for writers on Spanish America for the following two centuries, at least (Katzew "Casta" 75-76). The origin myths range from a descent from the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, to a Chinese origin, the latter having at least the merit of having some physical evidence in its favor. García discards the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel hypothesis because he sees the Jews as being thought of as physically and intellectually superior, whereas the indigenous people whom he has observed, according to him, are "unpolished, slow of learning, with ugly bodies and faces … slaves and natural servants" (García cited by Katzew *Casta* 77). According to García, they were also effeminate, which is

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[19] Two centuries later, this effort would be repeated, in a secular form (see below), proving that the 18th century campaign cannot have been effective.

related to the local climate, an idea from Hippocrates that climate influences humans directly.[20] This led to a difficulty with respect to mestizos, who had the potential to be accepted into 18th century criollo society, or, at least, their descendants could make that leap, as we saw in the previous chapter. The solution to this was to invoke another ancient Greek idea, this one from Aristotle, that since the male sperm was powerful and the woman only a vessel for carrying the fetus, that the product of the union of a Spaniard and an indigenous woman was more "Spanish" than indigenous. This notion can be interpreted as having a great deal more to do with patriarchy than actual observation.

Indeed, from the 16th century on, European writers invoked this climate theory to assert that the climate of the Americas affected the criollos themselves, turning them into Indian-like, effete, people. The criollos defended themselves by asserting that, because their bodies were different from those of indigenous people, the climate did not affect them in the same way as it did either the Indians or the enslaved black peoples in the colonies. The idea that the human race was a hierarchy, with those of European descent firmly at the top was held also by Guillaume Thomas Francois Raynal (1713-1796), a French Enlightenment writer, and fierce critic of brutal Spanish imperialism and the enslavement of Africans. It is interesting that Raynal expressed respect for

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[20] The notion of the debilitated character of indigenous people, in particular, indigenous men, was echoed in the 20th century, in a very different context, with a very different meaning (see below).

Aztec cultural artifacts, but yet, concluded that they were not on a par with what Europe had achieved. A Scottish historian, William Robertson, in his *History of America* (1777) also is admiring of Indian artifacts, although, he, too, regarded them as being inferior to those of Western Europe. Thus, there were European voices, at least as early as the 18th century, that responded to the art of the Indians with respect and interest. [21] Horror at the barbarism of the Spanish invaders

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[21] It can be argued that two strands, one using an admixture of ancient Greco-Roman and medieval Christian myths to justify the racist excesses of Spanish imperialism with regard to Indians, and one, more hesitant, and ambivalent, voice, resembling what in the modern period would be cultural relativism or even, in some cases, assertions of the rights of every human, co-existed throughout the history of Spain's presence in the Americas. A pseudo-defense of Indians from a different angle came with assertions of their great piety as Christians, appearing in works from the 17th century on (Katzew *"Casta"* 99). The 16th century myth of the Virgin of Guadalupe, in which the Virgin appeared to a Nahuatl-speaking Indian, speaking to him in his native language, and working miracles for him, is another important example of the association of Catholic piety with indigenous peoples. The figure of the Virgin of Guadalupe is depicted as indigenous, (or, at least, not white), and is revered to this day. Since the ostensible spiritual mission of colonization was presented as garnering more souls for Christ through the conversion of the Indians, it is plausible to see the Guadalupe myth as propaganda for the effectiveness of conversion.

co-existed with the Conquest from the beginning, for example, in the voice of Bartolomé de las Casas, see Introduction, above

Independence and Creole Patriotism

With Independence came the declaration that all Mexicans were equal in the eyes of the new state, with the official abolishment of the casta system. Casta terms were therefore forbidden by the new state, having previously formed the bedrock of social institutions. However, the casta system remained in place in canon law during the 19th century, with the result that classification in casta terms persisted in the interactions of priests with their congregants (O' Hara 233), for example, with regard to fees for services, which were set according to casta rank. Given the lack of change in the Church's laws, it is not surprising to find that the liberated status of non-white Mexicans was more rhetorical than real. Politicians described as "liberals," "found Mexico's diverse and heavily Indian population to be a potential obstacle to national development" (189) and characterized them as the "backward and degraded remains of the ancient Mexican population" (189).

The term "degraded remains" is important here, because the myth of Mexico's ancient cultural origins in the noble Indian was a commonplace from the 18th century on. Rebecca Earle

has examined the use of "the figure of the Indian" (126) in the rhetoric used by the criollos in their fight for independence. Given their exclusion from power by the Bourbon administration towards the end of the 18th century, the criollos turned their resentment into a form of Mexican, as opposed to Colonial, patriotism. In order to create a history for this, new, state of Mexico, an autochthonous past was created, in which, astonishingly, it was asserted that these descendants of the Conquistadores and other *peninsulares* had some affinity, for want of a better word, with ancient pre-Columbian cultures. This curious notion was already current in 18th century New Spain. According to Earle, "Creole patriotism, in the Mexican case, (consisted in) the exaltation of the Aztec past, the denigration of the Conquest, the xenophobic resentment against the *gachupines* [a derogatory term for Spaniards], and the devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe" ("Creole" 127). In fact, in the opening address for the 1813 Congress of Chilpancingo, where Mexican independence from Spain was declared, Carlos María de Bustamante, a pure criollo, invoked the spiritual ancestors of the new state as:

> Spirits of Moctehuzoma, Cacamatzin, Cuauhtimotzin, Xicotencalt and Cantzonzi ... celebrate this happy moment in which *your sons* (my emphasis) have united to avenge the crimes and outrages committed against you, and to free yourselves from the claws of tyranny and fanaticism that were going to grasp them forever. To the 12th of August of 1521 there succeeds the 14th of September 1813. In that day the chains of our serfdom were fastened in Mexico-Tenochtitlan, in this day in the happy village of Chilpancingo they are broken forever. (Earle "Creole" 128)

In truth, the "serfdom" endured by these diverse "sons" of the Aztecs varied greatly in nature. Both republican and royalist leaders regarded the actual living descendants of the Aztecs as "degraded remains," with the republicans explaining the Indians' sorry state at the time of independence as the consequence of "three hundred years of slavery" under Colonial rule (Earle 133). Pre-Columbians, according to the republicans, were noble beings, and the modern America that was being built sprang from those superior roots. Since the Indians of early 19th century Mexico were not fit descendants of the Pre-Columbians, the criollos were, in fact, the only "true" Americans. In the same breath, so to speak, those same criollos often invoked their peninsular ancestry (Earle 134). The royalists gleefully pointed out this glaring contradiction. As Earle recounts: "In his 1814 memoir, the Creole royalist Jose Antonio Torres y Peiia mocked this conflicting rhetoric: 'the same men who esteem themselves so highly for being the descendants of the conquistadores' heap crimes on the heads of their own fathers" (134). The separateness of the actual 19th century Indian population at the time is reflected in the comment of a mid-19th century conservative, "in Mexico, there is no communality between whites and Indians; everything is different; physical aspects, language and custom" (O'Hara 190). The same differences are still in evidence here, showing that the linguistic separation decried by the Colonial Church in the 18th century still persisted, and that, in the new Republic, echoes of Colonial times lingered, including the notion of the *indios bárbaros.*

Porfirio Díaz ruled Mexico from 1876-1911. He was from Oaxaca, as was his Liberal predecessor and early mentor, Benito Juárez, the first indigenous (Zapotec) president of Mexico, and the leader of La Reforma, called Mexico's second independence.[22] The Liberals, with Benito

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[22] As recounted by Brian Hamnett, Benito Juárez, a shrewd 19th-century Mimic Man, by all accounts, trained in his native Oaxaca as a lawyer, and was initially mentored by his teachers at the secular Instituto de Ciencias y Artes de Oaxaca (founded 1827), and then subsequently by a wide range of clerics, military and businessmen. Juárez rose to power, and retained it at the provincial and then the national level through his ability to maintain connections across the various interest groups that controlled the economy. His twin aims for a modern Mexican state were secularization and the removal of the military as a central power. Although these goals resonate with a 21st century reader as wholly "modern," he did in fact, envisage a democracy in which suffrage would be granted on the basis of income and property, somewhat like the Founding Fathers of the United States, some five decades previously. We do not know how his indigenous identity affected his political positions, but his remarkable career is an indication that an indigenous person could rise to a position of great power in the early days of the Mexican state, an expression, perhaps that the 18th century notion of *calidad* persisted. *La Reforma,* was initiated in 1854 and is described by Edwin Williamson, as a "wayward process" (264), which lasted twenty years. "The political death-throes of royalist, Catholic Mexico" (264) consisted in, among many

Juárez as their leader, were bent on abolishing what remained of colonial institutions, including the legacy of colonial racism and the central role that the Church had historically played both in New Spain and subsequently in the new Mexican state. However, what Ana María Alonso (461) calls "postcolonial ambivalence" towards this established Liberal rhetoric was all too apparent during the years of the Porfiriato. A curious biographical tidbit about Díaz is an expression of this ambivalence. Díaz himself was, by various accounts, either a full Mixtec, a mestizo, or a castizo (Knight 73). However, as he grew in power, Díaz began to powder his face to make it paler (González "Modernity" 521), an extraordinary gesture for the leader of a movement that supposedly opposed colonial racism (See Figures 3 and 4, for images of a younger and an older Díaz).

The very fact that there are varying accounts of the ethnicity of Díaz, how Indian he was, much less his pale makeup, make strange companions to official rhetoric, and its manifestation in monument construction undertaken during the Porfiriato. An ambitious multi-monument building project was begun by the regime in 1877, literally, and symbolically, leading from the original

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other events, the establishment of the *Ley Juárez*, (1855) and the *Ley Lerdo* which resulted in the impoverishment of the Church and a decrease in its power by making its vast holdings private. In 1857, a new Mexican constitution was enacted, in which no mention was made of Mexico as a Catholic state, and in 1861, Juárez was elected president. He was to retain power, of some kind, albeit through many struggles, until his death in 1872.

Aztec capital, through a remembrance of Miguel Hidalgo to the residence of Porfirio Díaz. The intent was to glorify the Liberal version of Mexican history, culminating in the economically prosperous regime of a repressive dictator, whose official actions were supposedly guided by "scientific" principles, such as those of Spencerian Social Darwinism, which regarded hybrids as degenerate (Knight 78).[23] Given these racist influences, it is perhaps not so surprising that Díaz powdered his face after all. However, the internal contradictions and confusions are enormous.

An interesting expression of the "sons of the Aztecs" cum European roots trope was completed in 1887. One component of the Porfirian building project, this was an Indianesque monument to Cuahtémoc, an Aztec who died fighting the Spanish. Decorations invoking Indian motifs appear on the sides of the monument. However, the figure which appears at the top of this neoclassical work is clad in a garment which resembles a Greco-Roman one (Figure 1), making a symbolic connection between the Western Classical and indigenous traditions. Alonso (462) describes the facial features of the figure as white, as opposed to Indian. This is possible, given that Díaz himself came, apparently, to be ashamed of his own mestizo identity. It is possible that this glorious expression of the origins of the regime of Porfirio Díaz needed to be whitened, just

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[23] For example, "scientific papers presented at the International Congress of Americanists (held during the Porfiriato) attempted to understand Indians' racial "inferiority" through the bone measuring and the anthropometry of their skulls" (González "Modernity" 43), shades of Nazi fascism that was to come.

as did its leader. The result was a curious, internally inconsistent amalgam which bore no resemblance to history. According to Knight (73), by the time of the Porfiriato, most Mexicans were actually mixed, and, being "Indian" was by then actually a matter of class, and language use, with some element of race in the mix.[24] So, higher status whitens, and, thus, taken literally, Cuahtémoc is represented as white because he is the metaphorical ancestor of Díaz, who wants to be thought of as white. However, the possibility of rising because of status, despite race, should not be a distraction from the fact that:

> During the Díaz presidency, (under the influence of the "científicos" and their racist Social Darwinism theories), the presumed superiority of the European shaped state efforts to whiten the population through immigration and to incorporate the Indian into the nation through a model of development that resulted in the agrarian dispossession of rural communities, many of them indigenous. (Alonso 41, citing Knight 79)

The same confusion regarding indigenous peoples was apparent in a public spectacle organized during the Porfiriato. González ("Modernity") has studied the 1910 Centennial celebration of the *Grito* as an expression of the image that the Díaz dictatorship (1876 – 1911) wished to present

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[24] This admixture of race and class was still evident in film and literature through the mid-20th century, (see following chapters for examples).

nationally and internationally.[25] Again, Mexican history was to be presented as culminating in the Porfiriato: “Monuments honoring Liberal leaders, museum exhibits, international congresses, and a tour of Teotihuacán” were offered as part of the celebration (González “Imagining” 498), and the central role of the Church in Mexican history was essentially ignored (521). A *desfile histórico,* or historical parade, was also planned, which included three separate parts, the first of which was to include a procession of the defeated Moctezuma and his warriors. For this, the authorities wanted actual indigenous men, no whitened faces needed here. Such actors were sought in Oaxaca and elsewhere. Some people refused to participate, fearing that some nefarious action of the government would follow if they left their communities and went to the capital to participate (González “Modernity” 42). The procession did take place, complete with Indian actors (Figure

[25] One international visitor at least, bought the intended message. According to a New York Times report of the event cited by González “Mexico's celebration of the 100th anniversary of martyred Father Hidalgo's proclamation of independence has been coupled with an equally impressive celebration of the eightieth anniversary of the birth of that wonderful old man, Porfirio Diaz. Who can doubt that the supposedly lesser includes the seemingly greater? Mexico's centennial of independence is unquestionably another manifestation of the power of the president” (“Imagining” 521).

2).[26] Perhaps the irony of this event was not lost on everyone, but, on the other hand, perhaps it is anachronistic to imagine that having the downtrodden and despised descendants of the people who were actually conquered in the 16th century "play the part" of their defeated ancestors in the 20th, was as apparent as an insult in itself at the time as it is now. Another expression of the response of indigenous communities to the efforts of Díaz's officials to appropriate a pre-Columbian past is reflected in their response to artifact -collecting in the provinces by the National Museum's director, Leopoldo Batres. This incident makes clear the irony of making an object whose meaning was still alive to this indigenous community into a self-serving political symbol invoking some romanticized remote past, to be enshrined in a national museum. The interesting role of the Church in defending the villagers has historical roots in the acceptance of *sincretismo* in the Christianization of New Spain/Mexico. The Indian and the Indianesque met in the buildup to the 1910 Centennial.

The Mexican Revolution and Its Aftermath. Re-invention of the State

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[26] However, the authorities tried to exclude Indians from attending the Centennial as spectators (González "Imagining" 498).

The Revolution that followed in 1910 was a revolt against the corrupt Díaz regime, with an ostensible rejection of the ideals of the Porfiriato, and the creation of modified utopian national myths, although connections between old and new myths are apparent.[27] The decade-long

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[27] According to Edwin Williamson, although Mexico saw some stability during the latter part of the 19th century in the era of the Porfiriato, there was no structure in place to assure the peaceful transfer of power between succeeding governments. Such a structure was finally put in place in 1929, after almost twenty years of catastrophic civil war. As Williamson presents it, the problem resonated with the older, mid-19th century trope of *civilización y barbarie,* the opposition of urban and rural interests which was not unique to Mexico among Latin American countries. The Porfirian *científicos*, in the urban role, were faced with the opposition of regional caudillos, who resisted the centralized political power in Mexico City. To compound matters, in the first years of the 20th century, a recession occurred, made worse by disastrous harvests, and the perceived menace of the imperialist United States which heightened anxiety even further. In 1910, Díaz won the "election" yet again, but soon thereafter, he had to flee his country, due to the crystallization of angry rebellion against his government from rural caudillos, led by Francisco Madero, from an old landowning family, and peasants led by Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata. Madero did not last long in power (1910 -1913), however. He was murdered in 1913, and succeeded by General Victoriano Huerta, whose government lasted only one year, when he went into exile: "The ancient regime had been effectively destroyed, but the war was not over yet" (386). Huerta was followed by Venustiano

Carranza, who was in power from 1916-1920. Villa and Zapata, who were both fighting for the rights of peasants, were roundly defeated during this period, although they kept fighting in their native rural areas. With their defeat, the possibility of the establishment of true peasant rights was dimmed. Alvaro Obregón, a canny northern *hacendado*, who fought as a commander on the northern, Constitutionalist side, emerged during the Carranza period, and helped to draft a formal constitution, which established a separation of Church and state, and, importantly for this study, a promise of the return of land to indigenous communities. Sadly, to a large extent, the policies laid out in the Constitution were not carried out and the indigenous communities were left excluded as before. However, Obregón himself fared well politically, winning the presidency in September 1920. "The caudillos from Sonora had finally emerged as the true victors. The state they created proved to be the most enduring and stable in the independent history of Latin America. State patronage (now included the leaders of) trade unions and agrarian leagues" (389-90). The agrarian leagues were organized into a national party, and a Zapatista was put in charge of it. As a symbol of the accomplishments of this chaotic period, it was named the "Mexican Revolution" on November 20, 1920. The spirit of the Revolution acquired its own mystique, and its leaders wanted to replace the power of the Church with this ideal. For this to become a reality, "The Revolution had to be a self-perpetuating and impersonal process" (391). For all the rhetoric and lofty ideals, Mexico remained a capitalist state, with policies that did not differ greatly from those of the Porfiriato.

Revolution (1910-1920) destroyed the Porfirian alliances of *criollos,* the government, and international investment, yet the old racial and class divisions remained. However, the supposedly new ideal of the mestizo as central to the Mexican state was already in place in the Porfiriato:

Porfirian public intellectuals identified mestizos as the country's most important social-ethnic group, and mestizaje as the solution to Mexico's so-called Indian problem. For example, Andres Molina Enriquez wrote in 1909: "'The fundamental and unavoidable basis of all the work that in future will be undertaken for the good of the country must be the continuation of the mestizos as the dominant ethnic element and as the controlling political base of the population.'" (González "Modernity" 43).

We see here that the ideal of the mestizo, and mestizaje, or the racial mixing that produces mestizos, which was to be one of the cornerstones of the policies of the leaders of post-Revolutionary Mexico, pre-date 1910. In what follows, I will attempt to understand how the policies and expressed ideals with respect to race, of José Vasconcelos, Manuel Gamío and Moisés Sáenz, central figures in the reforms instituted in the 1920s, differed from, and yet also resembled, those of their predecessors in the Porfiriato, and how those ideals were reflected in public art in the 1920s.[28]

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[28] According to Alonso (462), the new state also perceived a threat in the US notion of Manifest Destiny (Gómez 5), which asserted the hegemony of the Anglo-Saxon races over nations

José Vasconcelos. “Father” of mestizaje

José Vasconcelos (1882-1959), was a member of the *Ateneo de la Juventud,* an anti-positivist group founded by young intellectuals in 1909 in Mexico City. Some of the seeds of what was to become Vasconcelos’s philosophy can be found in his membership in the *Ateneo* of which Alfonso Reyes, and Diego Rivera were also members. Some members of the group who were in the visual arts, such as Rivera, were subsequently sent by the Mexican government to study current art and literature movements in Europe. Most of the *Ateneo* members subscribed to a movement lead by a Uruguayan intellectual, José Enrique Rodó, that espoused the spirituality of Latin America, in contrast to the soulless, and “scientific” US. Didier T. Jaen quotes a passage from Rodó: “A definitely organized society which limits its idea of civilization to the accumulation of abundant elements of prosperity, and its ideas of justice to their equitable distribution among its associates, will make of the cities it inhabits nothing different, in essence, to the anthill or the beehive” (xiv). We are to see a version of this idea in Vasoncelos’s *La raza cósmica*. The *Ateneo*

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with mixed populations such as Mexico. Such “mongrel,” barbarian, peoples and nations were to be “civilized” by those of superior, Northern European, stock. Thus, a new enemy emerged, coming from outside the centuries- old internal, race and class-based hierarchy of Mexico itself.

members were also eager students of Bergson, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer. The group was not concerned with politics, except for Vasconcelos, who worked against Díaz' re-election in 1910 (Manrique 1).

Vasconcelos was one of the architects of a new vision for the, supposedly, reborn, post-Revolutionary Mexican state. According to Palou, the seeds of Vasconcelos's ideas were already present during the Porfiriato in the "cultura moderna internacionalista donde el literato sustituye al intelectual" (19). The urbanization that occurred during the immediate post-Revolutionary period carried with it the possibility for intellectuals to live off journalism and teaching for the first time, hence, becoming more independent than before. Jaén, in his introduction to a 1979 annotated edition of *La raza cósmica*, provides a clear account of Vasconcelos's "vision of the future Aesthetic Era of mankind" (ix). In this scheme, there are three stages or eras in the development of humanity. These are the Materialistic, Intellectual and Spiritual, or Aesthetic Eras. In 1925, proclaimed by Vasconcelos as part of the Intellectual Era, ethical reasoning, political expediency and organized religion guide society. However, in the future, in a time that one should probably refrain from calling the Mexican Age of Aquarius, imagination will rule, and "Joy, love, and fantasy, that is, creativity, will be the predominant ingredients of human life" (ix). What is most relevant for the question of the treatment of race in post-Revolutionary Mexico is that ethnicity will cease to be important, through mestizaje, and the superior qualities of all the races that will melt into this final product "by the natural selection of love" (x). In this, Vasconcelos shrewdly drew on the unique quality of Latin American society with respect to racial mixing, to make a case for its supposed superiority to its Northern neighbor. On the face of it, one might respond positively

to the spirit of this message, if not to the notion of "the natural selection of love," a curious image. As Sánchez Prado, Jaén, and Palou all contend, this is a political fantasy, it is not political theory, and it is most certainly not science. It is a "proyecto espiritual" (Palou 16), a hope for a future for the nation after the Revolution, in contrast to the more concrete scientific ambitions of other figures of the period, which were based only in the present. It is also clear that, to Vasconcelos, despite his prophecy of a future of melting races, that "Latin civilization," read the 19th century Western Classical tradition, is the path forward. Thus, in this conceptual world, mestizaje took on mythical importance.

However, in *La raza cósmica*, Vasconcelos also makes clear his view of the future of indigenous peoples in Latin America: "El indio no tiene otra puerta hacia el porvenir que la puerta de la cultura moderna, ni otro camino que el camino ya desbrozado de la civilización latina" (Palou 13). One cannot avoid reading this as a racist statement, proclaiming the superiority of the criollo legacy, despite the utopian scheme presented in his essay.

What was so very interesting about this moment in Mexican history was the opportunity for Vasconcelos, as a creator of utopian visions, to also collaborate with the revolutionary generals in practical implementations of their ideas in the actual world. Vasconcelos held the important post of Minister of Education in the post-Revolutionary government, and functioned there as an efficient social activist, being highly effective, for example, "in opposing permanent special and separate indigenous schooling, which he viewed as the North American educational model, calling

for the incorporation of the Indian, still isolated, into the Mexican family" (Manrique 2). His vision of mestizaje was utopian, but he also functioned extremely well as a bureaucrat.

The idea of *la mexicanidad* was an invention of this period and *La raza cósmica* was a manifesto of this invention. As Sánchez Prado explains, the historical influences and intellectual genealogy of *La raza cósmica* are wide-ranging, from the European strands that may hark back to Vasconcelos's friends in the *Ateneo* to the legacy of pre-Revolutionary leaders such as Andrés Molina Enríquez. Despite what is agreed upon as the racist underpinnings of Vasconcelos's philosophy, Sánchez Prado suggests that, since his influence was so great in the entire Latin American world of his time and for decades after, it is worth the effort to achieve "una recuperación del gesto utópico-político de su pensamiento más allá de los profundos naufragios conceptuales (y éticos) de su filosofía" (382).

It is interesting to learn that *La raza cósmica* was regarded as a scandal by the Church, and by the conservative public (Sánchez Prado 384). Was this negative reaction based on the central role of mestizaje which would culminate in the appearance of the cosmic race, thus displacing the criollos from the central role that they had in previous regimes? Since Vasconcelos condemned "la opresión del indígena en el siglo XIX" (385) by the very institutions, such as the Church, that retained some power into the 20th century, it is not surprising that his anti-colonialist position on the Indians was regarded as offensive. Secularization of the culture was one of the objectives of the Revolution, as it was of the Porfiriato before it. On the face of it, one might imagine that there is no contradiction between an anti-colonialist position and Catholicism. A saved soul is a saved

soul, after all, no matter the ethnicity of the saved person, as was argued as far back as the 16th century by Bartolomé de Las Casas. However, if a respect for non-Christian, "barbarian" cultures in a secular state is part of this position, one could predict a negative reaction from the Church, which, on the face of it, but only on the face of it, was Vasconcelos's position. It is worth noting that a desire to diminish the power of the Church was also part of the policies of the Porfiriato (see above), and, so this aspect of post-Revolutionary rhetoric was not new. What was new, with regard to racial politics, was the expressed reverence for both sides of the mestizo's ancestry in the idea of mestizaje. Another crucial aspect of Vasconcelos's stance was his desire that the Church should admit its culpability in the massive oppression of the indigenous peoples of Mexico. Understandably, the Church was hostile to this demand.

According to Sánchez Prado, the mestizaje of Vasconcelos is different from *sincretismo* (385). Sánchez Prado invokes Social Darwinism as too simple an origin for mestizaje (385). In fact, Social Darwinism cannot explain the fusion of two cultures, it can only explain the eventual domination of one over the other, therefore, both mestizaje and *sincretismo* would seem to be alternatives to the survival of the fittest paradigm. Thus, this would be a useful cultural imperialist hat on which to hang the supposedly superior culture of the criollos.[29] The way in which the

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[29] To this scientist reader, such an example simply demonstrates the morally distasteful and intellectually inappropriate application of this biological principle to human culture, as opposed to its rightful place in the study of evolution, because it carries with it the implication that human

mestizaje idea was different from that of sincretismo was that "la palabra mestizaje deja de ser un simple sustituto del sincretismo y la mezcla, y se convierte en la promesa de un proyecto político" (Sánchez Prado 389). *Sincretismo* implies a straightforward combination as is apparent in the sculptures in some Mexican churches where elements of local religions appear side by side with, or embedded into, the conventional symbols of the Church. Such artistic combination is not the result of applying a principle such as mestizaje. Rather, it is the result of the Church authorities permitting the local indigenous people to re-use, and re-purpose, their own religious symbols, in the context of the imported religion. Consequently, the colonizers, and subsequently the Mexican Church are acting as cultural imperialists in this context. The Virgin of Guadalupe is a Catholic Virgin, be she indigenous or not.

It becomes easier to understand Vasconcelos's mestizaje by comparing *La raza cósmica* with *Forjando patria* (1916) a work of Manuel Gamio, a Mexican anthropologist who trained in the US with the celebrated Franz Boas (Sánchez Prado 386). Gamio's work, which amounted to a manual, contains concrete plans for his country, including plans for the integration of the races in the future state. He uses the metaphor of a forge, in which the indigenous strand, bronze in this metaphor, and iron, the criollo strand, will be melted together (Sánchez Prado 386). However,

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culture is no more than biology, and that cultures, in all their complexities, have histories that can be understood without study or self-reflection by crass borrowing from another discipline.

Gamio shared with Vasconcelos the conviction that "lacking in science, and 'asleep' because of centuries of oppression, Indians were at a lower level of evolution" (Alonso 468), the image of the forge notwithstanding. The science of anthropology, Gamio's academic field, was to be the tool to enable the picking and choosing from elements of indigenous culture in order to "bring the Indian into history" (468). In contrast, according to Sánchez Prado, Vasconcelos had a dream, (although that dream was influenced by the forge metaphor), a dream with roots in Plotinus, Vico, and Bergson, with the notion of an "élan vital," or an "intuición creadora" which informs the formation of the "espíritu de la raza cósmica" (Sánchez Prado 394), the meaning of which remains elusive, at least to this reader, although Sánchez Prado sees its roots in Bergson's philosophy. Science has no place in this scheme. Furthermore, it appears that there is no particular connection between Vasconcelos's vision of mestizaje and the "espíritu de la raza cósmica," whatever its intended meaning in the context of *La raza cósmica* may be. The idea is thought to be derived from a Nahuatl myth, but it is not known whether Vasconcelos simply co-opted the term into contemporary European philosophical thought. The notion of a "spirit" can lead towards fascist ideas about the innate superiority of a particular race or people, or, in this case, the *raza cósmica* .[30] Be that as it may, Vasconcelos's vision of a "narrativa cultural en la cual la reivindicación simbólica de los orígenes precolombinos es la base de una forma distinta de narrar la historia colonial" (Sánchez Prado 391) is central to our understanding of Mexican cultural history, and if

[30] In fact, in the 1940s, Vasconcelos became the editor of a fascist journal, Timón (Alonso 465).

there is such a thing as social progress, it was a small step on the road to social justice for the indigenous peoples of Mexico, Vasconcelos's racist stance notwithstanding.

El mestizaje implies a mixing of the races and an incorporation of this mixed population into the 20th century state, which was to be primarily urban and Spanish-speaking. Literacy (Spanish literacy, of course), was to be brought to the rural areas of Mexico. Vasconcelos ordered the setting up of many small libraries to be stocked with European and Mexican classics. His campaign went further in this direction, however. With their newly acquired literacy, rural indigenous populations were to be encouraged to specifically read such staples of a traditional Western education as Homer: "What this country needs is to start reading the Iliad" (Vasconcelos 46), and should there be any doubt about his position on the relative positions of European versus indigenous cultures, he added that, in these books, reside "the essential ideas of all times" (48).[31] The customs and art of indigenous peoples were to be used in the construction of Post-Revolutionary Mexico as has been presented by Alonso, and others (see below), but, to Vasconcelos, at least, assimilation, in the guise of "modernization" were always central. Mestizaje,

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[31] His elitism, and also, his inconsistent character, was expressed in Vasconcelos's action when he changed his public identity from mestizo to "pure-blood criollo" (Alonso 464). Proclaiming himself first to be a mestizo, and then reversing himself, can be regarded as an expression of his profound ambivalence concerning his own professed beliefs. Porfirio Díaz, with his whitened face, would have understood Vasconcelos' action very well.

for Vasconcelos, takes the form of the transformation of those Porfirian "degraded remains" into Mexican citizens who speak Spanish and read Homer.

Vasconcelos wore his elitist blinders, to be sure. However, to put the problem in perspective, how could the reformers have respectfully included those outside the Spanish-speaking, urban environment with its criollo traditions? Inclusion, perforce, involves sharing prosperity and education, of some kind. An egalitarian solution is not obvious. Since Spanish was the thread that held the country, with its many indigenous cultures and languages, together, what would an inclusive program have looked like? It is clear that, in the early 20th century, this was not apparent to Vasconcelos as a problem to be addressed.

Public Art and Revolutionary Ideals

Since the majority of Mexicans were illiterate at the time of the Revolution (Alonso 468), spreading post-revolutionary rhetoric was most effectively carried out by visual means. Murals, monuments and public performances were each used for this purpose, the most celebrated of which are the early 20th century murals of Mexico City. As part of his post-revolutionary project, Vasconcelos called upon some young Mexican artists to paint the walls of public buildings as illustrations of the ideals of the new state. Two of these artists, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros, had spent years in Europe, (time abroad that was funded by the Mexican government), studying both the history of Western art, including Italian Renaissance frescos, as well as having prolonged exposure to early 20th century movements in France such as "Primitivism," Cubism, and Symbolism. Upon their return home, the artists, together with, the home-grown, José Clemente Orozco, drew upon their exposure to Western art and to Communism, and their recently acquired post-revolutionary fervor, to produce the murals that have become an emblem of 1920s Mexico City. Rivera and Siqueiros returned to Mexico, each as a mature artist in his own right. It is in their

work that we see the most committed expression of the stated goal of the Revolution of honoring those excluded from full personhood in the Mexican state: the poor and the indigenous peoples of Mexico.

According to Rochfort (8), already during the Porfiriato, an artistic, pro-modernist, anti-positivist movement had been growing in the form of a journal, *Savia Moderna.* Diego Rivera, for whom the great formalists whose works he had interacted with in Paris such as Picasso, Ingres, Renoir, and Gauguin were all important (Rochfort 25), was commissioned to paint the walls of the newly re-designed National Palace, work which he completed between 1929 and 1935 (Alonso 470), displaying the new ideals of the State, specifically, the history of mestizaje. Rochfort quotes Vasconcelos as saying that he wanted the murals that he commissioned to be "An art saturated with primitive vigor, new subject-matter, combining subtlety and the sacrifice of the exquisite to the great, perfection to invention" (21).

The youthful artists did not keep to Vasconcelos's script, however, and eventually produced art committed to partisan ideals. A fresco by Orozco *The Rich Banquet while the Workers Fight* (1923), (Figure 5) in the National Preparatory School is an example of this partisanship. This is a fierce indictment of class inequality, showing grotesque, debauched, rich people at a banquet, while, below, workers, with clear Indian physiognomies, brandish shovels and hammers. Another fresco, *Cortez and Malinche* (Figure 6), in the same location, shows a naked Cortez, restraining a naked Malinche, while, a male Indian figure is prostrate on the ground before Cortez, his foot suspended above the man's body. Indian masculinity has been crushed by the conquering Spaniard, the indigenous man's country and his woman have been captured. This is a very different take on the previous view of the Indian man as effeminate. There is no sign of that much-vaunted civilizing European influence to be brought to bear in the process of forming the *raza cósmica.* Rivera's *The Mechanization of the Country* (1926), another fresco (Figure 7), this one in the Ministry of Education, shows a goddess figure striking down a man, whom Rochfort (61) identifies as a landlord, with a thunderbolt, while an Indian woman, molded in the formal French tradition of Ingres and Gauguin, sits disconsolately in a nearby wheat field, a tractor behind her in the distance,

a modern device that will take away her livelihood in due course. One cannot imagine that this kind of fierce protest against the hardships of Indian and mestizo peasant life were what Vasconcelos had in mind, with his notions of "primitive vigor" and the like. Indeed, Rivera went on to pillory his benefactor directly in a satiric 1928 fresco, also, in the Ministry of Education, *The Learned Ones,* (Figure 8), in which a hunched-over figure identified as Vasconcelos is seated with his back to the picture plane, on a white elephant. Other public intellectuals receive similar treatment in the fresco. Vasconcelos, not surprisingly, at this point spoke out against the muralists whom he had originally hired saying that they had fallen "into the abjection of covering walls with portraits of criminals" (Rochfort 66). It is not surprising that a committed Communist such as Diego Rivera would show his idealism in a way that would be offensive to a person who thought that reading the *Iliad* was what the Indians really needed. In fact, it is difficult to imagine that either side could have thought that there would be smooth sailing with these mural commissions. In the murals of Rivera and his fellow artists, we see fresh voices which do not share the confusion and ambivalence of Vasconcelos and Gamio. It is no coincidence that artists like Rivera had been partially formed, in terms of their ideologies and artistic training, in Western Europe. One could imagine Rivera thinking of Vasconcelos as a provincial relic of the 19th century, and, indeed, the figure of his patron, seated on that white elephant, embodies just such an image.

The 1921 Centennial Celebration

According to González ("Modernity"), as in the case of the murals, the 1921 Centennial included a celebration of revolutionary ideals, part of whose aim was to present existing, (as opposed to pre-Columbian), indigenous art as part of the national patrimony, a dramatic change from the 1910 celebration in the time of the Porfiriato. As was the case for the murals, the

centennial committee chose artists who had lived in Paris during the time of the Mexican Revolution to organize part of the celebration, since they had been funded to live there to absorb "modern" European artistic fashions. The organizers' plans for the 1920 celebration could not have been further from those for the 1910 centennial, as described by González:

> In a dramatic departure from Porfirian norms, a 'Noche Mexicana' and an 'Exhibition of Popular Arts' presented Native art as meritorious, inspirational and uniquely Mexican. Their work would reflect the influence of European cultural trends, particularly primitivism, Mexico's indigenous cultures and the revolution's liberating spirit (López, 2001; 2006; 2010). Artistic styles and forms had been exchanged among Native cultures for centuries, and indigenous and European art had commingled since contact. Examples taken from contemporary indigenous art would now inspire the creative process and influence the emergence of revolutionary aesthetics.[32] (González "Modernity" 46)

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[32] It is interesting to find that there had been artistic exchanges since the Conquest, betokening an openness and egalitarianism on the part of individual artists and craftsmen which is quite at odds with the official social hierarchies depicted in the 18th century casta paintings, though not their actual content, and, later, the attempt to "whiten" and distort pre-Columbian heritage in the late

"Primitivism," in its early 20th century French version, was to do with using forms, qua forms, seen in objects brought from French Colonial Africa, (seen for the first time in Paris by Matisse and Picasso in 1906-7), with little interest on the part of those great artists and tradition-breakers in the cultures of origin of those objects (Rubin 2). The professed intent in the intermixing of art forms, as expression of an intermixing of cultures, in this early 20th century Mexican event was quite different. (One wonders, in fact, whether the officials who made this assignment were aware of the nature of the French movement, or whether they simply wanted the public art that they commissioned to be up to date and "European"). What González describes above echoes Vasconcelos's vision of the fusion of the races in *La raza cósmica,* although, we know that, in practice, Vasconcelos himself did not adhere to his own lofty principles, or his "vision," with any consistency. However, as was the case initially for the muralists, the planner for the event, Adolfo Best Maugard, was given free license to choose productions that reflected his tastes and beliefs. Those beliefs were "in cultural relativism and popular traditions as carriers of the collective spirit" (González "Modernity" 47). (This, "collective spirit" is, perhaps, what was called "mexicanidad"). Performers from rural areas, including Mayan and Yaqui dancers, plus dancers in Colonial era costumes, were included in the celebration, as expressions of what we would now call inclusiveness. Indigenous food was also served during the *Noche mexicana*, which was reported

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19th century under Porfirio Díaz. Ambivalence was part of the DNA of the interaction of the two cultures.

at the time to be attended by an audience of 500,000 (González "Modernity" 48 cites *El Demócrata*, 27 Sep. 1921).

Such enthusiasm betokens interest in, and, perhaps, affection for, indigenous culture, but it is not clear that that affection would extend to the integration of those same indigenous peoples into mainstream Mexican life, nor is it clear what form such an integration could take. If we compare the 1910 procession of Moctezuma and his defeated warriors with the 1921 *Noche mexicana* dances, however, it is clear that the former celebrated humiliation, while the latter celebrated beauty, and cultural relativism, which, at least, is a bow in the direction of respect for indigenous culture.

There was also an exhibition of popular art at the time, which included indigenous arts and artisanship. González, remarks that "This created the right aesthetic effect for an urban audience, without the sights, smells, sounds and people of a village market" ("Modernity"48). If this is the case, it echoes the enthusiasm of the Paris artists for African artifacts that had been stripped of their original "unsightly" trappings associated with ceremonial practices, to reveal a "primitive" form. Perhaps this is not a precise analogy, since the middle-class urban buying public in Mexico City may have had some knowledge of, and respect for, the indigenous cultures from which the objects came, whereas this was not true of their Parisian counterparts.

What Alonso calls "postcolonial ambivalence" was clear in other quarters. Examining the perspective of a nation on the racial and cultural diversity of its population through its museum exhibits, as Alonso has done for post-revolutionary Mexico, is a potentially powerful strategy. The

contradiction between the glorification of indigenous peoples as one of the founders of the Mexican nation and the image of the "sleeping Indian" was expressed in the exhibits in the Museo Nacional de Antropología. Vasconcelos and Gamio shared the ideal of consolidating "this double and rich heritage, (which) makes Mexico into a living museum" (Alonso 469), "the brilliant Mexican past that preceded the Conquest" (Alonso 474) with public art that presented pre-Columbian art as a national treasure. Alonso makes a very telling distinction between art presented to be admired by the spectator and anthropological exhibits, which inform that same spectator about a culture which is not their own. It is possible to respond to the beauty and craftsmanship of an exhibit when viewed as an art object without cultural condescension, and, in fact, if the culture is far from one's own, to draw somewhat closer to that distant culture through an admiring response to the power of the artifact on display. In the case of a museum exhibit presented as science, it is easier to retain one's own cultural provincialism, and sense of Otherness from the objects on display. However, in the case of early 20th century Mexico, there were worse aspects to these "scientific" exhibits. As late as the 1960s, the museum invited groups of Indians to "build their own habitats" as a living exhibit. As Alonso remarks, "the connection between the process of stereotyping and caricature is obvious here" (477). The very existence of this invitation shows that the museum authorities thought of their audience, still well into the 20th century, as people with no actual connection to Indians. In fact, the notion may never have occurred to them that an actual person from those anthropologically interesting hinterlands might wish to visit what is after all, a monument to modern Mexico, its roots in mestizaje, its oft repeated reverence for the pre-Columbian past, and the various official acts that were intended to show respect for living

indigenous culture. The shadow of the image of those Porfirian "degraded remains" lingers on in this gesture. Since such efforts had been made by the reformers to bring those very communities into the "modern "world, from Spanish schools onwards to reading Homer and supposedly full inclusion in the Mexican state, one wonders why this display could even have been thought of a possible museum exhibit.

There was sincerity, albeit enormous confusion and self-deception, in the professed goal of powerful national leaders such as Vasconcelos and Gamio of honoring the diversity of post-revolutionary Mexico, in contrast to the more overt racism of the Porfiriato. However, given that confusion, it is no surprise that post-colonial ambivalence towards indigenous populations remained as one major cultural strand, but not the only strand, in 20th century, post-revolutionary, Mexico. Cultural expressions of this ambivalence are the subject of Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3. FILM AS POLITICAL PROPAGANDA. VISIONS OF LO MEXICANO

In the post-Revolutionary period, Mexican film served partially as propaganda for an admixture of cultural myths and political messaging. Palou describes the social role of film in early and mid- 20th century Mexico as: "El cine, en nuestro país, será utilizado primordialmente en su papel unificador de la nacionalidad y su proyecto político" (31). I will examine some cinematic examples, and one related literary one, to understand more about messages intended for the general

public concerning Indians, the Church, women, and the urban poor in post-Revolutionary Mexico. Based on these examples, I propose that the ambivalence that was conveyed over past centuries continued into the age of technology, post-revolutionary rhetoric notwithstanding. However, one is gravely short-changing Mexican film of the period by characterizing it in purely political terms. The coming together of new technologies with the influence of talented immigrants on home-grown cinematic genius resulted in the flowering of what is called The Golden Age of Mexican film in the 1930s and 1940s, and an extraordinary visualization of lo mexicano.

The technology of film arrived in Porfirian Mexico in 1896, and the first silent Mexican film, *El Grito de Dolores,* was produced in 1908. Both fictional film and documentaries, or combinations of the two, served political purposes, including the odd gesture of Francisco ("Pancho") Villa, who had a contract with the Mutual Film Corporation, a US film conglomerate, in 1914 in advance to film his battles, a pioneering act of joining art and life (reality TV turned on its head?) for propagandistic purposes through the new medium (Palou 31). The era of sound arrived in Mexican film in the early 1930s, and with it, a more powerful medium through which to convey the post-Revolutionary message to the public. *Vámonos con Pancho Villa* (1936) was part of a trilogy of films chronicling the Revolution directed by Francisco de Fuentes. However, the film fell afoul of the government censors because of a final scene in which Pancho Villa, at a moral crossroads, is revealed as a monster. The central character, Tiburcio, is ordered by Villa to kill, or cremate alive, his young friend, Becerillo, who has fought beside him up to this point, because the young soldier is very ill with an infectious disease, and cannot move, nor certainly fight, anymore. Tiburicio is horrified at this order to kill his friend, as though he were a dog, but,

nevertheless, he carries out the order, and afterwards, deserts, literally walking away into the darkness from the Revolution, but not before denouncing Pancho Villa and his distorted version of Revolutionary ideals. It is small wonder that de Fuentes was out of favor for this scene, but, what is interesting is that he felt free to make the film, just as Diego Rivera was able to complete his fresco lampooning Vasconcelos, and both the artist and his fresco survived. De Fuentes got a chance to redeem himself, though, with *Allá en el rancho grande,* (1936), a *comedia ranchera*,[33] a light film that proved to be an enormous hit. At this stage of his career, by switching to light and stylized comedy, De Fuentes took a safer route by avoiding directly tackling weighty matters such as overt political protest.

Sex, Religion, and Ambiguity in *Santa* (1931). A Proposed Resonance with Mestizaje

There were safer subjects for film-making than Revolutionary ideals, however, and the redemption of a "fallen woman" from the lower classes was a promising choice, although her suffering is presented with sympathy in *Santa* (1931), the first sound film made in Mexico, based on a homonym novel by Federico Gamboa, from the Porfiriato, published in 1903. An interpretation of

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[33] Comedia ranchera was *"*a romantic genre based on the farcical musical theater of the early 1900s that featured folkloric themes and popular music, a reaction against agrarian reformist policies and a romanticization of prerevolutionary Mexico" (Hershfield 90). In that sense, such a genre is, of course, quite political.

the 1931 film invoking La Malinche has been proposed (see below), making this melodrama a mythical origin story. A silent version had appeared earlier. The novel was immensely popular in its day, as was the film, which was released in March 1932. It was partly filmed on location in Chimalistac, then an isolated village, now part of Mexico City. The film was directed by the actor Antonio Moreno, a Spanish "heartthrob in Hollywood's silent cinema" (Ramírez Berg 60), who was persuaded to move to Mexico to direct the film, as were the stars Lopita Tovar (Figure 1), and Donald Reed, both originally Mexican, and also successful Hollywood actors (Ramírez Berg 60). We first see teenaged Santa in her village, being presented with a bouquet of flowers by a shy admirer, her modest house, and her parodically virtuous mother and little brother. All this innocence is swept away with the thundering arrival of a military Lothario on horseback, accompanied by his men. This man promptly seduces Santa and soon gallops away forever, as we imagine, crushing the shy admirer's flowers on the way out, together with Santa's "honorable" future. She is now a fallen woman, damaged goods in the patriarchal world of women as commodities. The music and the exaggerated actions are pure melodrama, a shopworn trope. Santa's brothers, rather than being portrayed as proud examples of protectors of the family's honor, are lackluster louts, in contrast to their lively, vulnerable, if susceptible, sister. They show clown-like body language, as they shove Santa back and forth between them, while cross-questioning her about whether she has been with a man, and proclaiming that they will kill any man who has touched her, since she is, of course, their property until they find another man for her, provided that she is not already damaged goods. When Santa finds out subsequently that the band of soldiers, led by her lover, is leaving the village, the brothers clumsily pursue her as she dashes out to plead with Marcelino not to abandon her by leaving with his troop.

Palou reads the character of Santa as being symbolically Indian, and he likens her tragic story to the role of La Malinche in the conquest of Mexico. According to Palou, Santa, in losing her virginity to Marcelino, a glamorous soldier, is La Malinche (40). After her expulsion from her native village, Santa flees to the wicked, worldly, city and joins a brothel where her first patron is Jarameño, a Spanish bullfighter. Palou reads this turn of events as symbolizing Santa/La Malinche

becoming enslaved by the Spanish (40).[34] Palou connects the arc of the plot of *Santa* to that of the La Malinche myth, which is undoubtedly "uno de los mitos fundadores más productivos de la mexicanidad" (41) by pointing out that Santa, like La Malinche, is seduced by a solider, "quien nuevamente es dueño de las armas y la violencia" (41).

My perception, somewhat, but not entirely, contrary to that of Palou, is that Santa has more of Eve in her than La Malinche. Eve-like, Santa is tempted into sin by someone treacherous, perhaps we can accept the notion that her native village is Eden-like, and it is her naiveté that leads to her being led astray by the serpent-like, male, seducer. In comparison, La Malinche was a slave, and her owner was the father of her son. In that case, no seduction was needed, and brute force plausibly sufficed. Santa is forced to move to the sinful city, away from Eden. After her expulsion from Eden, in the city, she does, indeed, Eve-like, acquire the knowledge of good and evil. Contrary to the central theme of La Malinche as mother of the Mexican nation, no mestizo offspring, no mythical ancestor of the Mexican nation, appears in *Santa.*

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[34] The rest of the story can only be described as melodramatic and, indeed, Palou describes it as the first Mexican proto-telenovela (41). It seems to have little to do with the La Malinche legend. Marcelino, the original seducer, intrudes on Santa's life as the mistress of the bullfighter, the bullfighter discovers them together, Santa narrowly escapes death at the vengeful hands of Jarameño through a vision of the Virgin, and Santa is expelled and forced to return to the brothel. Finally, after another round of acceptance and subsequent rejection by a rich lover, Santa is now protected only by the blind pianist in the brothel, becomes gravely ill, dies on the operating table during a hysterectomy and, thanks to the efforts of her blind admirer, is buried back in her village.

Since the central character in the film is called Santa, we know that this will be a story involving a falling from grace, and eventual redemption through some kind of re-awakened piety. The presence of the blind pianist in the brothel, with his pure love for Santa, is unadulterated melodrama. Since he cannot see her physically, he can see, and make a connection with, the, inner, sinless, beauty of her soul. That sinless spiritual state becomes an outward reality with the arrival of her brothers to tell her of her mother's death, which transforms her into a saintly person. Now she is Santa and a saint (Santa y santa), and we see her in the poster advertising the film (Figure 2), praying, complete with a halo. Maybe this metamorphosis shows her saintly heart of gold, although the trope of golden-heartedness is more usually associated with generosity to others, than with self-centered piety.

One political interpretation of the denouement, with the turning away from sin, and the eventual death of Santa, is that Christian morality remains all-powerful and omnipresent, despite the Revolutionary rhetoric of the separation of Church and State, and the avowed goal of post-Revolutionary governments of diminishing the Church's power in the reborn Mexico. The only way that Santa can return to her beloved village is as a corpse, where she will be allowed a proper burial. The pure love of the blind man for her may correspond to the Christian God who forgives all sin. This is the power that brings about the return of Santa to her home. Santa may be a Christian Eve redeemed through death.

If, on the other hand, as Palou proposes, we are to see Santa as the indigenous La Malinche who is violated and abandoned by an invading force (41), that force being a stand-in for the Conquistadores and their descendants, then the film becomes an allegory for the rape of the land and its people by the original invaders. One could extend Palou's hypothesis into very speculative and secular territory by seeing the death of Santa as the only terrible, logical, end for the pillage of the land, or, alternatively, as Santa's/La Malinche's spiritual escape from slavery. The pall of sanctimony that hangs over the film is somewhat decreased through these partial, and admittedly very tenuous, interpretations, but it is not possible to escape the confused moralizing entirely.

The Transformation of Mexican Film. A New Genre is Born

In 1932, the Soviet filmmaker, Sergei Eisenstein arrived in Mexico, with financial ties to Hollywood and the US writer, Upton Sinclair, with the intention of making a film about Mexican history. The film was not assembled at that time, but, in its final 1979 (assembly/reconstruction), Grigori Aleksandrov, the only living member of the original three-member team at that time, credits the muralists Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Siqueiros as their teachers in the long country-wide journey that they took to make the film, *Que viva Mexico*, a clear echo of the Grito de Dolores, the motto of the Revolution. The film is in Russian, perhaps emphasizing its distance from its subject, though not from the ideology of the three muralists. One can assume that the shared political vision of the muralists and Eisenstein, called "Stalin's whore", made the mentoring partnership possible. [35] This provides continuity between the state-financed public

[35] Eisenstein, however, was no mere Soviet propagandist. "If Leni Riefenstahl was Hitler's point-person for political propaganda, Sergei Eisenstein was Stalin's whore. But unlike any of the films Riefensthal produced for the Third Reich, Eisenstein's films are masterworks of political subversion made for the Russian people but nonetheless critical of the collectivist system under which they were made" (González).

frescoes in Mexico City of the 1920s, (which finally, embarrassed the government patrons, as described in the previous chapter), and the future Mexican film industry. In the case of *Que viva Mexico,* however*,* the materials were seized by the US in Texas under circumstances that are not clear, but which, one could imagine, were related to politics and the US sponsors, and only released all those decades later. Thus, the film itself was temporarily dead on arrival, so to speak, but its cinematography, happily, was not. Gabriel Figueroa was one of Eisenstein's cinematographers, and his extraordinary gifts, together with the skills that he acquired working with the Soviet director's cinematographer, Edward Tisse, and a year's training with Gregg Toland, Orson Welles' cinematographer (Cotter), were to elevate the visual art of Mexican films of the Golden Age, as exemplified by Emilio "El Indio" Fernández' films, and by Buñuel's masterpiece, *Los olvidados* (1950), discussed below. Figueroa was part of a circle of artists, which included the same, three celebrated, muralists. In fact, he was sometimes called the fourth muralist (Hall 222), although his work is very different in tone, image, and, I contend, possibly in intent, than those of the three firebrand muralists. The injection of such mastery was to make what, dramatically, perhaps, resembled 19th century European opera with respect to melodramatic narrative, into works of art. In contrast, *Los olvidados* holds its own on all counts in any cinematic company.

Figueroa also had a partnership with a Mexican printmaker, Leopoldo Méndez. According to the curators of a recent, 2015, exhibition of Figueroa's art at the Museo del Barrio in New York City:

The Taller de Gráfica Popular (Popular Graphic Arts Workshop or People's Graphic Workshop) was an artist's print collective founded in Mexico in 1937 by Méndez and other collaborators. The group was primarily concerned with using art to communicate revolutionary social causes. The print shop became a base of political activity and attracted many artists as collaborators. Gabriel Figueroa and Leopoldo Méndez worked together on a dozen films. They were deeply committed to art with significant social content. They were very aware of the fact that cinema had the capacity to reach more extensive and diverse audiences. Figueroa himself explained the collaborative process with Méndez "We (Figueroa and the director of the movie) presented him [Méndez] with a newly completed film; he interpreted the theme and created eight or ten engravings that we used as background for the credits. It was an entirely new concept. (El museo)

Figueroa created images of great beauty of the Mexican landscape and many of its people, in, for example, *Río escondido (1948)*, and *María Candelaria (1944* (both discussed below) and is a major artistic ancestor of the cinematographers who followed after him. Despite the account given above, we do not actually know whether he was deeply committed to the political ideology of his friends the muralists, but the enduring visual image of Mexico and Mexicans that he created passed into legend as "lo mexicano." Figueroa drew on art-historical sources for technical inspiration, Diego Velasquez' *Las Meninas* being one of them, for combining two forms of perspective (Ramírez Berg 116), as well as expanding techniques such as low-angle filming and

"expressionistic lighting" (119), tools that he had learned from some combination of his Russian and Californian mentors (112). His most famous original invention was his rendition of skies, the inspiration for which came from the work of the Mexican painter Gerardo Murillo (1875-1964), usually known by his assumed Nahautl name of Dr. Atl. Ramírez Berg (112) cites a source describing Dr. Atl as making "an aesthetic geography of the mountains and valleys of Mexico." Figueroa invented a solution to the problem of how to depict the sky on film that echoed the aim of Dr. Atl, using an infrared filter to remove haze, resulting in the startling sky images that are seen in the films discussed below. This was "lo mexicano," in a form that could be filled with, or used for, political messaging.

A "schizophrenic view of the indigenous population": *María Candelaria. Xochimilco* (1943) by Emilio "El Indio" Fernández[36]

Xochimilco, now, a suburb of Mexico City, was a floating garden community of Indians in the pre-revolutionary time period (1909) presented in the film. The film was directed by Emilio "El Indio" Fernández, who had a longstanding collaboration with Gabriel Figueroa. El Indio is also said to have had access to portions of the unreleased *Que viva México* (Ramírez Berg 66). Fernández was perhaps proud of his mestizo heritage, with his mother being a Kikapú Indian,

[36] Hall (217).

although it is not at all clear how this supposed pride is on display in the two films discussed here.[37] *María Candelaria*, whose subject is indeed an Indian community, was awarded the Palm d'Or at the first (1946) Cannes Film Festival, where Figueroa also received an award for his work. Palou describes the portrayal of María Candelaria in the film by Dolores del Río, as a representation of "la buena salvaje" (34). Del Río, originally from Mexico, from a wealthy family, whose physiognomy in the film appears to be that of a criolla, was a Hollywood actress who returned to acting in Mexico after the end of the era of silent film (Fig 3).

Del Río's life and career are, in themselves, a cultural text. Apparently, she and her family were preoccupied throughout her life with what was described as her dark skin and her (Indian?) facial features. Hall (17) cites a source claiming that she used whitening powders on her face even as a child, (shades of Porfirio Díaz, pun intended), and, while in Hollywood, the actress used cosmetics, multiple plastic surgeries, and skillful lighting to whiten her appearance. Since her family on both sides were upper-class, claiming to be directly descended from New Spanish nobility on her mother's side (Hall 22), having a skin that was less than European white would have been cause for consternation. Hall cites a cousin of Del Río's who recounted that there was concern that if the little girl were dressed in white she would look like a fly in milk (26). That she returned to Mexico to play, to great accolades, the part of an Indian peasant, is indeed ironic, she, who had expended great effort to erase any real, or imagined, Indian quality from her face. One can interpret this as an expression of the distance from the realities of actual indigenous communities of the filmmakers, and indeed, of the post-Revolutionary authorities. A glamorous movie star playing "an Indian peasant" were two fairytales rolled into one, never mind that actual Indians were actors

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[37] He may, also, have been given this nickname simply on the basis of parts that he had played in Hollywood, or his appearance.

in the film as well, playing, other, unflattering, parts that were part of the fairy tale. There is a resonance here with the 1910 Centennial procession of Indians playing the role of Montezuma and his defeated warriors, perhaps.

The filmmakers, for all the political messaging that they may have wished to convey, apparently were blind to the jarring choice of a supposedly white woman to portray "la buena salvaje." They most likely made this choice simply on the basis of her celebrity. Perhaps it is an anachronism to imagine that an actress who was recognized as an Indian could have been considered for a major cinematic role at that time in Mexico, (or in California, for that matter), betokening the very racism that post-Revolutionary rhetoric sought to decry. However, Ramírez Berg, cites Adolfo Fernández Bustamante, writing in 1931, who expresses that very sentiment:

If it hopes to succeed, Mexican cinema should be Mexican art: it should embody national motifs, which we have by the hundreds; natural settings, which are abundant in our country, stars who embody our distinct racial characteristics different from Hollywood's "beautiful models." Eisenstein has given us the template for our cinematic future, has marked the path we should follow; he has been a guide … who did not seek the beautiful boy or the Yankee-looking girl, but cast *indios* instead, selected the most Mexican landscapes and has produced the wonder of an authentic work of Mexican art, profoundly nationalistic and beautiful. (62)

Lo mexicano, in its totality, is described here, including, most importantly, the wish to celebrate indigenous peoples, at least with respect to their physiognomy, but not, it seems, their actual culture or their languages. The Pre-Columbian past, in the form of monuments and the appearance of living indigenous peoples, is exalted, but the assumption seems to be that those beautiful surfaces suffice to produce "the wonder of an authentic work of Mexican art." However, what Ramírez Berg calls "media colonialism" (62) is seen very clearly in Del Río's efforts to appear whiter, to seem more like that "Yankee-looking girl," and we are far from the ideals expressed by Bustamante.

To complicate matters further, the film portrays the Indian community to which the unfortunate María Candelaria belongs, as full of hate for her, (Figure 4) concluding with her death at the hands of the community in the form of a mob, complete with burning torches. This happened because they (falsely) accused her of posing nude for an artist, but, her original outcast status was because her mother was supposedly a prostitute. Rigidity and puritanism send humans (perhaps, non-human savages?) down a murderous path. It is not hard to see the shadow of the form of racism from preceding generations in this depiction.

Paradoxically, the tone set by one of the opening images, showing a pre-Columbian head of a woman, next to a photo of a dark-skinned woman (not del Rio, it would seem) (Figure 5), is one, ostensibly, proclaiming pride in one of the ancestral strands of Vasconcelos's vision of mestizaje, and its embodiment in the living descendants of those pre-Columbian peoples. Respect for contemporary indigenous culture was not part of the raza cósmica rhetoric, the 1920 Centennial celebration notwithstanding. (Perhaps the denouement of the film would have suited the authorities very well). Be that as it may, we are led, in our naiveté, in this opening credit, to expect a film that presents the Indians as, maybe noble, or minimally, interesting, humans or, at least, not caricature-like villains. In fact, a message appears at the beginning, announcing that this will be a "tragedia de amor" in "un rincón indígena de México," lest there be any doubt about the subject or the place. The hero and heroine ("una india de pura raza mexicana") are, indeed, such noble people, but they are outcasts. However, the actors chosen to portray María Candelaria's tormenters are actually indigenous people (Figure 4), and they are implied to be actual *salvajes,* not really Christian, because they show no mercy to their fellow villagers. The Church, in the form of a visibly white priest, is represented as benevolent and understanding of the needs and lofty purity of the hero and heroine. I use these dated terms for the principal characters advisedly because that is how they are portrayed, although the impressive presence of both Del Río and Pedro Armendáriz, her male counterpart, must not go unmentioned. The message conveyed is that to be pure of heart, noble in purpose, and Indian, leads to death at the hands of "savages." There is no place in the world for a virtuous Indian. The distant ancestors of the "savages" are the *indios bárbaros* of the casta

paintings, although the main attribute of those 18th century, seemingly, peace-loving, *indios bárbaros* was only their lack of a Christian faith, non-European-style clothes, and their possession of bows and arrows. The rhetoric of the post-Revolutionary powers that be included a desire to lessen the power of the Church in their new, Mexico, (as, indeed, it was from the beginning in independent 19th century Mexico, see above), but it seems that a vehicle intended, literally, for popular consumption, needed this bow in the direction of an image of a supposedly benevolent and humane institution. Since we are told explicitly that this story took place in 1909, before the Revolution, it is possible, also, that what is being conveyed is the bad old days of the Porfiriato, before the transformed world of the new form of Mexico. Be that as it may, the film struck a chord, with large audiences, and praise from such figures as Fernando de Fuentes, and Alfonso Reyes, a prominent Mexican public intellectual (Hall 221). Our 21st century eyes do not see the same film that Mexicans responded to in 1944, a film that Del Río herself called "tipo indigenista o mexicanista" (cited by Hall 326).

Political Propaganda in *Río Escondido* (1948) by Emilio "El Indio" Fernández

Charles Ramírez Berg quotes Emilio Fernández as proclaiming "I understood that it was possible to create a Mexican cinema with our own actors and our own stories, without having to photograph gringos or gringas or tell stories that had nothing to do with our people" (93-94). We can no longer take this defiant statement at face value, given the interweaving of Hollywood with what became the Golden Age of Mexican film, and the racial position of El Indio's films. However, a Mexican cinema was indeed created, in no small part because of him. We have seen that, in the case, at least, of *María Candelaria,* the portrayal of Fernández' Indian "people" is not a positive one. In *Río Escondido,* a very different approach is taken, in which the Indian community in question is not malevolent this time, but, rather, childlike, and in need of enlightenment from non-Indian Mexicans, another trope with long echoes in New Spanish and Mexican history.

The subject of the film is Spanish-based education programs for Indian children living in their own communities, an effort which had been repeated through the centuries, as we have seen, but which took a much more ambitious form under post-revolutionary governments, instigated initially by Vasconcelos. These are neither *indios bárbaros* (they are Catholics, of a sort), nor exactly *indios ladinos*, since, although they are presented as speaking Spanish, they have no power and their children are simply innocent vessels, ready to be filled up with Hispanic culture as imparted by a famous teacher, played by María Félix, sent expressly by the President of the Republic directly to that particular community. The propagandistic nature of the film is heavy-handedly conveyed in the opening scene, in which the teacher, Rosaura Salazar, played by María Félix, is summoned to the National Palace by the President to be given her "mission" of bringing education to the Indian community of Río Escondido. On her way to her interview with the President, she passes by objects illustrating the history of Mexico, including a Diego Rivera fresco. It is difficult to imagine that Rivera would have had great sympathy with this educational goal, since he was concerned primarily with exposing the exploitation of those very Indian peasants who were oppressed by the powerful landowners in the provinces, a focus very different from that of transforming Indian communities by making the people who lived there much less Indian and much more like criollos, copies of the *Iliad* included. This is an interesting example of political messaging gone awry. The President then gives a sonorous speech to the teacher, telling her that she can be part of the effort to "salvar a nuestro pueblo," no less. He tells her that "México estará con usted," and she says that she knows that she has a very great task to accomplish. The teacher's journey to her destination is very solitary and her missionary zeal is undaunted. Her aloneness in Figueroa's landscapes, and in

Méndez' print, are images of an independent woman who is both strong and educated, and who has taken on the world (Figure 6a and b).[38]

Upon arrival, after being helped after fainting, (due to a heart condition), along the way, by a Good Samaritan who is also a doctor, (shown with a stunning Figueroa sky as backdrop) (Figure 7) she is confronted by what used to be the village school house, which is now being used as a stable for the horses of the dictatorial local cacique (*el presidente municipal*), who seems to be a mestizo. She also acquires some recently orphaned children to raise as her own. Due to the intervention of the doctor, the cacique finally removes his horses, the school reverts to its original function, and we see the teacher explaining to the assembled children that they, too, can rise in Mexican society like Benito Juárez, a fellow Indian (Figure 8). The light passing over the teacher's face leads us to the portrait of Juárez, and the sense is almost of a religious icon accompanied by the bearer of the true faith.

The only way to rise is, of course, to assimilate completely. There is not a flicker of ambiguity or hesitation in the speech that is given to the Indian children gazing at the Juárez picture, children

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[38] The contrast in tone between Figueroa's art and the Méndez linocut is startling, although the basic message is the same. The linocut, with the Mexican symbols in the sky and the tagline about "the little lady teacher" is gratingly sentimental and somewhat condescending. In contrast, the cinematographer's wide-open sky with the female figure in silhouette against it lacks those qualities, and gives meaning to the idiom "The sky's the limit."

who, somehow, miraculously, understand the teacher's Spanish. The contrast between the visual aesthetics, and the accompanying political propaganda is astonishing but perhaps not to the Mexican movie audiences of the 1930s.

The cacique becomes sexually obsessed with the teacher and tries to persuade her to move in with him into a very modern house. She is outraged, and declares that he has insulted her womanhood and her profession. The rejection results in terrible suffering for the Indian community because they are cut off from their water supply by the rejected suitor. All ends in tragedy as one of the teacher's adopted sons is killed by the cacique as he, (the son), draws water from the cacique's private well to save his family. The cacique then tries to rape the teacher, who shoots him in her own defense. Rosaura finally collapses and dies from her frail condition, coupled with the overwork and fear that has dogged her footsteps ever since her entry into the Indian village. She has died for her President's (and Vasconcelos's) version of her country.

Thus, a woman is not only the central character in the film, but she is an active agent for social change, (albeit one which we, as 21st century spectators, may be dubious about), and for humanity and justice. To paraphrase Hélène Cixous, (writing in 1975), in our (Western) culture at large, woman has been buried, and for a new order to emerge, this rock of patriarchy upon which the old order is built has to be destroyed by a "species of mole never known before" (656). Rosaura may be regarded as a fore-runner of this new species of mole, and one could argue that she has company. María Candelaria also has autonomy thrust upon her and has to fight for herself, but to no avail. Santa, also alone, succeeded only in death. In contrast, Rosaura is less passive, and even more alone. She wins a victory over tyranny on behalf of the post-revolutionary government, although she dies for that cause. Because of the images, and Félix's dramatic presence, it is not possible for this viewer, at least, to regard the figure of Rosaura as wholly a falsely sentimental one, even though the propaganda that drives the film can hardly be entered into today.

The Lack of Light in *Los olvidados*

L*os olvidados,* directed by Luis Buñuel (1950) could function as an antidote to Vasconcelos's *raza cósmica* and Gamio's forge. The film was named *The Young and the Damned* in English, a name which, in my opinion, is not suited to the film, because it lends a filtering, moralistic, air to a work which is neither moralistic, nor Catholic. It appears to me that Buñuel's intention, above all, was to directly present the spectator with a certain reality, and oblige us to live in that reality with no comforting filters or crutches. The theological aura of "damned" does not fit the work of an artist who left his Catholic faith behind in the Aragon of his youth. Buñuel "declaró una y otra vez el carácter pedagógico del filme" (Palou 68), but that does not equate to a sermon because there is no viable salvation for the youth portrayed in the film. It resembles a declaration more than a sermon, (albeit with a suggested solution), and it is a very powerful declaration at that.

From the outset, we are firmly in the gutter. This particular gutter is a place populated by children and adolescents who have no hope for a future. In the world of the film, the power of physical force rules supreme. The adolescents lack any means to oppose the violence that is their daily life because they have no hope. Buñuel's insistence that his film was "una rebanada de vida tal y como se vive allí o en Londres o París" (Palou 65) constitutes a declaration of his political principles, or, more accurately, his political faith. This faith consists in the view that capitalism, in its crudest form, is the cause of the formation of groups of people without hope, who live outside

the organized society in which a person is compensated for his or her work, and where that society demands, in turn, that the individual submit to society's norms. That submission is the price of admission to the social system, and those who are included can reasonably have hope for themselves and their children. Viewed in this way, this system is universally applicable, and not especially Mexican.

However, Buñuel spent six months investigating his subject before starting on the film (Palou 66). Clearly, it was essential to him that he had real information about the lives of the truly forgotten of Mexico City, the message about the story being possible in any big Western city, notwithstanding. Because of this, it is odd, but understandable, that Buñuel insisted that his film was not fiction, that it was "true," and that his revelations were "cosas que han sido mostradas por vez primera" (Palou 66). Despite his belief in a social theory that was supposedly universal, Buñuel's masterpiece is very much about a specific place.

Since El Jaibo (the villain in the story) kills the only character who has a job near the beginning of the film, it is clear that the narrative is going to be about the forgotten ones, *los olvidados*. That being the case, it is not surprising that the public roundly rejected the film when it was first released, (Ibanez 53), since it was easy to read it as a wholesale condemnation of post-Revolutionary Mexico, and the myth that the ethical state looked after all of its own. However, the film was critically acclaimed immediately (Mora 91), illustrating the tension that exists between works that have a wide public and their lasting artistic value.

The world of *Los olvidados* is made especially frightening through the powerful use of light and shade in a very dark palette, a specialty of Figueroa, as we have seen in *Río Escondido*. The spectator is given the sense that the children, and Pedro in particular, are living as though they were blind people in an unpredictable world, a world without compass that is full of danger and fear. The transition from neorealism to surrealism in the scene of Pedro's dream seems natural to the viewer because the very dark world could be hiding both the everyday, and the far from every day, especially for a child who has spent his entire short life in distress and hunger. A triumph of the narrative is that Pedro remains a child of the streets throughout. He does not metamorphose into a sentimentalized hero.

Since his life as a child and a son has been hard and painful, the scenes of Pedro and his mother are most difficult. In less gifted hands than those of Buñuel, depiction of the mother-son relationship could become quite maudlin. However, Buñuel stayed true to his intention of presenting "reality," the specific reality that he had encountered during his six months of research. We feel sympathy for Pedro, even though he is not a "hero," because we identify with him as a vulnerable protagonist. The absence of a father in the family is presented as one of the causes of his suffering, but the way in which that suffering is conveyed to us is central to the narrative. These are no proposed explanations for Pedro's pitiful state. We are given no sermons on the virtues of the patriarchal family even though "todos en la película padecen esa orfandad" and "Los pobres no tienen padre verdadero, ni físico ni imaginario" (Palou 72). The poor people depicted in the film have no father. The absence of a wage-earning father in this male-dominated world is a central cause of the extreme poverty of Pedro and his mother, there can be no doubt of that. According to

Palou, El Jaibo's seduction of Pedro's mother constitutes a betrayal of Pedro because it is a usurpation "del lugar del padre ausente" (Palou 71). The seduction may be a symptom of the decadence of the community and/or the lack of social structure, as personified by the evil of El Jaibo. Pedro may feel betrayed by El Jaibo but there is no insistence on the centrality of the absent father theme. In fact, it is not clear that Pedro is familiar with the notion of betrayal since he lives in a world of pure violence. His reality is hunger, fear, violence, and abuse from his mother. "Honor" is hardly present in his world at all, aside from the necessity of not betraying Jaibo's crimes because, if one did, he (Jaibo) would kill the person who betrayed him. Of course, if the absent father idea is to be taken *au pied de la lettre*, Pedro's suffering would be explained as an unconscious expression of the pain that came from the absence of a father in his life.[39] Since Pedro constantly lives with fear and hunger, (and a complete absence of love from his mother), I suggest that his physiological state may take primacy over the absence of a father in his life, or, to be more

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[39] Freud's proposal that there is a particular part of the mind, the unconscious, into which unfulfilled desires, or buried memories, are deposited, has a great attraction. Beginning in childhood, individuals have the constant sense of navigating their interactions with others out of a confused mix of actual feelings, memories, and, perhaps most importantly, a guiding sense of what is "appropriate" for any given circumstance. Even if this is true, it cannot be proven that this state has to do with fathers, in particular.

precise, that Buñuel's intent is to convey a raw reality based on organismic needs. As Bertoldt Brecht put it in *The Threepenny Opera*

> Now all you gentlemen who wish to lead us
>
> Who teach us to desist from mortal sin
>
> Your prior obligation is to feed us
>
> When we've had lunch, your preaching can begin (153).

Pedro has sympathy for El Ojitos since he is a child, like himself, who suffers even more than he does. As Palou remarks, "hay una ingenua indicación de que la niñez es esencialmente buena" (73), as we see when Pedro tries to protect El Ojitos. However, his surroundings are so powerfully adverse that he is obliged to let go of this natural bond. The presence of a character who is actually blind gives additional emphasis to the sense of chaos in the world of the film. Don Carmelo, (taken directly from Spanish literary tradition, according to Palou, 70) has no moral principles, as is true of everyone in the community. He celebrates the Porfirian past, a good time, according to him, when women stayed at home. There is neither actual light nor figurative light in this world, and Don Carmelo exploits the Indian child who was abandoned in the market by his own father for his (Don Carmelo's) own purposes. The lost boy is given the nickname "El Ojitos" because he looks more like an Indian than the other people who live in the barrio. It is made clear that the more "Indian" one's appearance, the relatively lower one is in the social hierarchy, an echo

from the past. Also, their fanciful perception is that, since he comes from the country, that is why he is shorter than the rest of them.

The presentation of the administration of the Escuela-Granja, to which an *olvidado,* such as Pedro, can be sent, on very little actual evidence, is less successful than that of the barrio. The slogan "a quien hay que encarcelar es a la pobreza, no a los pobres" (Palou 72), has a facile ring to it, even though it is true. Going along with this slogan, the humane treatment that Pedro receives in the Escuela is hardly credible. This is a world which may, or may not, be honest. The staff in the Escuela are a stark contrast to the people of the barrio, who never uttered a general thought about the way in which they lived, because they were living without hope. Palou makes an interesting comparison between Don Carmelo, who says that "solo hay paz allí donde no hay pelados" (Palou 72), and the director's humane view of his charges.

I am not convinced that the idea of mestizaje was important to Buñuel, as a foreigner. Rather, poverty was his focus, poverty was what he saw firsthand. Yet, in his presentation of El Ojitos, he captured that persistent racist hierarchy in Mexican culture. Other than how "Indian" El Ojitos is, there is no other question of differences of caste, to use an old term, in the film. We do not know whether *los olvidados* depicted in the film differed with respect to race or degree of mestizaje when compared with other populations who fared better in post-Revolutionary urban life in Mexico. Such a sociological question has no place in the film. There are no clues that Buñuel was concerned with this, quintessentially Mexican, obsession. El mestizaje, as an idea, does not appear in the film. Buñuel's tightly focused vision is the most powerful quality of the film. We are

staring human misery straight in the face. It is only the so-called "solution," the idea that benevolent representatives of the state can heal the almost mortal emotional wounds inflicted on young boys from poverty and neglect that leaves us uneasy.

Indians, Class, and Gender in Chiapas. Balún Canán (1955)

New ground was broken with respect to the depiction of indigenous peoples, and of women, in Mexico with the novel *Balún Canán,* by Rosario Castellanos, which was published in 1955. A movie, based on the book, appeared in 1977. The novel is, in large part, autobiographical (Woodrich 133). In an interview with Elena Poniatowska, (cited by Woodrich 134), Castellanos declared: "Desde mi infancia, alterné con los indios. Después de adquirir una perspectiva, me di cuenta de cómo eran los indios y de lo que deberían ser. Me sentía en deuda, como individuo, y como clase, con ellos. Esa deuda se me volvió consciente al redactar Balún Canán." This is the framework within which the novel was conceived, but yet, ambivalence towards the Indians is present here too.

Both novel and film present the audience with those excluded from Chiapan society, the Mayans, and both works can at the same time be read as a platform for feminist ideals. The central character is the daughter of long-established landowners in Comitán, or Balún Canán, (as it was known in the local Mayan language), in a region of the state of Chiapas that borders on Guatemala, as was the novelist herself. According to Edith Negrín Muñoz, the Mayan place name is associated with "las deidades de la mitología maya representadas por los promontorios, a los nueve

guardianes" (58). The girl's nanny has explained the meaning of these guardians to her, as part of her Mayan education. Since the girl's family has no interest in providing her with a Ladino education, her intellectual formation is largely Mayan. This is a substantial shift, from the 1930s cinematic portrayals of Indians from afar as amoral, not quite Christian persons, as ethereal suffering spirits, or as child-like creatures, waiting to be transformed into good Mexicans through an entirely Spanish-based education, to the appearance of Mayan culture in 1955 in Balún Canán as a recognizable entity in itself. Here we are presented with a real-life Indian woman who shares her life with the narrator, a major shift indeed, albeit the social inequality of the nana and her charge are very evident.

An aspect of the relationship between the indigenous community and the Ladinos that is entirely absent in the earlier works discussed in this essay appears early on in the novel. The narrator and her nana watch as an Indian man asks to buy a ticket to a ride on a Ferris Wheel, making his request in Castilian. Shock is expressed at this: "Oílo vos, este indio igualado. Está hablando castilla. ¿Quien le daría permiso?" (Castellanos 38). Vasconcelos and the mission of Rosaura in *Río Escondido* notwithstanding, it seems that an indigenous person was not "permitted" to use Spanish in a public place, and the man, (subsequently referred to as an "indio embelequero," and an "Anticristo" 39) who wanted to go on the Ferris Wheel is reaching far above his station. What is interesting also is that we imagine that the narrator and her nana communicate in Spanish, and so the nana does know Spanish, but perhaps, is only allowed to speak it in public when she is with her Ladina charge. The sense of the rigid enforcement of a complicated racial hierarchy is conveyed vividly by this vignette, set in the context of the nana as and the narrator.

Palou, and Dalton, read the novel as feminist, and there is no doubt that the exclusion of the girl from her family's attention is the cry of an ambitious and spirited female against the injustice of the world in which she is growing up. The Mayan nana is cast in the role of the good mother, in contrast with the girl's biological mother. The nana is not the subject of scientific inquiry, nor is she a demographic statistic. She is the mother who lovingly nurtures her child. She is ultimately expelled from the house and the narrator tells us, writing many years later, that she never saw her nana again. "Nunca, aunque yo la encuentré, podré reconocer a mi nana. Hace tanto tiempo que nos separaron. Además, todas las indias tienen la misma cara" (Castellanos 291). The assertion that "todas las indias tienen la misma cara," stands in contradiction to the loving portrait of the nana who took the role of the narrator's mother long ago. An interpretation of this interesting contradiction is that the girl cannot escape entirely from her class and her historical period, so she tells of her sadness at the loss of her loving Nana, the good mother, one individual, while at the same time mouthing the commonplace, that oppressed racial minorities are one blurred lump of (near-non) humanity. The world in which she grew up was, by her account, cold, hostile, and above all, machista. Her racist thought functions as a type of auto-protection to insulate herself against the loss of the only adult in her life who actually loved her. It is crucial to keep in mind, also, that the girl had her Nana with her up until she was no more than seven years old, when she was powerless to change her life, or, even influence it in any way.

The nana is expelled from the house because there is a rumor that the "brujos will not let one of the children of the family reach adulthood" (Clark D'Lugo 103), and the children's mother prays that it will not be her son. The expulsion of the nana because of the prophesy betokens some

respect for Mayan culture, since the family takes the prediction sufficiently seriously to cast off the narrator's nana, and the mother's prayers can even be viewed as a, somewhat fraught, theological sincretismo between the Mayan and Christian cultures.

What is interesting about the 1977 film, as opposed to the 1955 novel, is that the magic practiced by the Indians is presented as a yet more powerful force. When the narrator's brother does die, it is of appendicitis in the novel, whereas in the film, we are not quite sure of the "diagnosis," as Western medicine would call it. This may have been due to the influence of magical realism, which was prominent by the time of the making of the film. It is as if the film makers wanted to give us a moment of anxiety, of asking ourselves whether the rationality of the Ladinos, and, by extension, our own rationality, is to be trusted. The cinematic vision of the Indians is of beings who have their own world, a world that is not our, Western, one. From rationality onward to magic!

Apart from the nana, the Indians appear in the 1977 movie version of the novel as caricatures. The colors of their houses are somber, the children are very appealing, and their leaders are noble and handsome. According to Palou, it is "un filme que parece ser la versión cinematográfica de la idea del presidente Echeverría sobre la necesidad por los indios de participar en 'la vida cívica intelectual y productiva del país', si no, 'serán extranjeros en su propia tierra … excluidos por los beneficios de la civilización'" (Palou 104-105). This is the centuries-old message repeated again, except not quite. "Civilization" is invoked, with the clear message that there is only one kind of civilization, and the Mayans must assimilate because, it is implied, their own

culture is “foreign” to Mexico, a strange assertion indeed! However, since the Ladino family as portrayed in the film, and the novel, is certainly barbarous, the traditional dichotomy is not actually applicable here. During the Cardenista sexenio (1934-1940), the time in which the novel is set, policies were set in place to assure access to education for Indian children and “the return of communal land ownership for the indigenous” (Clark D’Lugo 103). The ambivalence expressed by the narrator towards the Indians, in the form of her nana, is a manifestation of her class at a particular historical moment, a moment when the professed aims of the central government were more forward-looking than those of provincial landowners such as her family.

From the Sublime to the Comic. A Subversive Portrayal of the Indigenous

Alongside these 20th century, highbrow, depictions, a startlingly different, comic, depiction of indigenous people thrived in Mexican popular culture from the mid 20th century on. Indigenous characters in Golden Age films were played by Mexican actors who had been successful in Hollywood, and therefore were quite white-looking, such as Dolores del Río (see above). When indigenous characters appear in Golden Age films, they are subaltern objects to be feared and/or educated, as in *Río Escondido* or *María Candelaria.* In contrast, in a particular case which fits the category of B movies in the US, or Mexploitation films in the case of Mexico, a very different indigenous character is front and center. Seraina Rohrer has studied the decades long career (1960s through 2015) of María Elena Velasco, a mestiza actress, playing the character La India María in

"classic slapstick style" (25), and its relation to Mexican popular culture[40]. La India María is an indigenous woman of no means who successfully makes her way out of many scrapes with the powerful, which involve physical violence, in 20th and 21st century Mexican society.[41] Crucially, the actress was clearly identifiable as indigenous herself with respect to her appearance and dress, in marked contrast to the stars of the Golden Age of Mexican film, and thus, a major break from the famous high art films of the 1940s and 1950s was made.

La India María's character remains constant over the long-time period of Velasco's films, and the films remained popular. With this timelessness, one can infer that indigenous people have remained stuck at the bottom of the social hierarchy in modern Mexico. According to Rohrer, writing in 2017: "From radio to newspapers and television, Mexico's media largely ignores indigenous concerns" (23). That same reality that belied avowed Independence and Revolutionary

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[40] Velasco can serve as a role model for a woman making her way in a man's world, rising from working with powerful film companies to producing her own films with her adult children (65).

[41] Rohrer suggests that the acceptance by the India María character of the beatings that she receives at the hands of powerful men invokes an allusion to the Virgin Mary, and this may be the case (135). Alternatively, the violence is simply part and parcel of the slapstick trope, *cf.* The Three Stooges, the Marx Brothers, and the cartoons of US television of the 1950s through the 1980s.

ideals (see above) has persisted for almost two hundred years. Those who did not assimilate are invisible, all the way through the early 21st century. An optimistic believer in "progress" is taken aback by this stagnant, and persistently racist, aspect of 21st century Mexican society. Despite, or because of, this stagnation, the India María character is a subversive, as Rohrer convincingly shows.

In her interactions with those in power, La India María is bold and undaunted, albeit clumsy, in her efforts to expose the corruption and racism of the society in which she is, supposedly powerless. It is important to understand that she is not the butt of the jokes, and so the slapstick is not intended to have the audience laugh at her character. Interestingly, the broad presentation of the India María character, with its heavy dose of slapstick, is combined with "occasional long diatribes about social injustice" together with snippets of the indigenous languages Chichimeca and Nahuatl, not all of which are translated into Spanish (Rohrer 27). India María's Otherness is emphasized especially through that lack of translation. She has an identity which is not simply defined by her exclusion from mainstream Hispanic society. Furthermore, apparently, meanings hidden from the mainstream Spanish-only speaker are accessible only to those with a knowledge of the respective indigenous language. The subaltern has spoken, and we, the "Self" in the Self/Other dichotomy, are partially excluded from the meaning of the subaltern's words, as is only fitting. This is indeed progress, in an unexpected and original vein.

Not all audiences were receptive to the antics of La India María. According to Rohrer, Velasco ran the risk of offending the conservative censors of television that were in league with

the PRI (54), presumably because of the social justice outbursts of her character. However, the opposite problem also arose, when Vicente Fox came to power in 2000. Fox appointed a Director of Indian Affairs, who was an Otuni Indian woman, who took offense at what she interpreted as the negative stereotype of Indians as portrayed by La India María (54). It seems that this person did not care to see beyond the literal surface to the subversion beneath! Indeed, having a sense of humor has never been a prerequisite for holding high government office. Interestingly, when Velasco died in 2015, her obituaries did not mention that her character was indigenous as though the critics, (as opposed to the, "non-arty," movie-going public), never assimilated the ambiguity or the protest that she was making over so many decades (Rohrer 135). This glaring omission suggests that the place of indigenous people in Mexican culture remains painful and unresolved to this day.

CHAPTER 4. JUAN RULFO'S ART: LO MEXICANO TAKES A DIFFERENT FORM

In his short stories and his photographs, Juan Rulfo's vision of lo mexicano is a startling departure from the exquisitely beautiful and equally stylized and abstracted world of the Golden Age of Mexican film. Juan Rulfo's rural Mexico of the 1940s and 1950s is arid, and its people poor. His sense of place informs his art throughout. It is possible to respond to the stories in *El Llano en llanas*, set in the writer's native Jalisco, without any knowledge of Rulfo as an ironic commentator on the rural Mexico of his time, his personal history and acute sense of place, his dedication to the history and ethnography of his country, or of his photographs, yet, these factors each illuminate what we can understand of Rulfo's art. In the stories, the characters suffer the consequences of the hollow rhetoric of post-Revolutionary governments, while blind devotion to religious faith proves to be not much more useful to their lives. A recent analysis by Amit Thakkar ("Studium") has revealed Rulfo's success in deepening his visual depictions of indigenous people with political resonances. By the early to mid 20th century, the respect for indigenous communities officially avowed in Mexico since the 19th century had partially taken the form of efforts to transform indigenous culture into folklore, in the form of sanitized tourist attractions. As a counterpoint, we see Rulfo's portraits of indigenous people, presented as dignified outsiders and observers of their Other, the urban citizen. This is a new lo mexicano, in a socially committed

register that differs from that of official post-Revolutionary rhetoric, and of the films of the Golden Age.

Rulfo's clear-eyed depiction of his native Jalisco in his stories present the reader with a paradox. We are in a world which one wants to label as "real," even ultra-real, but, at the same time, we feel uneasy and puzzled, since we do not understand where we are, what is happening in that place, or, indeed, the entire context of the story. As readers, we have no distance from the characters in the story, characters who are silent, mysterious, and not mysterious, at the same time, and above all, vulnerable. Our anxiety stems from lack of rootedness: "Rulfo's short stories detach violent, traumatic experiences from causality, explanation and morality" (Bell 2012). The reader responds to stories such as "Talpa," *"*Diles que no me matan," and "No oyes ladrar los perros," with sadness, sympathy and horror, all at the same time. Rulfo does not permit the reader a moralizing distance. In a 1983 interview with Eric Nepomuceno, Rulfo explained his conscious desire to create stories with no external messages: "cuando sentí que había eliminado ... todas las explicaciones, las divagaciones ... Yo no he querido incluir ninguna idea mía: No quise interferir. Si te fijas, tanto en los cuentos como en la novela, el autor se eliminó" (Nepomuceno). Of course, it is not possible to eliminate any writer's "ideas." Such ideas are displayed in every aspect of his or her art. Nonetheless, the power of Rulfo's short stories comes from his success in achieving a semblance of this explicitly stated goal. The same description can be applied to his photographs.

The stories are populated with crimes, criminals, and dishonest institutions, such as the Church and the government, but above all, there is great suffering on the part of vulnerable and

poor people. The means through which Rulfo immerses the reader, and through which he touches us so directly, is difficult to define. In the case of "Talpa," the story begins at its conclusion, with a character named Natalia crying in her mother's arms. The reader understands nothing in the first paragraph of the story except for a tidbit of information conveyed by "un llanto aguantado por muchos días" (Rulfo *El llano* 49) and a place called Zenzontla (which still exists in Jalisco). The narrator obliges us to infer, bit by bit, the identities of the characters, the context and the environment. The story is recounted as a participant in the story would recall it. We are precipitated *en media res* because the narrator tells us the story in his own manner. The structure of the story embodies the narrator's way of thinking. We live in the inner life of the narrator, and because of this, silence envelops us. According to Antonio López -Quiñones, in the stories in *El llano en llamas*: "El silencio aprisiona a los personajes en un mundo interior, ajeno a la realidad. Este mundo interior no sólo supone un viaje al conocimiento de uno mismo, sino también a los ámbitos más oscuro y misteriosos de la existencia humana" (80). The characters' inner lives are "ajen[as] de la realidad," and, yet, we can feel the physical suffering, the heat, and the lack of water. It is this juxtaposition of the inner life of the characters with their unforgiving surroundings that is so unsettling and compelling at the same time.

That harsh environment, and the raw, physical, sense of its oppressiveness are central to the political content of "Nos han dado la tierra." The hollow promises of post-Revolutionary governments with respect to the deprivations of rural peasants is echoed in the arid landscape, as captured in Richardson's description:

> The story constitutes, therefore, a direct commentary on social power, relating implicitly — but without equivocation — to the questionable attempts at agrarian reform undertaken during the post-Revolutionary regimes of Álvaro Obregón and Plutarco Elías Calles in 1920s Mexico. Thus, we see how Rulfo highlights the relationship between location and power, between the appropriation of place and the inequalities and exploitation associated with the ownership of land in Mexico, conjuring up a territory which is inspired by the forbidding Jalisco landscape, with its history of grief and its litany of contestation. In this way, he turns it into a spatial imaginary that is the locus for our engagement with the hopes, aspirations and frequent despairs of peasants whose hold on territory is only ever tenuous and whose powerlessness is repeatedly brought home to us, as well as to them. (77)

According to Lucy Bell, in Rulfo's stories, we are faced with "a feature of modern experience: the shock of a sudden, isolated experience, un-cushioned by any rational defence system" (438). The lack of context is a hallmark of modern experience, as Bell sees it. Neither some kind of conventional received wisdom, nor social position, nor religion serve as bulwarks against the suffering in isolation that is present in "Talpa." (In fact, in the case of religion, it serves as a major source of suffering as opposed to its offering solace). The isolation of the characters from each other in "Talpa" and other Rulfo stories can perhaps be approximated through Bakhtin's term "heteroglossia." Bakthin defines heteroglossia as the presence of multiple "socio-ideological languages," as opposed to a unifying language that consists in "a system of linguistic norms" (270). Heteroglossia is:

> (T)he Tower-of-Babel mixing of languages that goes around any object; the dialectics of the object are interwoven with the social dialogue surrounding it. For the prose writer, the object is a focal point for heteroglot voices among which his own voice must also sound; these voices create the background necessary for his own voice, outside of which his artistic prose nuances cannot be perceived, and without which they 'do not sound.' (278)

Rulfo's use of heteroglossia and the submersion of social dialogue into his spare literary vision is one of his greatest achievements. We hear the heteroglot, separated, voices of the different *campesinos*. Without decoration, and through spare language, we feel their pain, and the difficulties of life as a poor person. The inner life of the characters is central to the stories as Carlos Blanco Aguinaga commented in 1974: "Todo se queda quieto, sin tiempo exterior, en esta realidad de Rulfo. Hasta la monótona repetición de ideas y palabras en boca del hablante—monologante—acentúa esta impresión de aislamiento de todo, de vida que se ha quedado en suspenso, dentro" (90). However, the isolation is not total. There is a discordance between the inner world of the narrator and his human surroundings, which actually implies a connection, albeit an imperfect one. In "Talpa," the narrator has a living relationship with Natalia, and she has a real bond with her mother. The narrator is not exactly "quedado en suspenso, dentro," what is conveyed more like a disequilibrium between his inner life and the events and people in his environment.

A series of Rulfo photographs, depicting pilgrims on their knees fulfilling a vow, (*JRM* 140, 141, 142) (Figures 1, 2 and 3) can be approached as an illustration, or perhaps, a concrete context for "Talpa." We see some members of the procession at close quarters in these

photographs. Kneeling to fulfill a vow is part of the pilgrimage. The sadness, resignation, exhaustion, and, perhaps, some kind of false hope can be read in the faces of the pilgrims. That false hope has arisen out of the deprivation of their lives. Another picture shows the entire procession (Figure 4 *JRM* 153). The editors of the volume have included a passage from the story as a commentary on this photograph, but, of course, we do not know what Rulfo's response to this would have been.[42] We see the interminable length of the procession of people extending to the horizon, and can imagine the suffocating dust kicked up in the arid landscape by this mountain of humanity. Faith is the dubious source of hope that is at the basis of this movement of people. We do not know whether Rulfo intended to illustrate his story with his photograph, but the existence of the photograph makes his visual sensibility clearer, and enriches our experience of reading the story. That struggle for survival was one that we can imagine the voice of post-revolutionary government conveniently ignoring or denying, as we see in the satirical story "El día del

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[42] Even though there are clear resonances between the two forms, there is a possible pitfall in connecting Rulfo's photographs with his stories literally. In the photos, we see Rulfo's visual memories of his country, which is a helpful adjunct to his work, but it is insufficient for an entrée into his literary world. We feel the same silence in the photos as in the stories, but there may be no precise equivalent between the two forms with respect to the use of irony or social commentary.

derrumbe.*"* We are there, in that forbidding landscape of "Talpa," with the narrator, Natalia and Tanilo, inhaling the dust of the road. The landscape, and the climate, above all, Nature itself, are actors in the story, and those non-human actors are merciless. In *Aguadora* (Figure 5, *JRM*, 153), we see a young woman who is carrying a water jug up a steep, rocky, and uneven slope. She forms a somewhat small, but nonetheless central, element in an inhospitable environment, dry and merciless. In fact, one can almost, but not quite, lose sight of her body in the bleak terrain that she is negotiating. One can feel the struggle for survival in her efforts to keep her body in equilibrium on the steep slope. Yet, there is energy and spring in her careful steps up the slope. There is no mercy for the people who live in this climate, but they are not broken by it. It is especially difficult for the pilgrims in "Talpa" on their long and fruitless journey.

It is not only Nature that is the enemy of the pilgrims. Their mission is one of futile desperation. (Talpa is a real place along a pilgrimage route in Jalisco, and it may be that the route taken by the pilgrims in the story is also real). It is clear that Tanilo is going to die, and equally clear that the hope that a miracle will happen in the holy place that is their destination is a fantasy. Fukumi Nahira (117) has suggested that the description of Tanilo's body which is almost decomposing along the pilgrimage route before his actual death (which occurs at the shrine itself), evokes the broken body of Jesus on his way to Calvary. This may well be, and, if so, such an evocation would be a subdued mockery of the story of the Passion, since Tanilo's death will not bring salvation to his fellow humans, nor are the sores and lesions on his body the result of any divine resistance to the human forces of evil.

In parallel, there is the relationship of the illicit couple who persist in their journey along the pilgrimage route in order to enjoy the pleasures of their secret intimacy. As Natalia eventually regarded it, their love is an illusion and a grave sin. However, most crucially for Rulfo's story, the narrative remains morally neutral. There is only suffering, pain, and the intense sunlight. No external moral judgment is imposed on the couple's actions. It is quite risky to decide that any artist is a "realist," because such a term is both elusive and naive, but the reader does experience the events and the characters in the stories as some kind of unfiltered "reality," without the distraction of voiceovers. We do not feel morally superior to Natalia and her lover. The priest's sermon is devoid of meaning, but it does express the beliefs of his flock, beliefs that give comfort to Tanilo, who is dying in the presence of the icon in which he has faith. We accept Tanilo's faith, his horrible fate, and the forbidden love of the narrator and Natalia all at the same time. The power of the story comes from our immersion in this universe that is free of simplistic moralizing. Nihira cites an interview of Rulfo conducted by José Balsa, in which Rulfo's "interest in writing the story lay largely in criticizing the darker side of fanatical religion" (117). As readers, we hardly need this explicit statement to confirm the polemical aim that Rulfo takes against the empty superstitions that can be imposed by organized religion and their pernicious hold on the lives of poor and pious campesinos without resources. Yet, knowing that this was Rulfo's avowed goal validates our response to the story and to the photographs that can serve as illustrations of the pilgrimage. This is a long way from the benevolent priests of the Golden Age of Mexican film, who act as comforts for the suffering people and the main characters (see previous chapter).

Thakkar distinguishes between the irony of Rulfo's stories, which are readily apparent

without prior knowledge, and their political content:

> Rulfo's fiction is both ironic and political; not only does the irony operate on a fictional level within itself, but it also alludes to political circumstances in a centrifugal direction, principally towards what I call the "colonizing' discourse of the post-Revolutionary state. …. The subtlety of this dual operation accounts for the power of the work because it allows for two levels of understanding, one which caters for those who have no knowledge of the historical context, and the other for those who have acquired some understanding of it. (*Fiction* 5)

Institutions such as the Church in "Talpa" and the government in "El día del derrumbe" are fixed elements in a cultural landscape that gives no support to the characters in Rulfo's stories. There are no explanations in this world, because there is no god-like, all-powerful, narrator, first or third person, who proclaims upon the actions of his creations. The power of the stories comes from the sense of humans as slaves of their surroundings (Thakkar *Fiction* 28), a world in which salvation does not exist. The absence of water, an objective attribute of the Jaliscan landscape, as seen in *Aguadora,* can also be viewed as a symbol of the struggle for survival of its inhabitants. As Thakkar (*Fiction* 34) points out, even the Rulfo stories that can be called "comic," for example, "El Día del derrumbe," are not comedies like those of Shakespeare, Moliere or Dickens, because there is no "happy ending," a happy ending being some kind of healing resolution or salvation, such as, for example, marriage, the defeat of evil forces, or the end of war. The world is broken, there is no ready to hand fix, we are not to be released from that breakdown. The campesinos are

suffering the consequences of that rupture, be it the destitution wrought by empty promises of successive post-revolutionary governments and/or the promises of divine miracles springing from religious faith.

The Whereness of Rulfo's Art and Its Autobiographical Roots. A World with Few Women

Resonances from Rulfo's tragic childhood are part and parcel of his stories, where his native Jalisco itself is a prominent player. His acute sense of place as seen in Jalisco's villages, the barrenness of the land, and the rugged terrain, immerse us in the stories. As Richardson comments:

> In several stories in *El Llano en llamas*, we get sufficient local detail to ensure that we know that the places being referred to are identifiable places located within a specific geographical context: the flora and fauna, the landscape and the references to climate serve to situate us in a particular region of Mexico. But these features are not of interest for what they convey of local color; rather they are seen — through the impact of soil and climate, through movement between locations, or through qualities of atmosphere and landscape — as commenting on how people anywhere may relate to the circumstances in which they find themselves. The element of *whereness* matters to Rulfo's characters. (71)

The precise "whereness" of Jalisco is made clear through its great specificity. Juvencio Nava in the short story "¡Diles que no me maten!"' is depicted as being able to perceive the earth beneath

his feet even in pitch black darkness (Richardson 72) because: "Allí en la tierra estaba toda su vida. Sesenta años de vivir sobre de ella, de encerrarla entre sus manos, de haberla probado como se prueba el sabor de la carne" (Rulfo *El llano* 94). Attachment to the land, to a specific place, even its soil, is a sensation rarely experienced by city-dwellers, but well known to those who were raised in a rural place.[43]

I contend that the sense of immediacy, and of unvarnished human suffering that are so vivid and moving in Rulfo's stories are rooted in his visceral connection to place and to his own, painful, history. From this bond comes the possibility of rendering a new form of lo mexicano, which included both satirical send-ups of the failures of agrarian reform for the subaltern rural peasantry, interwoven with depictions of the struggles for survival of those who owned and managed the arid and unforgiving land. For this reason, it is á propos to address some biographical details of Rulfo's own life. The location itself, for all its power, is merely part of Rulfo's connection to the place. In the same way that knowing the political context of the stories deepens our understanding of them, knowing some biographical details helps us to connect more fully with the stories as well. The hypereality of "Diles que no me matan" has autobiographical roots: "Pero

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[43] With the image of the character's sensing the earth beneath his feet as though it were the taste of meat, we also come close to a version of magical realism.

en ‘Diles que no me maten’ sí se narra un crimen: el asesinato del padre de Juan Rulfo … Lo asesinó el hijo de otro terrateniente, quien, hacia 1925, tuvo una disputa con don Juan Nepomuceno Pérez Rulfo, dueño de San Pedro, hacienda ubicada cerca del pueblo de Tolimán” (Carlos). For Rulfo’s family, property-owners (*hacendados)* and ranchers of means, the challenges of maintaining a herd of cattle in an arid climate lead to family tragedy. Rulfo’s father was murdered by the son of the owner of a neighboring hacienda in a dispute over access to grazing rights for cattle. Rulfo himself was not a peasant, therefore, but from the landowning classes. He was a criollo, to use a term that most likely was no longer used in his lifetime. The suffering, hunger and desperation shown in stories such as “Talpa” and “No oyes” were from contexts that Rulfo observed, but not from circumstances that he experienced. His world was that of the ranch, the world of “Diles.” According to Richardson, “Diles” is:

> noteworthy in regard to socio-political considerations and the question of how power relates to spatiality. In it, the initial killing, the murder of Don Lupe by Juvencio Nava, is motivated by a dispute over land, a dispute which is related, crucially, to the land’s fecundity, as Juvencio insists on using Don Lupe’s more fertile ground to graze his livestock, and the theme of the link between land and the giving of life—land as the ultimate source of all life—is central to all the subsequent action. (78)

The dangers on the ranch come from the competition for resources for the cattle in the two herds, cattle could easily die from hunger or thirst, because of the harsh climate. It is a hostile world, full of territoriality, and most prominently, a masculinity so exaggerated that is almost a parody. In

fact, in the majority of Rulfo's stories, there are no central female characters, with the exception of Natalia in "Talpa." There is an allusion to a dead mother as a conventional source of inspiration in "Oyes" and allusions to women in a genealogy in "Acuérdate," but women do not appear as actors in the narratives. Neither are there many scenes of domestic interiors. The world is one of masculine action and suffering, outside the home in the pasture ("Diles"), or the hills ("No oyes"). The sharp edges of this man's world are felt in the hardness of the stones, the lack of water in the hills, and above all, in the lack of mercy in human relationships. The voices of the stories are like those in an old-fashioned bar, or a rural Irish pub, where, in an all-male environment, one tries to hide one's vulnerability making it all the more obvious through the attempts to hide it. Rulfo had lost both his parents by the age of ten, was raised for a while by his grandmother, and then spent some time in an orphanage. It is possible that the absence of home in the stories comes at least partially from his own tragic childhood, and that his acute sense of being an outsider has its origin in the same source.

It is likely that the murder of his father, the *dueño*, which is the subject of "Diles," (and perhaps also "En la madrugada") was central to Rulfo's inner life for the duration.[44] It is interesting

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[44] The place names in "Diles" are associated with, but not identical to, the names of places close to San Gabriel (Carlos). In contrast, in other stories, places such as Talpa in "Talpa," Tonaya in "No oyes" and Santo Niño in "Anacleto Morones," correspond to villages and towns that still exist in Jalisco. The use of these not quite local place names lends a dream or nightmare-like quality to

that the central character in "Diles" is the murderer, and that he is presented ambiguously, even though the story concludes with the ultimate punishment by the son of the victim for his deed of so many years before. Although the son does avenge his father's death in the traditional manner of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a drop of kindness is present in the order to the soldiers: "Amárrenlo y denlo algo de beber hasta que se emborrache para que no le duelan los tiros" ("Diles" 97). In this gesture, there is a suggestion of some softness in the moral position taken by the avenging son, but not enough to alter his intention to carry out the killing. According to Thakkar, Rulfo makes use of moralizing irony in this story, "where a character killed thirty-five years ago is called 'Juvencio Nava,' a fragmented pun suggesting the words 'juventud' and 'navaja', reinforcing the feeling in the story that justice-through the actions of Nava's son- is catching up with the offender" (*Fiction* 18).

Lucy Bell cites Rowe for an interpretation of father-son relationships peculiar to Latin America: "As Rowe points out, whereas 'in the European context, the son replaces the father

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the stories. The trauma of his father's murder and his mother's death may perhaps be linked to the fact that Rulfo suffered from depression as an adult throughout his life. "' No me gusta hablar con nadie (...) así es el sentimiento que yo tengo, soy todo deprimido y marginado (...) lo que no me gusta es la gente, hablar en público. Me entra el pánico, me deprimo mucho (...) a veces amanezco queriendo no despertar' (Jorge Legorreta quoting Rulfo).

within a process of continuity', in Latin America 'they confront each other violently, testifying to the original and as yet unresolved conflict of civilizations which gave birth to the mestizo culture of countries like Mexico'" (445). I cannot agree with this interpretation, on the face of it. Where is the evidence that the depictions of father-son relationships reflect Latin American history in general, and Rulfo's work in particular?[45] It seems to me that this is far from the Rulfian vision. Inter-generational conflicts arise from specific and personal histories in, for example, "No oyes" and "Diles." In fact, in his photographs, Rulfo approaches the version of that "original and as yet unresolved conflict of civilizations" that existed in the rural 20th-century Mexico that he knew so well, in his own way, a way that has nothing to do with Vasconcelos's mestizaje. His images come from what he saw and the history and anthropology that he studied. Vasconcelos operates on a grand, and utopian scale. The *raza cósmica* was to be a fusion of two races, but it is abundantly clear that the European race is to be the source of the culture that arises from the fusion. There is a curatorial wave in the direction of indigenous cultures, cultures to be cataloged for the sake of scholarship, but assimilation is the only way forward towards progress, witness the compulsory reading of Classical literature in the curriculum of Indian schools. In contrast, Rulfo shows us actual human beings, be they campesinos in his stories or Indians in his photographs, invested with

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[45] My response to Bell's analysis is confined only to Rulfo's work. I am far from being in a position to assess her much more ambitious assertion about Latin American history in general, although I am personally skeptical about sweeping descriptions of this kind.

his respect for their identities. Insofar as social reform is relevant, it is presented as a source of human suffering. The lofty ideals of the Revolution are presented as being clumsily, and/or dishonestly, executed on the ground in the country, in the Rulfo short stories. Rulfo is a chronicler of human struggle tout court.

Rulfo's Images. Homogenizing Mexico, or Taming the Other

Rulfo was a dedicated student of his country's history, culture, and ethnography.[46] He traveled far and wide across Mexico, (partly as a consequence of his work),[47] observing and taking

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[46] "'Más que tener una preparación formal, yo he sido un lector casi patológico, en que he llegado a leer hasta dos libros por noche'" (Merrim 311 citing Rulfo). This voracious autodidact's library contained up to 10,000 books, hundreds of them philosophical, historical, and international literary works" (311).

[47] "Rulfo se ganó la vida en trabajos muy diversos: estuvo empleado en una compañía que fabricaba llantas de hule y también en algunas empresas privadas, tanto nacionales como extranjeras. Simultáneamente, dirigió y coordinó diversos trabajos para el Departamento Editorial del Instituto Nacional Indigenista y fue también asesor literario del Centro Mexicano de Escritores, institución que, en sus inicios, le había concedido una beca" ("Juan Rulfo Biografía").

photographs, including many of indigenous people,[48] including many families, and women on their own. The significance of this scholarly aspect of Rulfo's work for his art seems sometimes to be overlooked, (perhaps because he had no formal post-secondary education?), yet it was a major thread in his life: "I have worked in social anthropology for more than twenty-odd years now and, despite reading so many books and visiting indigenous communities, it is totally foreign. There are fifty-six indigenous communities, which speak their own languages and have their own customs" (Thakkar 87, citing Rulfo). Rulfo here acknowledges the autonomy of indigenous communities, alluding to them with respect. The image of "degraded remains" has vanished, there is no mention of forced assimilation into Hispanic culture as the only way forward (as in *Río Escondido*), and we are in the modern world of social science.

In fact, Rulfo is quite explicit about the negative consequences of assimilation for Mexico for social science and the heritage of his country: "[T]he incorporation of these 53 communities into the system would bring extermination to their cultures, whose arts, myths, and legends … will

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[48] Photographs (were) taken by Rulfo between 1932 and 1949 in various different Mexican states, including: Distrito Federal, Estado de Mexico, Puebla, Tlaxcala, Hidalgo, Morelos, Oaxaca, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Michoacán, Jalisco and Zacatecas" (Vargas Millán 55). During the 1940s and 1950s, he had jobs that required travel (Thakkar "Studium" 82).

long continue to be precious to ethnologists, sociologists, and anthropologists" (Rulfo "The Mexico"). Rulfo's voice is that of a modern scholar here, expressing a respect both for non-European cultures as they are lived, and not simply as captured museum pieces, and also for the social science disciplines whose mission it is to attempt to understand those cultures.

In "Studium," Thakkar has presented a probing analysis of the photograph *Puerto del Cementerio de Janitzio* (Figure 6) that addresses Rulfo's depiction of indigenous people. The picture depicts an indigenous woman and two children at a gate to a cemetery. The picture can be conventionally classified as Mexican, rural, Catholic, and/or as a landscape with indigenous subjects, "studium" in Roland Barthes' terminology, a scheme that Thakkar uses as a frame of reference for his analysis. With this studium-based description, we are comfortably in the picture postcard, touristic, domain. Indeed, recent scholarship cited by Thakkar, carried out by Ruth Hellier-Tinoco, has revealed that the island of Janitzio was transformed by intellectuals employed by post-Revolutionary governments into a vehicle for:

> (N)ationalist processes of folklorization that began in the 1920s (that) specifically concerned Janitzio, in Lake Pátzcuaro, Michoacán, once part of the pre-Hispanic Tarascan, or P'urhépecha, Empire, of which the capital was Tzintzuntzan.… As Hellier-Tinoco argues, the post-revolutionary obsession with authenticity led to 'processes that sought to represent and *classify* difference and otherness, engaging strategies for constructing and shaping the concept of "indigenous bodies." ("Studium" 85-86)

Indigenous rituals, such as the *Noche de muertos*, which may, or may not, have been originally pre-Hispanic and were previously performed privately by the inhabitants of the island, (rituals to which outsiders were not invited), were embraced by the central authorities, and publicized as prime expressions of lo mexicano.[49] This drive came from the same impulse as Vasconcelos's literacy campaign, discussed above, although it took a different form. By the time of Rulfo's work in the 1940s, the Janitzio rituals were well-established in their "government issue" forms. Whatever they were originally, they had now become patriotic tourist attractions, part of the planned homogenization of post-Revolutionary Mexico, as exemplified by Vasconcelos's massive education campaign designed to produce assimilated Indians, who were to be called upon to showcase their cultures to the urban population as folklore. To top it off, so to speak, a large statue of Morelos was erected on the highest point of the island, the symbolic value of which, as Thakkar points out ("Studium" 85) was to hammer home the metropolitan, (colonizing), takeover of this

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[49] "Specifically, one can see why islanders might feel forced by poverty to take economic advantage of a ritual that was largely unknown before 1922 and that was then popularized by a post-revolutionary government determined to pursue the recovery of the rural conscience from the Catholic Church in what I have called elsewhere a 'colonising discourse'" (Thakkar "Studium" 91).

remote place that had occurred. The position of the statue, presiding over the indigenous people who lived on the island, as it were, was no accident.

We do not know directly what Rulfo's position on these actions were. However, Thakkar's analysis of the photograph reveals that Rulfo is unlikely to have applauded the metamorphosis of a part of one indigenous culture into a spectacle for urban vacationers. To summarize Thakkar's points about the "gate-children-woman triad" (89), in the photograph, the woman is wearing traditional P'urhépecha clothing, her face cannot be seen, and the girl, who is barefoot wearing what Thakkar ("Studium" 90) calls a "rudimentary skirt," and carrying a small boy, is turning towards her and seems to be smiling, but we do not know why. There are no other people in the picture, no crowds of participants in a ritual, nobody is kneeling or crying, which is part of the ritual, (quite the opposite, in fact) and it is not even November 1, the Day of the Dead, much less the Night of the Dead, when the ritual publicized for the tourists by the government occurred. An everyday scene that has not a great deal to do with the annual ritual has been captured by Rulfo's modern camera. We do not know whether this was an active protest on the part of the photographer, but it does tell us that Rulfo chose to portray indigenous people in their own world as best he could, and not as actors in a concocted show for the state. In that respect, a state-authorized "Indian" mask prepared for the tourists has been removed. Paradoxically, we have Rulfo's own protestation that: "Nunca empleo a los indios porque para mí es imposible entrar y llegar a profundizar en la mentalidad indígena" (Thakkar, "Studium" citing Rulfo 85). In this instance, it would seem that he has afforded the viewer at least an everyday, but distant, glimpse of that mentality, despite his protestation to the contrary.

Rulfo and Cinema. Depicting the Ordinary

By 1955, Rulfo was known as an expert on Mexican history and anthropology, and was hired by the makers of the film *La Escondida,* set during the time of the Revolution and directed by Roberto Gavaldón, as a historical consultant (Millán 60). Gabriel Figueroa was the cinematographer for this melodrama, which is set in Tlaxcala in 1909 and María Félix was the female lead.[50] Dylan Brennan contrasts the portrayal of the campesinos as they appear in typical Golden Age films with photographs that Rulfo took of the campesinos off-set:

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[50] The film was shot in color, and, in my opinion, is far below the visual standard of *María Candelaria* and *Rio escondido*. It is, therefore, quite difficult, and, perhaps, even, not appropriate, to make comparisons of Figueroa's work on *La Escondida* with Rulfo's stills on the set, as Brennan has done, since the great cinematographer is not shown at his brilliant best in this film. This being the case, my remarks are confined to generalities in responding to Brennan's analysis. Nonetheless, the presence of Rulfo and Figueroa on the same set, each using his camera, is an interesting moment in the history of lo mexicano.

> The photographs of the peripheral figures introduce a new dynamic. These are not evocative of the mythical world of Figueroa's Mexico where iconic *mestizo* beauties such as Dolores del Río and María Félix play indigenous characters. When Rulfo, free from the cinematographer's subordination to the vision of the director, directs his lens to those who are not central to the film's action, he achieves something different from Figueroa. When Rulfo photographs the young woman with the baby in her rebozo, he negates the rural mythification of Figueroa in favour of exposing the harsh realities of rural life in Tlaxcala in 1955, 45 years after the Revolution that was supposed to improve the lives of the same campesinos. (Brennan 150)

The only accessible image of "the young woman with the baby in her rebozo" from Rulfo's time in the employment of the filmmakers is shown in Figure 7 and it is not of good quality.[51] The

[51] Brennan's focus in his study is the extraordinary fact that some of Rulfo's photographs, taken in 1955, of the set and of the people who populated it were subsequently used by Félix Manzano in a presentation of the history of the Mexican Revolution that appeared in the left-wing magazine *Sucesos para Todos*, purporting to be historically accurate portrayals of actual events of the Revolution. This is not the focus of my analysis, but it does shed some light both on the shadowy area occupied by those of Rulfo's photographs that were taken during his employment on the set

woman's face is barely visible, and her baby appears to be crying, according to Brennan (127). It is probable, however, that she is not movie actor, or even extra, material, since her appearance is somewhat untidy and thoroughly un-mythical, and so her image can serve as a counterweight to Figueroa's extraordinary images of his version of lo mexicano, timeless rural Mexico, discussed above in the previous chapter.

Brennan makes the further, very interesting, suggestion that some of the Rulfo photos taken on the film set "could easily be classified as homage to Figueroa" (125). Some examples are a portrait of María Félix, every inch the modern diva, taken in a railway compartment which may have been her dressing room, (Figure 8), a shot of the glamorous male lead Pedro Armendáriz in the open air (*JRM* Figure 9), and another outdoor, low angle, shot, this one of a haughty-looking, again, very diva-like, Félix set against a darkish sky (*JRM* 123 Figure 10). The beauty of the image of Félix in the train comes from the chiaroscuro, the clarity of the contrasts between light and dark, and the way in which the bright white of Félix's head-covering contrasts, and yet also resonates with, the receding shadows behind her, and her black hair. One does not know what Figueroa made

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of *La Escondida,* and on the blatant disregard for the truth that was considered acceptable by those who owned the photographs.

of Rulfo's photos of the set and the movie stars, and whether he regarded them as a tribute to his art. I am not at all sure that he would have accepted them as homage, since Rulfo's photos of the actors, especially the ones taken in the open air, have a directness and physicality to them that might have seemed impudent to Figueroa, whose Mexico dealt in myth, and Romantic visions (see Chapter 3 above). Be that as it may, the "homage-like" photos of visibly urban, and, equally visibly, whiter, movie stars (who performed in Hollywood) are quite different from the photos taken by Rulfo of local campesinos, be they mestizo or Indian, wandering on to the set, in their everyday, shabby, clothes. The movie stars' world is not, in essence, different from the world of the implied, urban audience. The local people of Rulfo's photographs, the subalterns of Rulfo's universe, share nothing with Figueroa's art. A striking example is shown in Figure 11 in which an actor, decked out as a Zapatista soldier, is seen side by each with two Tlaxcalan local women, one young, one old, (maybe a family unit?), in their everyday clothes, barefoot, with a toddler. The women are not looking at the camera, they seem to be oblivious to it, in fact, and seem to be amused at something happening off-camera: "Pero la presencia de estos indígenas auténticos en el set de *La Escondida*, y la cámara de Rulfo que los retrata, sirven para revelar y, tal vez, denunciar la manipulación de la experiencia campesina que filmaron Gavaldón y Figueroa" (Brennan 125, citing Weatherford).

It is not clear whether Rulfo intended his photographs as anything as directly confrontational as a "denunciation" of his filmmaking employers' artistic objectives or, more precisely, their obliviousness to the conditions under which the actual inhabitants of Tlaxcala lived. We do know that he respected and actually saw the local people in a way that might have seemed

foreign to Figueroa and Gavaldón,[52] as is manifestly the case in his stories, and in his writings. In the photograph, the world of the indigenas in all its self-enclosed dignity, camaraderie, shabbiness, and hardship, has physically invaded the idyllic and idealized, conventions of the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema, including what seems to be a bad-tempered leading lady. The local women have come to sell food to the actors (Brennan 127), presumably as a way to earn some money, which was in short supply in 1950's Tlaxcala. The juxtaposition of the supposedly heroic story of the Revolution, about which many lies continued to be told, (including using Rulfo's photographs to that end), with the poverty of the people for whom the Revolution was supposedly fought, is made very clear here. In that sense, the picture can be read as a denunciation of the failure of the avowed Revolutionary goal of agrarian reform that supposedly was going to lead to increased economic stability and prosperity in rural communities.

Observing the Observers

Many Rulfo portraits of indigenous people have been published, but only some of them are dated and the location is often not indicated. It is, therefore, not possible to establish any kind of

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[52] I use the word "foreign" advisedly, as an echo of the colonizing Self-Other distinction made by Amit Thakkar (*Fiction* 84) in the context of the dichotomy of urban versus rural in Mexican history from Independence on, building on the ideas of Homi Bhabha. (See Introduction above).

developmental sequence in his style. What is apparent however, is their powerful immediacy and the dignity which Rulfo affords his indigenous subjects. A close-up photograph of a mother and child, with the mother's face seen in profile, is seen in Figure 12 (*100 Photographs* 87). The mother has her back to the camera and is gazing with affection and intensity at her baby who seems quite plump, secure, and content. It is as if the camera were invisible to them. We, the spectators, are not invited into the space of the picture, in fact, we are excluded from it, and yet, it is insistently there, close to us. The mother's face and neck are in shadow, emerging from her lightly colored undergarment and *rebozo*. The pair make a curved unit, in focus against an out of focus outdoor background. This is an arrestingly different Madonna and Child, for those of us with comparable Western European images in our respective memories. The difference lies in the absence of religious allusions, the ethnicity of the pair, and the tenderness of the mother, presented without mawkishness or hand me down allusions to European imagery, as, for example, in the standard images of the Virgin of Guadalupe. This is an American Madonna and Child, and proudly so. One is reminded of the mothers and children that appear in the casta paintings of New Spain of two centuries previous.

Another, open- air, portrait, dated 1955, and taken in Ayutla in Jalisco, of four young indigenous girls, probably teenagers, appear in Figure 13 (*100 Photographs* 97). Two of the girls are looking intently at something of interest to them, but that something is clearly not the photographer. They are identically dressed and barefoot. It is possible that they are dressed in this fashion for some special occasion, or dressing in this uniform manner may have been the custom, we simply do not know. The juxtaposition of their coherence as a visual group, running in a

diagonal across the picture, expressing the naturalness of their huddling together, as teenagers do, with their traditional head coverings, blouses and skirts, make the spectator struggle with the disruptive Otherness of their presence. [53] This is what one part of rural 20th century Mexico looks like, and it is a non-Hispanic part. The urban, or foreign, spectator can relate to the girls through the bond of common humanity, but not through any readily accessible cultural symbols. Maybe this is what Rulfo meant when he described the indigenous communities that he visited as "foreign" to him. Vasconcelos's utopian literacy campaign was directed at forced assimilation of these "foreigners," but we can see, from Rulfo's photographs from the 1940s and 1950s, that that campaign cannot have been universally successful. Rulfo's great achievement, in this context, is in recording the lives of indigenous peoples, such as the girls in the photograph, according them dignity and autonomy. He is content with their foreignness. There is no "visiting tourist" sense to the view that we are given of the girls, they simply live there, in that space, be it "foreign" or not, and we do not. One is reminded of the world of the stories, which are also self-enclosed, with no voice over commentary. Both the campesinos of the stories and the indigenous people of the photographs are the subalterns of Rulfo's world, presented to us by a gifted and respectful

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[53] The folded cloth headpiece worn by several of the women and girls in Rulfo's photographs appears in 18th century casta paintings (for example, Figure 7, Chapter 2 of this thesis) as a mark of an indigenous woman. It is difficult to avoid the overworked word "timeless" in this context.

observer, who is, emphatically, not a reformer armed with a utopian theory to implement willy-nilly as were Vasoncelos and the zealots of the post-Revolutionary governments.

In Figure 14, (*JRM* 111), we see two men who are attending a meeting. From the caption, we know that this is an official assembly of an organization of indigenous people. As with the other photographs discussed here, the men are intently watching something off-camera, but, in distinction to the other pictures discussed above, we gather that, whatever it is, the issue may have made them angry and anxious. We are looking upwards at the men, and their images fill most of the picture, making the intensity of their gaze greater for us, because we have nowhere else to look. One guesses that the matter at hand is grave, and its resolution may be out of the men's hands. We feel sympathy with the men, even though we can glean nothing of the circumstance from the picture. Distance from them is also implied, in the sense that this is a meeting of a group to which we do not belong. Again, the photographer has recorded a moment, but he, in no way, has intruded upon that moment.

Returning to portraits of women and children, we see a group, again, at close quarters, in Figure 15 (*JRM* 115). Neither the woman, (who is wearing the folded head covering) nor the children, nor the adolescents look directly at the camera. The group is intently looking at what may be a performance, or perhaps the making of a movie. This is their world, and their silent space. At the same time, we are drawn into that space, suspended in some invisible and uncomfortable way, as we are in the stories. We are certainly not tourists, nor are we exactly observers. According to Thakkar, in the stories there is a "disturbance of the reader's orientation, ensuring that we are alert

to meanings beyond the literal "(*Fiction* 27). This observation can be applied to this picture also. What one might call the "hyperreal" is not real at all, rather, it has a dreamlike quality to it.

A Cynical Response to Rulfo's Pictures. "Optical Tourism"

Critical responses to Rulfo's photographs were not universally positive. Benjamin Fraser interpreted the photographs in a contrary fashion to other critics such as Fuentes (see above). I am not convinced by Fraser's argument which I summarize here, followed by a proposed rebuttal of Fraser's position. He has, in fact, cynically poked fun at Rulfo's photographs.

> Nothing prevents Rulfo's photographs from being a convenient way for those who see them to visually capture the other and participate in optical tourism …. Rulfo's photographs, documenting rural peasants and crumbling architecture, fit squarely into tourist narratives (119). … A portrait that declines to name its subject becomes complicit, if inadvertently, in the cult of celebrity that has fueled an insatiable appetite for the opposite sort of photograph: to grant only the famous their names demotes the rest to representative instances of their occupations, their ethnicities, their plights. (118)

On the contrary, I contend that there is no possibility of forging optical tourism from the images discussed here. We do not see happy campesinos, hawking "traditional" objects to the tourists, nor

do we see desperate individuals amid those crumbling ruins, as one might expect for images of persons who are suffering "plights." As well-off observers from a more temperate and comfortable place, who do not have to search for water on a daily basis, we are struck with the desert-like conditions, the absence of vegetation, and the hard work involved in surviving in these rural parts of Mexico, but we are not asked to feel pity for the "plight" of the rural people. As Carlos Fuentes described it, "Each of the men, women, and children of Rulfo's photographs possesses an immediately recognizable richness. It is called dignity" (15). We do see markets, depicted as places that are populated by flesh and blood human beings (*JRM* 102. Figure 16). The Other, when it is a touristic human subject, is something to be patronized, with an accompanying souvenir changing hands, to be wrapped up to take home to some comfortable bourgeois place far away. Such transactions are ones between a culturally imperialistic traveler, be s/he from Mexico City or Minneapolis, and a person who has no actual human identity in the world of the people in power beyond providing idle amusement for the buyer. This is not the world of Rulfo's art, primarily because the campesinos and the indigenous people who populate his pictures inhabit their own world, and it is clear that that world is respected by the photographer. The people in the photographs are both sufficiently specific and insufficiently glamorous to appear in a glossy brochure. The Tlaxcalan group who intrude on the set of *La Escondida* are actually selling something, but that something is not themselves. They are not "typical Indian peasants." It is difficult to imagine a rich US family making their way to Mexico to seek out the "exotics" of the Rulfo pictures. They are the persons of his youth in Jalisco, and the people that he saw during his journeys over the length and breadth of Mexico when he was an adult.

Conclusion

The simultaneous clarity and obscurity of Rulfo's work invites critical generalizations. According to Bell: "the mythical reading of Rulfo's work (is) inextricably connected with eternal sameness and mythical return" (450). I am of the opinion that is not useful to place Rulfo's work in the context of a hypothetical "mythical return," mainly because the meaning of this phrase is not clear. The uniqueness of Rulfo's art comes from the unvarnished specificity of his depiction of time and place, his respect for humans and their suffering, and his biting political irony, born of a distance from, and yet closeness to, his subjects, not to speak of his dazzling mastery of his media. Bell's other generalization, of the "melancholic memorial of the wound of the conquest, as a contribution to the construction of a homogenized myth of Mexico "(450), resonates more, especially with the photographs, and the "homogenized myth of Mexico" is certainly a target of the stories and the photographs. Rivero's vision gives a livelier, and enlivening, sense of Rulfo's art, however: "Rulfo, mediante sus fotografías y sus libros, parece estar diciendo: ¡Miren ...! ¡Vean! Este mundo está aquí presente; nos lacera con el peso angustiante y funesto de su realidad tangible. ¡Asómense en él!" (30).

According to J. Hillis Miller: "Truth as reproduction leads to truth as revelation, for we see things in their imitations, that we have passed in reality a hundred times without seeing. Mimetic art removes the veil of familiarity from the world" (441). The Jalisco that we see in Rulfo's work

is, and is not, the Jalisco that we can find nowadays on the Internet, and from this elusiveness comes the power and the mystery of the photographs. Rulfo's Jalisco is not "truth as reproduction." However, is it truth as revelation?

Rulfo envelops his reader or spectator in his intense internal world, from which there is no escape, and in which there are few words, and above all, no excess words. There is no solace, nor is there any suggestion of the possibility of change or progress. The terms "change" and "progress" are, in fact, irrelevant to Rulfo's art, except perhaps as ironic reflections on their absurdity. From the photographs, we share with Rulfo something of the images of his youth. We can imagine how desolation informed his inner life as a result of his being orphaned at the age of ten, and how anxiety attacks dogged his adult life. With some understanding of the failed agrarian reforms of post-Revolutionary governments, we respond more fully to the irony of his stories. However, these factors are elemental building blocks used by Rulfo to produce his elusive and profound stories and photographs. The word "truth" is big and dangerous. Through his art, Rulfo has placed us closer to the Mexico that existed in the early 20th century than Emilio Fernández, or Diego Rivera. A major part of what he shows us is a living Other that had been ignored, patronized, or mythologized for centuries before. Perhaps this actually is "truth as revelation."

I will let Juan Rulfo himself (Figure 17) have the last word in describing his art as. "Truths that wound us by their lacerating existence" (Rulfo "Nacho" 21).

CONCLUSION: MESTIZAJE AND THE SHADOW OF COLONIALISM

The world of the casta paintings, despite ostensibly being based on racist ideologies accrued over centuries in Colonial Mexico, is one of dignity and warmth. The artists are proud Americans, or Mexicans, as Miguel Cabrera identified himself. Because of the recent work of scholars such as Ilona Katzew and her colleagues, we now know that the casta painters, some of mixed heritage, came from an established lineage of artists with workshops in Mexico City. From what we can see, at least, this was not an artistic offshoot of the motherland's painterly practices, but, rather, a freestanding tradition in its own right, with what may be its own artistic influences, and, as such, an unselfconscious expression of 18th-century Mexican culture. A further study of the, undoubtedly European, origins of that artistic tradition would be very interesting.

Such unselfconscious freedom seems to vanish with Mexican Independence, and this is understandable. Now there is a newly born nation state whose values and laws have to be defined. Not the least of these to be defined values are the position of the many different indigenous peoples who live in this new country, and also the role that the Church, a highly viable legacy of colonialism, is to play in it. It is not unexpected to find, after 400 years of colonial rule, that the fundamental Eurocentric belief that the origin of the highest forms of "civilization" and, most importantly, of "civilized" people is to be found across the Atlantic does not disappear with the emergence of an independent Mexico in the early 19th century.

This is the legacy that haunted the new, and not so new, Mexican state. We see it in a grotesque form, in the whitened face of the mestizo Porfirio Diaz, in the monument ostensibly erected in honor of an Aztec warrior, a warrior who has a European face, and in the paradox, after the Revolution, of casting a Mexican actress as an indigenous heroine, that same actress who went to enormous lengths to whiten her physiognomy so as not to disgrace her criolla class of origin, and to be acceptable to the Hollywood studios where she worked. Equally grotesque, but perhaps, more understandable, is the raza cósmica model of Vasconcelos, which posited a dual racial origin for the Mexican people, albeit all the while proclaiming the great superiority of the European strand. It is most likely no accident that those 20th century artists working in Mexico whose works were free of this local obsession with the inferiority of the indigenous races were either not Mexican at all (Buñuel) or whose artistic formation happened outside their native country (Rivera). The struggle to define Mexican identity took a different form in 1950, with Octavio Paz' *El laberinto de la soledad*, in which Paz embeds the Mexican in his or her history, inclusive of the Malinche story, claiming that this brutal origin point of mestizaje makes the Mexican ashamed and therefore reserved and withdrawn (Hurtado 263-264). Paz' work was widely admired, presumably because it struck a chord in the culture, although I find it difficult to use it to illuminate, in any way, the works that I have chosen to study. It is, however, perhaps, a high mark in the national obsession with la mexicanidad, beautiful examples of which are seen in the Golden Age of Mexican film, and transformed into something very different, and equally beautiful, in the work of Juan Rulfo. In this way, then, Paz contributed to that same national conversation, albeit in an abstruse and philosophical vein.

From the 18th-century Miguel Cabrera, who proclaimed himself to be a Mexican and who painted his fellow Mexicans, to the 20th-century Juan Rulfo who watched and recorded their descendants, one could claim that there is an unbroken tradition of the love of beauty and of the specifics of the human and natural landscape that these artists knew. Undoubtedly, this study could be extended through the present day to identify and examine changes in the treatment of the mestizaje theme, and accompanying views of the indigenous Other.

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