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A CONCEPTUAL GENEALOGY OF “THE INDIGENOUS” IN MEXICAN VISUAL CULTURE

Introduction

On the occasion of the 5th centennial of the first encounter between conquistador Hernán Cortés and Mexica emperor Moctezuma Xocoyotzin, newly-inaugurated Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador addressed a letter to the Spanish Monarchy and the Catholic Church requesting an apology for the violence perpetuated by these institutions throughout the conquest and colonial period. In the letter, López Obrador stated:

The incursion headed by Cortés into our current territory was, without a doubt, a foundational event for the contemporary Mexican nation, yes, but it was also tremendously violent, painful, and transgressive. [...] Mexico wants the Spanish State to admit to its historical

responsibility for these offenses and to offer an apology or the necessary political compensation [so that] both countries can create an itinerary for the Kingdom of Spain to publicly and officially express an acknowledgment of the damages caused [by the Conquest].¹

The reaction of the Spanish Government to the request was a resounding no. Pedro Sánchez's government emitted a statement "strenuously rejecting the content [of the letter]",² while the Spanish Government's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell termed the letter an "unfortunate initiative".³

Spanish right-wing politicians were particularly offended by this request. Pablo Casado, the leader of the Popular Party (Partido Popular; PP for its initials in Spanish), was adamant:

What has been said is a direct attack against Spain, I won't have it. [...] I don't believe in the Black Legend, not the one created centuries ago and certainly not the one that the resentful Left is now trying to write. [...] We are one of the most important nations in the history of humanity.⁴

¹ Redacción. (2019, 27 March). Así es la carta de López Obrador al Rey: pide un 'reconocimiento público' y una ceremonia conjunta. *El Periódico*. Retrieved from: <https://www.elperiodico.com/es/politica/20190327/carta-lopez-obrador-rey-felipe-vi-7376357>.

² Redacción. (2019, 25 March). AMLO solicita por carta al rey de España y al Papa que pidan perdón por la Conquista de México. *BBC News Mundo*. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-47701387>.

³ Corona, Sonia, Alberola, Miquel, and Saiz, Eva. (2019, 27 March). La carta de López Obrador provoca una refriega política en España. *El País*. Retrieved from: https://elpais.com/politica/2019/03/26/actualidad/1553621044_552464.html.

⁴ Corona, Alberola, and Saiz, La carta de López Obrador.

The leader for Ciudadanos, Albert Rivera, equated the letter with a populist push to falsify history and provoke confrontation. And Santiago Abascal, the leader of Vox (Spain’s newly emerging far-right party), stated “López Obrador, infected by indigenist socialism, does not understand that in asking Spain for reparations, he is actually insulting Mexico”.⁵ The heated debate raised by this request for acknowledgment signaled that, to this day, the willingness to recognize a colonial past remains contentious, at the very least.

Understanding this controversy as symptomatic of an unresolved conflict, and indicative of a persistent coloniality, this presentation aims to provide a genealogy of “the Indigenous” in Mexico within a decolonial theoretical framework. Here I would like to specify that I am deploying genealogy in the Foucauldian sense, as an analytical focus on “the mutual relations between systems of truth and modalities of power”.⁶ If the visible and the sayable are considered two poles of knowledge, then *power-as-strategy* is the connection between the two.⁷ I am specifically interested in this point of tension between the visible and the sayable, as well as in the power relations, institutions, and practices that it produces.

Importantly, a genealogical approach is central to a “strategic use of [discourse analysis] to answer problems about the present”.⁸ Hence, a genealogy operates within histories of the present, an analytic strategy seeking to highlight the importance of revisiting historical constructions of specific discursive regimes in order to speak to contemporary problematics. Using this approach, I aim to find ways of interpreting

⁵ Corona, Alberola, and Saiz, La carta de López Obrador.

⁶ Davidson, Arnold. (1986). Archaeology, Genealogy, Ethics. In Couzens, David (Ed.). *Foucault: A Critical Reader* (221-233), Oxford: Blackwell, 224.

⁷ Kendall, G. and Wickham, G. (1999). *Using Foucault’s Methods*. London: SAGE.

⁸ Kendall and Wickham, *Using Foucault’s Methods*, 34.

images that are “effective in exploring the potential meaning of the cultural creations of the past for the circumstances in which we find ourselves today”.⁹ The primary goal is not only to look towards the past, but to better understand the present. In Walter Mignolo’s words, “understanding the past cannot be detached from speaking the present”.¹⁰ With this in mind, this paper will be divided into three parts based on three main discursive shifts in the representation of Mexican Indigenous peoples: 1) the figure of the “Indian” during the first contact, conquest, and colonial periods; 2) indigenisms and the forging of a *mestizo* nation; and 3) contemporary decolonial pathways of indigeneity.

The Imaginary of the West: Occidentalism

For this keynote address, I am interested in exploring the production and workings of modern/colonial visual culture, particularly with regards to how the modern/colonial imaginary is built, then naturalized and, therefore, invisibilized in its constructedness. Walter Mignolo terms this the process of colonial semiosis, whereby asymmetrical relations of colonial difference are maintained through socio-semiotic interactions. This speaks to *who* possesses representational privilege and *how* it is deployed in order to sustain modern/colonial discourse. In short, this approach looks at Occidentalism as the dominant imaginary of modernity/coloniality.

⁹ Bryson, Norman *et al.* (1994). Introduction. In Bryson, Norman; Holly, Michael Ann; and Moxey, Keith (Eds.). *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations* (xv-xxix). Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, xvii.

¹⁰ Mignolo, Walter. (1995). *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 5-6.

For Fernando Coronil, Occidentalism isn't simply characterized by the imposition of stereotypical representations of non-Western societies. He argues that Occidentalism is based on a representational privilege that intrinsically links itself with the “deployment of Western global power”.¹¹ In this sense, representations in Occidentalism are necessarily relational and political, such that they are produced in, and in turn reproduce, asymmetrical relations of power. As a result, certain representational styles and contents are privileged, particularly if they serve to represent non-Western peoples as “other” in the context of a series of practices that correlate otherness with justification for Western expansion.

Therefore, I am interested in exploring indigenism (as opposed to indigeneity, a distinction I will elaborate on further below) and its imaginary as one of the discursive strands constitutive of Occidentalism. If we define indigenism as a state policy that institutionalized attempts to negate, assimilate, acculturate, and raid Indigenous knowledges, then I consider it to be part and parcel of what Aníbal Quijano has termed “the colonization of the imaginary of the dominated peoples”.¹² In this process, the colonized subject is forced to renounce her own forms of production of knowledge in favour of a mythicized version of European knowledge that negates the subjectivity and knowledges of the colonized.

¹¹ Coronil, Fernando. (1998). Más allá del occidentalismo: hacia categorías geo-históricas no-imperialistas. In Castro-Gómez, Santiago and Mendieta, Eduardo (Coords.). *Teorías sin disciplina. Latinoamericanismo, poscolonialidad y globalización en debate* (121-146). Mexico: Miguel Ángel Porrúa Editores, 130.

¹² Aníbal Quijano cited in Castro-Gómez, Santiago. 2008. (Post)Coloniality for Dummies: Latin American Perspectives on Modernity, Coloniality, and the Geopolitics of Knowledge. In Moraña, Mabel; Dussel, Enrique; and Jáuregui, Carlos (Eds.). *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate* (259-285). Durham and London: Duke University Press, 281.

Systems of Representation in Modernity/Coloniality

So, how does Occidentalism—or the imaginary of modernity / coloniality—operate? Firstly, it is based on what Quijano has termed the coloniality of power, an analytical category that refers to a structure of domination based on the establishment of an asymmetrical power relation between colonizer and colonized based on two nodes: race and labour. In it, a supposed ethnic and epistemic superiority of the colonizer justifies the entire colonial project. For Coronil, this is achieved through the following representational strategies:

- World components are divided and conceived as isolated units.
- Related histories are excised from one another.
- Differences are transformed into hierarchies.
- These representations are naturalized and, therefore,
- They reproduce existing asymmetric power relations.¹³

In the same way that verbal appropriation of the Americas took place through the proclamation of decrees and acts of nomination,¹⁴ the visual representation of Indigenous peoples was a ceremony of possession that naturalized the Europeans' "right" to observe and record the likeness of others. Paraphrasing David Spurr, the European gaze was a privileged one; it based itself on the premise of its authority to inspect, examine,

¹³ Coronil, Más allá del occidentalismo, 132.

¹⁴ For more on the verbal and textual appropriations of the Americas, see Seed, Patricia. (1993). Taking Possession and Reading Texts: Establishing the Authority of Overseas Empires. In Williams, Jerry M. and Lewis, Robert Earl (Eds.). *Early Images of the Americas: Transfer and Invention* (111-147). Tucson: University of Arizona Press; Greenblatt, Stephen. (1991). *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; and Todorov, Tzvetan. (1984). *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*. New York: Harper & Row.

order, arrange and construct.¹⁵ Hence, the ideology of the gaze was based on the convention of the commanding view, which offered aesthetic pleasure, but also information and authority.

Moreover, this representational privilege codifies a way of seeing that Joaquín Barriendos has termed the coloniality of seeing: an ocularo-centric machinery of power that has constructed itself through the establishment of the visual regime(s) of modernity/coloniality.¹⁶ Through its representational mechanisms, it has disciplined particular ways of seeing that have, in turn, transformed differences into values. As a result, for Barriendos the coloniality of seeing has generated visual regimes for the production of racialized, inferiorized, and objectified alterities. On the one hand, it contributes to the persistence of a dialectics through which the subject that observes and the alterity that is trapped under that gaze is maintained. On the other, it has configured an "inside" and an "outside" to the matrix of power in modernity/coloniality and, therefore, it has contributed to structuring systems of representation that have resulted in specific institutional effects and practices of modernity/coloniality. In short, the coloniality of seeing, alongside the coloniality of power, of being, and of knowledge, is also constitutive of modernity. It is precisely its mechanics that I would like to touch upon here, before suggesting, further on, the possibility of a "right to look" to counter the coloniality of seeing.

¹⁵ Spurr, David. (1993). *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

¹⁶ Barriendos, Joaquín. (2011). La colonialidad del ver. Hacia un nuevo diálogo visual interepistémico. *Nómadas*, 35(October): 13-29.

1. The First “Indians”

First, I would like to apologize in advance for the following. Due to the time constraints of this presentation, this next section will inevitably be quite schematic and full of omissions. It is very much an overview of the discursive nodes of construction of the Indigenous other within the visual imaginary of Occidentalism in the Hispanic Americas and, more specifically, in Mexico. I am presenting it in this way so that perhaps these themes can function as points of comparison with productions of Indigenous alterities in other geo-historical contexts, which we'll hopefully discuss throughout this conference. I do this keeping in mind that one of the aims of the decolonial project is to undo excised histories and trace parallels between different peoples' experiences of modernity/coloniality.

Columbus and First Encounters

When Christopher Columbus first encountered the Indigenous peoples of the Caribbean, the representational points of reference for these unknown peoples were infused with a heady mix of provincialism and fantasy. Columbus and early modern European illustrators had to draw on existing iconographies to invent tentative strategies for visually producing this “new” otherness. Briefly: medieval and early modern pre-contact images of unknown peoples were based on Greco-Roman conceptions of the barbarous other, resulting in the production of numerous images of monstrous hybrid figures relegated to the margins of maps and navigation charts.

Equally, the so-called Christian “Reconquest” of the South of the Iberian Peninsula from the kingdom of Al-Andalus also fed into the available

imaginary for describing the peoples to be encountered in the West. For example, Mexica temples were frequently referred to as mosques in Cortés’ *Cartas de relación*; even the use of the term “conquest” to refer to the overthrow of the Mexica empire relates back to the “Reconquest” of Al-Andalus, and so on. Hence, the first phase of contact was rife with representational experimentation and the search for a visual vocabulary to describe the “new” external other. Medieval and “Reconquest” imaginaries bled into the early representations of Amerindian peoples, specifically heightening the figure of the Indigenous cannibal as a proto-category or place-marker for what would later develop into scientific racism.

Indigenous Bodies, Proto-racism and Labour

As Aníbal Quijano has argued, there are two main nodes that configure the model of Western superiority over the non-Western colonial subject in the matrix of colonial difference: the codification of difference between colonizer and colonized based on the concept of race and the configuration of a new structure of labour for the management of natural resources.¹⁷ The figure of the cannibal was the degree zero of these two nodes (figure 1), symbolically carrying within his body both the genesis of what would later become racial categories and also the subject of a new paradigm for labour in the form of redemptive slavery.

The link between the cannibal (racialized) body and slavery (forced labour) was present from the very first moment of the colonization of the Americas. In one of his missives to the Spanish rulers, Columbus suggest-

¹⁷ Quijano, Anibal. (2008). Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Social Classification. In Moraña, Mabel, Dussel, Enrique, and Jáuregui, Carlos (Eds.). *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate* (181-224). Durham and London: Duke University Press, 182.



[Fig. 1]. Froschauer, Johann. (1505). “First Known Depiction of Cannibalism in the New World” [engraving], published in *Mundus Novus* by Amerigo Vespucci. Source: Wikimedia Commons under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International licence.

ed an economic use for the Amerindian “cannibal”:

Your Highnesses could grant a license and permit a sufficient number of caravels to come here every year, bringing the said cattle and other things necessary to populate the land and cultivate the soil, and all this at reasonable cost, a cost which could be covered by [shipping back to Spain] cannibal slaves, a people so fierce, healthy, well-proportioned, and intelligent that, once rid of that inhumanity, they would make better slaves than any others.¹⁸

¹⁸ Columbus, Christopher. (1982). *Textos y documentos completos*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 154.

After some initial reticence, Queen Isabella later enacted a law that would institutionalize Columbus’s idea. The edict, otherwise known as the Cannibal Law of 1503, stated:

[...] since [the cannibals] are hardened in their evil intentions, eating the said [Arawak] Indians and worshipping idols, [should they] resist and not wish to receive and welcome in their lands the captains and peoples who by my command go and make the said voyages, and if [the cannibals] do not wish to listen to them in order to be indoctrinated in the things of our Holy Catholic Faith, then [they] can [be] capture[d...] paying to us the share of them that belongs to us, in order that [the cannibals] might be sold and a profit be made without [the seller] incurring any penalty whatsoever.¹⁹

Hence, the imbrication between race, labour, and the civilizing mission was established very early on in the push for the conquest of the Americas.

Equally, the division between the “good” Indian and the “savage” was also established at the first point of contact and through the trope of the cannibal. On the one hand, the (peaceful) Arawak first encountered by Columbus were interpreted as signifiers of Edenic innocence and beauty: “the king and the others walked about naked as the day their mothers birthed them, and also the women with no shame whatsoever, and they were the most beautiful men and women that they had found until

¹⁹ Cited in Palencia-Roth, Michael. (1993). The Cannibal Law of 1503. Williams, Jerry M. and Lewis, Robert Earl (Eds.). *Early Images of the Americas: Transfer and Invention* (21-63). Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 24.

then”.²⁰ In Columbus’s view, their nakedness also made them easy targets for the “civilizing mission”: “They have no ingenuity in weapons and go about naked and are very cowardly [...] and so are good for being ordered about and made to work [...] and to be taught to use dress and our customs”.²¹

Their counterparts were the purported Caribs (cannibals), as described by Tomás de Ortíz, bishop of Darién, in 1524:

The men from the *terra firma* of the Indies eat human meat and are sodomites more than any other. There is no justice among them, they go about naked, have no love nor shame, they are like asses, dim-witted, crazed, unreasonable; they are beastly in their vices.²²

Hence, early European representations of the Indigenous peoples constructed these groups as either beautiful Edenic pushovers or grotesque cannibal sodomites (figure 2). Through the authoritative gaze of Occidentalism, two opposing interpretations of the Indigenous body developed: the “good” Indian, potentially subject to civilization and labour, and the “savage” cannibal, beyond the bounds of civilization (except as a slave). The dichotomy of the “good” Indian vs. the irredeemable “savage”, hotly debated in the Valladolid Debate between Fray Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, was to prove central to the construction of the modern/colonial paradigm of the other, alongside providing the conceptual/philosophical framework for the corresponding institutionalization of the *encomienda* and *repartición*

²⁰ Columbus, *Textos y documentos completos*, 83.

²¹ Columbus, *Textos y documentos completos*, 84.

²² Cited in Reding Blase, Sofía. (1992). *El Buen Salvaje y el Caníbal*. México: UNAM, 12.



[Fig. 2]. de Bry, Theodor. (1562). Cannibalism in Brazil in 1557 as Described by Hans Staden [engraving]. Source: Wikimedia Commons under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International licence.

systems, which sought to incorporate the originary peoples into the nascent governing systems of the colony.

Pintura de castas and a Nascent Scientific Theory of Race

By the end of the colonial period in New Spain, the institutionalization of colonial difference had reached convoluted extremes of classification and the implementation of a clear form of racialism based on three lines of ethnic heritage: Spanish, Indigenous and African, and all their humanly possible combinations:

It is held as systematic that a Spaniard and an Indian produce a *mestizo*; a *mestizo* and a Spaniard, a *castizo*; and a *castizo* and a Spaniard, a Spaniard. It is agreed that from a Spaniard

and a Negro a mulatto is born; from a mulatto and a Spaniard, a *morisco*; from a *morisco* and a Spaniard, a *torna atrás*; and from a *torna atrás* and a Spaniard, a *tente en el aire*. The same thing happens from the union of a Negro and Indian, the descent begins as follows: Negro and Indian produce a *lobo*; *lobo* and Indian, a *chino*; and *chino* and Indian, an *albarazado*, all of which incline towards the mulatto.²³

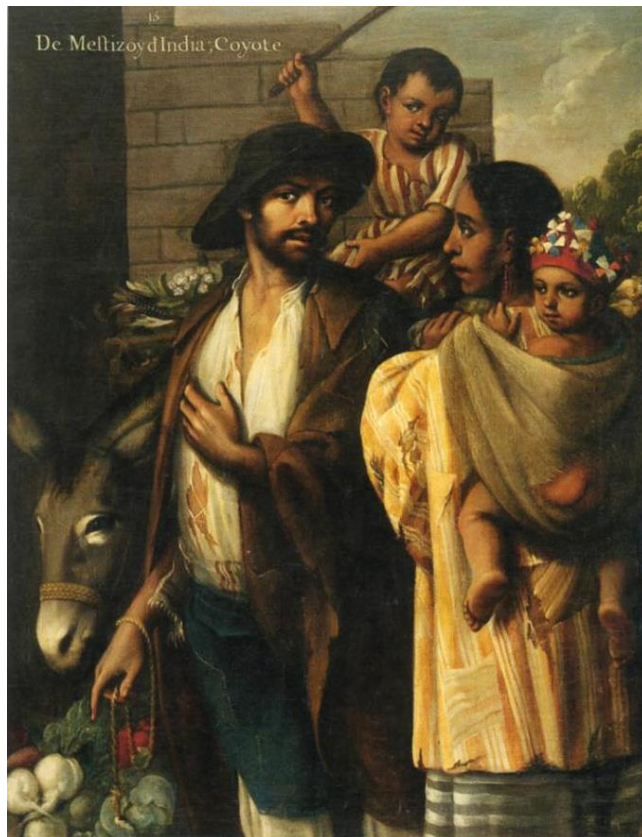
The epistemic shift brought on by the Enlightenment meant that there was a new emphasis placed on the organization and classification of colonial subjects. In this context, high value was placed on the “purity” of blood, with particular consideration for the Spaniards who were characterized as *gente de casta limpia* (“people of a pure caste”). This distinction of “purity” was a concept that originated in Spain to indicate the absence of Jewish or Moorish ancestry, but in the context of New Spain it meant the absence of Negro blood.²⁴

Indigenous subjects, while considered to be of a good “pure” caste, were believed to be *gente sin razón* (“people without reason”), with the ensuing institutional consequence that they were treated as legal minors and made wards of the state.²⁵ The caste system, based on the institutionalization of legal rights along the lines of racial characteristics, served the purpose of organizing the three sectors of the population in

²³ Pedro Alonso O’Crowley (1774) cited in Katzew, Ilona. (2004). *Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-Century Mexico*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

²⁴ MacLachlan, Colin and Rodríguez, Jaime. (1980). *The Forging of the Cosmic Race: A Reinterpretation of Colonial Mexico*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 199.

²⁵ MacLachlan and Rodríguez, *The Forging of the Cosmic Race*, 197.



[Fig. 3]. Cabrera, Miguel. (1763). 15. De Mestizo y de Yndia, Coyote [painting]. Source: Wikimedia Commons under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International licence.

order to assign them specific political, economic and social roles in an attempt to control an increasingly miscegenated “disorganized” society (figure 3), thus prescribing the relation between race, place, and labour as theorized by Quijano.

Given this framework, *casta* paintings can be viewed as the expression of the privileging of reason through the pictorial materialization of taxonomic categories (figure 4).²⁶ An exercise of the representational

²⁶ The labels in figure 4 read: “1. Español con India, Mestizo; 2. Mestizo con Española, Castizo; 3. Castizo con Española, Español; 4. Español con Mora, Mulato; 5. Mulato con Española, Morisca; 6. Morisco con Española, Chino; 7. Chino con India, Salta atrás; 8.



[Fig. 4]. Unknown artist. (18th century). [Casta painting containing complete set of 16 *casta* combinations]. Source: Museo Nacional del Virreinato (Tepotzotlán, Mexico) and Wikimedia Commons under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International licence.

privileges of the colonial elite, this genre permitted miscegenation in New Spain to be fixed and produced as an object for scientific inspection. As in all taxonomic enterprises, hierarchies were deployed in order to

Salta atrás con Mulata, Lobo; 9. Lobo con China, Gíbaro (Jíbaro); 10. Gíbaro con Mulata, Albarazado; 11. Albarazado con Negra, Cambujo; 12. Cambujo con India, Sambiaga (Zambiaga); 13. Sambiago con Loba, Calpamulato; 14. Calpamulato con Cambuja, Tente en el aire; 15. Tente en el aire con Mulata, No te entiendo; 16. No te entiendo con India, Torna atrás". Such attention to detail in all the potential combinations of the three main ethnic groups signals the obsession with purity of blood and its accompanying hierarchization of peoples in colonial New Spanish society.



[Fig. 5]. Cabrera, Miguel. (1763). 16. Indios Gentiles [painting]. Source: Wikimedia Commons under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International licence.

organize the “scientifically” legitimated differences between races. In the space and sequence of the pictorial format, these hierarchies took on an explicitly visual form. In most of the *casta* series, the first painting demonstrates the mixing of the male Spaniard and the female Indian, giving the white Spaniard pride of place as the initiator of the series, hence confirming the racial patriarchal hierarchies established in the colony. Concurrently, the image of the “wild” Indian living on the fringes of society persisted (figure 5), legitimating the perpetuation of the civilizing mission that sought to incorporate the marginalized peoples into a burgeoning, soon-to-be *mestizo* nation.

2. Indigenism and the Forging of a *Mestizo* Nation

Post-Independence

The *mestizo*, classified in *casta* paintings as the offspring of Spaniard and Indian, was the ultimate representative of miscegenation in the colony and in the emerging nation. Yet this figure was not only a hybrid in the biological sense; the *mestizo* was also the product of a cultural miscegenation and, as such, became championed as a symbol of the incorporation of all the aspects of native society and Spanish traditions in order to provide the foundations for the Mexican nation.²⁷ The forging of a nation from 1821 onwards not only depended on a sort of continuation of the civilizing mission brought on by colonization, but also on the production of a collective imaginary that could incite the subject to develop a sense of belonging to a nation (figure 6).

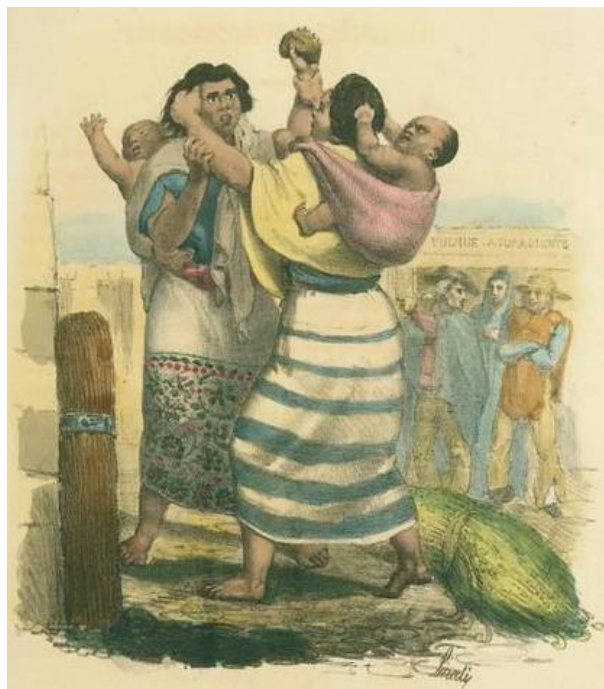
The Indigenous presence in the newly formed nation was at the core of “The Indian Question” (“La cuestión indígena”): what role were Indigenous peoples to play in the destiny of the new nation? For many, the answer was the forging of a *mestizo* nation on the basis of acculturation and assimilation, thereby achieving the homogenization of the population that could then call itself “properly” Mexican. For the first time, the many varied Indigenous cultures were the target of an official national ethnic policy (figure 7).

Alongside this assimilationist policy, a parallel representational style emerged: *neoaztequismo*. In it, there was a mythical rehabilitation of the

²⁷ MacLachlan and Rodríguez, *The Forging of the Cosmic Race*, 209.



[Fig. 6]. Castro, Casimiro. (1855). “Trajes típicos de mexicanos en una escena rural a las afueras de la Ciudad de México” [engraving], from *México y sus alrededores*. Colección de monumentos, trajes y paisajes dibujados al natural y litografiados por los artistas mexicanos. Source: Wikimedia Commons under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International licence.



[Fig. 7]. Linati, Claudio. (1828). “Dispute de deux Indiennes” [engraving], from the book *Costumes civils, militaires et religieux du Mexique*. Source: Wikimedia Commons under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International licence.

Indigenous past, which equated the Aztec Empire with the classic civilizations of Greece and Rome: “Several elements from Indigenous cultures can be found in the remains of classical civilizations: neoaztequism (Phelan Leddy, 1960: 768), for instance, remarks on the similarities with the classical civilizations of Greece and Rome, emulated by Western nation-states”.²⁸ This romanticizing of the Indigenous past (figures 8 and 9) became crucial cultural content that served to shape the emerging nationalism in the country. A glorified Indigenous past, comparable to the great empires of Europe, was a source of pride. Yet it was also part and parcel of a fossilization of the Indigenous cultures in the burgeoning nation, whereby *criollo* and *mestizo* identification with “Indians” from the past was not met with any sort of will for the understanding of their Indigenous contemporaries.

Imaginary of the Post-Revolution

This sort of discourse persisted well into the post-Revolutionary years (from 1921 onwards). For Manuel Gamio, anthropologist and archaeologist behind the reconstruction of Teotihuacan, the pre-Hispanic past was evidence of the high degree of civilization that had been reached by the Indigenous peoples. However, contemporary Indigenous peoples were now subject to certain socioeconomic conditions that begged for a nationwide reconfiguration in order for the Indigenous populations to become integrated to the nation through a gradual process of assimilation: a) a fusion of races, b) a fusion of cultural

²⁸ Natividad Gutiérrez Chong cited in O’Farrill, León. (2010). Nacionalismo de Estado e indigenismo en México: una discusión viva. *Boletín de la Asociación para el Fomento de los Estudios Históricos en Centroamérica (AFEHC)*. 46 (October): 1-19, 6.



[Fig. 8]. Esquivel y Rivas, Carlos. (1854). Prisión de Guatimocín, último emperador de Méjico [painting]. Source: Wikimedia Commons under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International licence.



[Fig. 9]. Izaguirre, Leandro. (1893). El suplicio de Cuauhtémoc [painting]. Source: Wikimedia Commons under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International licence.

expressions, c) homogenization of languages and balanced access to economic opportunities.²⁹

But for other post-Revolutionary intellectuals, the Indigenous past was marked by the barbarous despotism of the Mexica, tainted by human sacrifice and perpetual wars. Writer, philosopher, and politician José Vasconcelos saw the Indigenous peoples of Mexico as a hindrance to the country's modernization.³⁰ For him, the basis for the Mexican revolutionary nation was to be the *mestizo*. If humanity was divided into four main races (white, red, yellow, and black), he believed, then the combination of all four into the *mestizo* would produce a cosmic race (*raza cósmica*) that could be truly universal. Inspired by a heady mix of early eugenic thinking and the prevailing social Darwinism of the age, this view turned on its head the notion that "purer" races were superior, and hybrids were considered degenerations of the original races. Instead, *mestizaje* brought about the best combination for humanity.³¹

This form of cultural "mestizophilia" was further coupled with a push to educate the masses through a far-reaching system of public education. As Secretary of Education, Vasconcelos championed mass campaigns for literacy, where teachers were sent into remote regions to school populations beyond the pale of the Revolution. This policy equated teachers with the evangelizing missionaries of the colonial period, but under a secular, post-Revolutionary state that could be based on a cultural, social and political identification with the figure of the *mestizo*.

²⁹ González Salinas, Omar Fabián. (2016). La utopía de forjar una sola raza para la nación. *Mestizaje, indigenismo e hispanofilia en el México posrevolucionario. Historia y memoria*, 13: 301-330, 311.

³⁰ O'Farrill, "Nacionalismo de Estado", 9-12.

³¹ O'Farrill, "Nacionalismo de Estado", 9-12.

By the 1940s, a new form of indigenism emerged that sought to rehabilitate “the Indigenous”, sing the praises of an idealized Indigenous past and, through this institutional acknowledgment, incorporate contemporary Indigenous peoples into the Mexican nation-state. Mexican president Lázaro Cárdenas created the Congreso Indigenista Interamericano in 1940, highlighting the changes in State policy towards Indigenous peoples:

[The new policy seeks to bring] universal culture to the Indian [*sic*], that is, the full development of all the capabilities and natural faculties of the race, an improvement of their living conditions, adding to their systems of subsistence and work all the tools that technology, science, and the universal arts can provide, but always on the basis of their racial personhood and respect for their consciousness and identities.³²

This new policy found echo in the cultural production of the time. The muralist movement embraced Mexico’s pre-Hispanic past, where it was present in esthetic discussions, discourse on national identity, in historical recreations, philosophical and existential pondering, and explanations on Mexican culture (figure 10).³³ Yet living Indigenous peoples were still not seen as active agents for the Mexican nation. Rather, they were simply considered objects of analysis. Cultural projects during this time period, such as the Museo Nacional de Antropología e Historia (National Museum of Anthropology and History) contributed to showing a pre-Hispanic past where the Indigenous

³² Cited in O’Farrill, *Nacionalismo de Estado*, 14.

³³ Itzel Rodríguez Mortellaro cited in González Salinas, *La utopía de forjar una sola raza para la nación*, 320.



[Fig. 10]. Rivera, Diego. (1945). La gran Tenochtitlán [mural]. Source: Wikimedia Commons under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International licence.

peoples had been converted into “living fossils” or atemporary subjects with no say in contemporary Mexican national life (figure 11).³⁴

3. Contemporary Pathways to a Decolonial Indigeneity

1994: Indigenism or Indigeneity

This form of benevolent institutional indigenism, based on assistentialism and paternalism as State policy, persisted throughout the PRI regime during the latter half of the twentieth century. However, in 1994 an Indigenous insurgency emerged that would bring to the fore the existence of Indigenous groups that did not feel represented or included

³⁴ González Salinas, *La utopía de forjar una sola raza*, 322.



[Fig. 11]. Diorama at Museo Nacional de Antropología e Historia [National Museum of Anthropology and History], 2010. Photo: Nasheli Jiménez del Val.

in the nation-state. The night that the North American Free Trade Agreement came into effect on New Year’s Day, the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) rose up in arms in the Mexican state of Chiapas. Formed by several Indigenous groups hailing from the region (Tzetzales, Chontales, Tzetziles, Choles, Tojolabales), the neo-zapatistas positioned themselves politically against the supposed modernization of Mexico and the neoliberal economic policy imposed by the regime, as represented by the implementation of NAFTA. For their spokesperson subcomandante Marcos, the EZLN had decided to rise up in arms because NAFTA was a death certificate for the [Indigenous] groups of Mexico. The implementation of neoliberalism in Mexico was, for the neo-Zapatistas, only a new and more intensive stage in “the historical crime of the concentration of privileges, riches and impunity” brought on by colonialism. In one evening, the neo-Zapatista insurgency brought down the globalizing and First Worldist discourse that the Salinas government

had peddled at home and abroad, forcing the Mexican State to focus on the complex reality of the Indigenous peoples.

In the case of the neo-Zapatista uprising, age-old paternalistic discourses quickly resurfaced, and the Indigenous movement was spoken about under many of the same terms as they were during the colonial period: as legal minors, people without reason, and would-be wards of the State. Initial presidential statements were that the neo-Zapatistas weren't an Indigenous uprising at all, but rather a concerted attempt to destabilize the country by national and international professionals in violence and terrorism. Once this course of rhetoric backfired on president Salinas, he chose another tactic: he offered a few of the rebels "benevolent treatment and would even consider a pardon" if they let down their weapons. This prompted the oft cited communiqué "Who must ask for pardon and who can grant it?":

Why do we have to be pardoned? What are we going to be pardoned for? For not dying of hunger? For not being silent in our misery? For not humbly accepting our historic role of being the despised and the outcast? [...] For having carried guns into battle, rather than bows and arrows? [...] For being primarily Indigenous people? [...] Who must ask for pardon and who can grant it?³⁵

The irruption of the EZLN was a political cry that changed the terms of the political conversation and expressed, as did their slogan, "Nunca más un México sin nosotros" ("Nevermore a Mexico without us"). Moreover,

³⁵ Subcomandante Marcos (1995). *Shadows of Tender Fury*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 81.

it implied the positioning of marginalized Indigenous groups that seriously led the nation to reconsider that racial and national "integration" always was and continues to be a myth. But perhaps the major contribution that the Zapatistas' irruption on the global scene represented was precisely its capacity to think and resist transversely: from a local, to a national, to a global scale, they questioned and continue to question a world system based on the exploitation of others under modernity/coloniality.

Temporalities

Returning to the request for an institutional apology forwarded by Mexican president López Obrador in March of 2019, reactions to the petition signal that the discussion has, by no means, been exhausted. On the one hand, the rhetoric of "that happened so long ago" in the Spanish government's statement amounted to nothing more than a very formal institutional "get over it":

The arrival of Spaniards to modern-day Mexican lands 500 years ago cannot be judged in light of contemporary considerations. Our fraternal peoples have always known to read our shared past without anger and through a constructive perspective.³⁶

This sentiment was also echoed in the words of Spanish writer and director of the prestigious Cervantes Institute, Luis García Moreno: "Rather than commit to the past, we should commit to the future".³⁷ On the other hand, the persistence of colonial discourses, such as the

³⁶ Redacción, AMLO solicita por carta, *BBC News Mundo*.

³⁷ Rodríguez Marcos, Javier. (2019, 27 March). No hay civilización que tenga las manos limpias. *El País*. Retrieved from: https://elpais.com/cultura/2019/03/26/actualidad/1553631914_870915.html.

supposed importance of Spanish civilizing forces in eradicating the bloodthirsty Aztecs (which has actually been said recently),³⁸ demonstrate that the colonial mindset is an ongoing condition rooted in the past that has not yet been superseded. In this sense, we are still subject to a form of coloniality as a system that continues to reproduce inequality as its *modus operandi*.

And while López Obrador has stated that he too will apologize in the name of the Mexican State for the repression of Indigenous peoples, particularly in the context of the Yaqui or Maya exterminations throughout the 19th century,³⁹ Indigenous groups and leaders have been extremely critical of many of López Obrador's modernization projects that reek of neoliberal exploitation of Indigenous lands.⁴⁰ Moreover, the Mexican *mestizo* government (no matter how left-wing and progressive it aims to present itself), continues to produce visual representations of Indigenous peoples that speak to the fossilized Indian and, what is worse, link this figure to a nascent project for a new form of militarization in Mexico (figure 12).

³⁸ From PP politician Rafael Hernando's Twitter feed: "Habr  que recordarle a este Sr. q [sic] los espa oles fuimos all  y acabamos con el poder de tribus [sic] q [sic] asesinaban con crueldad y sa a a sus vecinos, y q [sic] por eso unos pocos ayudados por los q [sic] eran perseguidos y esclavizados, se conquist  y civiliz  esa tierra. Q [sic] estudie un poco". Rafael Hernando [@Rafa_Hernando]. (26 March 2019). [Re:] L pez Obrador pide al Rey... Retrieved from: https://twitter.com/Rafa_Hernando/status/1110320568006520837.

³⁹ Redacci n. (2019, 25 March). AMLO exige disculpa al rey de Espa a por matanzas en la Conquista. *El Universal*. Retrieved from: <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/amlo-exige-disculpa-al-rey-de-espana-por-matanzas-en-la-conquista>.

⁴⁰ La Redacci n. (2018, 18 November). Colectivos ind genas desaprueban el Tren Maya. *La Jornada*. Retrieved from: <https://www.jornada.com.mx/ultimas/politica/2018/11/18/colectivos-indigenas-desaprueban-el-tren-maya-3290.html>.



[Fig. 12]. Guardia Nacional [National Guard]. (2019). Source: Author’s archive.

So the temporalities remain askew. On the one hand, there is a continuous effort to try to keep “the Indian” in the past (here I am referring to what Johannes Fabian has theorized as the denial of contemporaneity or coevalness⁴¹), all the while the rhetoric of the civilizing forces persists in the discourse of modernity/coloniality. Indigenous peoples in Mexico are still denied an effective agency in the matters of national policy yet there remains an absolute negation of acknowledgment—a disavowal—of their importance as effective political agents.

Faced with this denial, I suggest that indigeneity—in opposition to indigenism—can be a form of resistant subjectivity that a) recognizes the continuing impact of the modern/colonial matrix of power, thereby highlighting the contemporaneity of the colonial condition, and b) enacts effective agency through practicing different paradigms of power

⁴¹ Fabian, Johannes. (1983). *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press.

relations. These are just two aspects that I am sketching out here, but I hope they can be a point for further discussion throughout the conference.

Championing the Right to Look

So, where do we go from here? Firstly, the matter of access to representation is central. Confronted with centuries of representations that have served to colonize the imaginary of marginalized peoples, as I hope to have demonstrated here, we must reconsider the role that representation plays in perpetuating power asymmetries. We are talking about a politics of representation insofar as practices where the power of dominant forms of representation make marginalized groups perceive themselves as “other”, constituting in effect an exercise of representational violence.

Secondly, we must become familiarized with the mechanics and intrinsics of how a modern/colonial system of representation works in order to start to disarticulate it. If representational violence is based on the assumption that the production of knowledge depends on a clear-cut separation between the object and the subject of knowledge, then any object under inspection is submitted to a power dynamics that, in the final instance, colonizes representation, co-opts the potential agency of the marginalized subject, and denies her access to the production of significant forms of self-representation. In this sense, we must imagine ways to undo what Coronil has theorized as the representational tactics of Occidentalism, as listed in the introduction:

- World components are divided and conceived as isolated units.
- Related histories are excised from one another.

- Differences are transformed into hierarchies.
- These representations are naturalized and, therefore,
- They reproduce existing asymmetric power relations.⁴²

Thirdly, we must explore the possibility of establishing what Barriendos terms an inter-epistemic visual dialogue that takes into account the dynamics between dominant visual regimes championed by a Eurocentred modernity and those othered cultures that have been racialized and hierarchized by the discourse of modernity/coloniality. This dialogue must be non-essentializing, non-homogenizing, and non-idealizing, such that a self-reflexive questioning of our own loci of enunciation consistently comes under scrutiny.

Fourthly and finally, we must champion a "right to look", as suggested by Nicholas Mirzoeff,⁴³ that can start to disarticulate the coloniality of seeing that determines the system of representations of Occidentalism. Borrowing from subcomandante Marcos' words: "On many occasions we have said that dignity can be defined in relation to looking at the other, being looked at by the other, and in looking at ourselves. [...] Because a way of looking is a way of asking".⁴⁴ There is an intrinsic dignity in fighting for the right to look at another and, in turn, being seen because a process of acknowledgment is therein inscribed (figure 13). I hope that in the following days we can design and imagine new and fruitful ways of looking at and being seen by each other here.

⁴² Coronil, Más allá del occidentalismo, 132.

⁴³ Mirzoeff, Nicholas. (2011). *The Right to Look: A Counter-History of Visuality*. Durham: Duke University Press.

⁴⁴ Subcomandante Marcos. (2003). Mensaje a la exposición fotográfica colectiva '69 miradas contra Polifemo'. *Enlace Zapatista*. Retrieved from: <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2003/11/01/subcomandante-marcos-mensaje-a-la-exposicion-fotografica-colectiva-69-miradas-contra-polifemo/>.



[Fig. 13]. Osornio, Mariana. (2017). Te miro [I See You] [photograph]. Source: Wikimedia Commons under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International licence.

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