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By

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The Cosmic Race, Decolonization, and Neo-Zapatismo: Mexican Philosophical Thought on Race
and Revolution

By

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Race and Revolution**

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This thesis has been accepted on behalf of the Department of History by their supervisory committee:

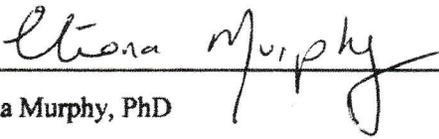


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ABSTRACT

This thesis project will argue that the participation of indigenous Mexicans in the Revolution of 1910 and the EZLN uprising of 1994 forced José Vasconcelos, Leopoldo Zea, and Enrique Dussel to reflect on the legacies of Mexico's colonial past in order to propose how such peoples would form a part of modern Mexican society and identity. Vasconcelos proposed the idea of the cosmic race to encourage indigenous assimilation. Although Zea was a decolonial thinker, he too encouraged indigenous assimilation. Dussel, for his part, was a thinker of liberation philosophy, and he cited the ideology of the Neo-Zapatistas in Chiapas as reason to recognize Mexico's indigenous diversity. This discussion is an intellectual trajectory of how three of Mexico's best-known philosophers have thought about the role and place of Mexico's indigenous population.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2016, during his first tour of Mexico, Pope Francis visited the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas in Chiapas to acknowledge the existence and contributions of indigenous peoples to the Mexican nation. In a stage decorated with the façade of the city cathedral, and in front of a large indigenous audience, he initiated his speech in the Tzotzil language and did the rest in Spanish. He denounced the human rights abuses and various forms of discrimination that were brought upon the indigenous communities he preached to. The gospels, prayers, and songs of the mass were done in the three local languages: Tzotzil, Tzeltal, and Chol. The pope even praised the communities for their harmonious relationship with the ecosystem, and he said that the world has much to learn from them. He also encouraged the Chiapas youth to continue practicing the customs of their elders, even as modernity tries to homogenize the world's cultures. During his visit, he authorized masses said in indigenous languages, and he visited the resting place of the bishop, Samuel Ruíz. Twenty-two years earlier, Ruíz radicalized the indigenous communities of the region with liberation theology, and this partially inspired the Zapatista uprising of 1994.¹ Even though the pope was not formally taught liberation theology in his native Argentina, he nonetheless empathized with the movement's power to bring social changes in Latin America, especially for the downtrodden and, of course, the native population. More recently in 2019, Alfonso Cuarón, a Mexican director, made a film inspired by his indigenous maid who raised him as a child. The movie is titled *Roma*, and it protagonizes the life of that maid, played by a Mixtec woman named Yalitza Aparicio. Cuarón was praised for showcasing racial diversity in a country where pop culture celebrities are mostly white or of predominantly European descent.

¹ Nicole Winfield and Sonia Perez D., "Pope Celebrates Indigenous in Chiapas as Catholics Dwindle," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, February 18, 2016, <https://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=3540203&itype=CMSID>.

Aparicio was nominated for an academy award for best actress. Although she did not win, she would have become the first indigenous Latin American to win the award.² These two anecdotes reveal that, in Mexico, there is a recent concern about overlooking racial minorities in discussions of social justice and cultural representation.

Three Mexican philosophers, in their respective life-times, responded to the participation of indigenous peoples in revolutions that have raised questions about Mexico's racial, cultural, and national identity. These three philosophers are José Vasconcelos (1882-1959), Leopoldo Zea (1912-1920), and Enrique Dussel (1934-present). Through the works of these three philosophers, this thesis traces the trajectory of racial philosophy in Mexico and the changes in perspectives towards the indigenous population, from promoting "homogenous" assimilation to promoting diversity. These three philosophers also carried with them romanticized perspectives about the indigenous peoples as having static cultures, untouched by outside influences. The participation of indigenous peoples, first in the Revolution of 1910 and later in the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, gave all three of these philosophers the impetus to reflect on this indigenous question. They wrote mainly about how these events happened in Mexico, but they also made numerous references and connections to the rest of Latin America. Therefore, this discussion will do the same by looking at Latin America, collectively, as the Spanish, Portuguese, and to a lesser extent French-speaking parts of the Americas. The differences between these countries will be stressed in other contexts of this discussion. Also, it is important to keep in mind that these three philosophers, for the most part, referred to the indigenous population only as *indigenous*, but such a population within Mexico, as in all the other countries of the western hemisphere, is not homogenous. There are many ethnic, linguistic, and regional communities within Mexico's

² Laura Tillman, "Yalitza Aparicio of 'Roma' and the Politics of Stardom in Mexico," *New York Times*, January 17, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/17/movies/yalitza-aparicio-roma.html>.

indigenous population. This thesis will look at how Vasconcelos, Zea, and Dussel all believed that they needed to address the colonial legacy of Mexico in order to contextualize their discussions on the revolutions that they wrote about. They thought very radically about Mexico's national history to interpret these twentieth century revolutions.

Philosophy and Race in Latin America

Why center this discussion on what philosophers have had to say on the matter? In Latin America, philosophy is inseparable from history. European and North American philosophies tend to explore abstract, universal, or timeless topics, but Latin American philosophy tends to explore topics that relate to its own social and historical realities, such as colonialism, dependency, liberation, and identity.³ Thus, the writings of Latin American philosophers provide reflections and commentaries about social, political, economic, and cultural matters during their respective time periods. Unfortunately, the acknowledgement of Latin American philosophers by the North American and European philosophical milieu depends on whether or not their works are widely translated and read in English, German, or French. However, Latin American philosophy parallels North America's pragmatist philosophy, which holds that its questions and answers need to rise out of and make contact with the lived experiences of culturally and historically situated human beings. Of course, Latin American philosophers have built on many Western traditions of thought, such as Christian philosophy, positivism, and existentialism. However, their social and political philosophies are even more distinctly Latin American as they address urgent issues in the region, such as neoliberal capitalism, oppressive dictatorships, social activism, and indigenous rights. Indeed, Latin American philosophers have thought very deeply

³ Leonardo Tovar González, "LAS FUNDACIONES DE LA FILOSOFIA LATINOAMERICANA," *cuadernos de filosofia latinoamericana* 27, no. 95 (2006): 16-7.

about how indigenous communities form an integral part of Latin America's identity. They even ask themselves if philosophy existed before the Spanish Conquest and the subsequent burning of indigenous texts. Indeed, the "flower poems" of Nezahualcoyotl expressed deep philosophical concepts, such as the existential brevity of life.⁴ Latin American philosophers also have lengthy discussions about how to ethically resolve the oppressive conditions that indigenous peoples face in their respective countries. Superficially, it may seem that most of Latin America's conflicts have been driven by class differences, rather than racial differences. Hence, the erroneous saying that "Mexico is not a racist society; it is a classist society." However, most of the poor and underserved populations of Latin America – Mexico included – are dark skinned, indigenous, or African descended. More attention has been given to the racism that the global north (i.e. North America and Europe) has towards Latin America, and that has overshadowed the racism that has existed within Latin America itself. According to philosopher Linda Martin Alcoff, "Latin American thought has been structured to a great extent by European ideas about race and culture ... and the contradiction between those ideas and Latin American reality has produced a rich tradition of philosophical work on the concept of cultural identity and its relation to the self."⁵

The conquest of the Americas initiated a long history of racial conflicts in Latin America, and philosophical thinkers of this region have discussed many of these conflicts. Indeed, some scholars "have tried to find [the origin of the concept of race] in the Purity of Blood Statues of fifteenth century Spain, which were employed against *conversos*, [Muslims and] Jews who had converted to Christianity but who were still not accepted because of their ... blood."⁶ This idea

⁴ González, "LAS FUNDACIONES," 18-9.

⁵ Linda Alcoff, "Mestizo Identity," in *Idea of Race*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Tommy L. Lott (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), 139.

⁶ Robert Bernasconi and Tommy L. Lott, *Idea of Race* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), vii-viii.

of “blood purity” was replicated in the caste system that the Spanish established after the conquest of the Americas. Individuals with less Indigenous American or African blood were the wealthiest and most privileged in the colonial society. Other scholars have tried to find the origin of race “in the debates of sixteenth century Spain when the opponents of Bartolomé de las Casas justified the mistreatment of Native Americans on the grounds that they were not human.”⁷ Las Casas is a thinker that is praised in Latin American philosophy because in the Valladolid Debate, he used theology and philosophy to defend the humanity of the recently conquered Native Americans. He attacked Aristotle’s natural slave argument, and he shamed a contemporary philosopher, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, for defending Aristotle and the conquest.⁸ On an interesting side note, a century before Protestants in North America established Harvard, Colonial Mexico had a university with Catholic scholastic thinkers, and a famous nun, poet, and philosopher, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, advocated for women’s rights long before feminism developed in North America or Europe.⁹ In the early nineteenth century, the leaders of the independence wars in Latin America vowed to abolish the caste system, but in the long run, such promises became more rhetorical than practical. Simón Bolívar, a major leader in South America’s independence, was educated by an enlightenment philosopher named Simón Rodríguez. In fact, Rodríguez and Bolívar struggled to conflate the ideas of liberation and identity, as they could not win independence without the nonwhite majority in South America. In his “Address at the Congress of Angostura,” Bolívar expressed, “we are not Europeans; we are not Indians; we are but a mixed species of aborigines and Spaniards. Americans by birth and

⁷ Bernasconi and Lott, *Idea of Race*, viii.

⁸ Rafael Alvira and Alfredo Cruz, “The Controversy between Las Casas and Sepúlveda at Valladolid,” in *Hispanic Philosophy in the Age of Discovery* ed. Kevin White (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 88-110.

⁹ Susana Nuccetelli, *Latin American Thought: Philosophical Problems and Arguments* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2002), 157.

Europeans by law, we find ourselves engaged in a dual conflict.”¹⁰ Most of the newly independent countries in Latin America abolished the caste system on paper, but racial inequalities persisted.

As the nineteenth century progressed, creole elites embraced the ideology of positivism, and they tried to model their countries after industrial France, Britain, and the United States, rather than Spain or Portugal. They welcomed European immigrants to whiten the populations of their respective countries and to Westernize their national cultures. Liberal leaders and presidents, such as Domingo Faustino Sarmiento from Argentina, worked to bring European migration and push Latin American society towards Western modernity. In his book, *Civilization and Barbarism* (1845), Sarmiento argued that “civilization” would come to Argentina if it eliminated its gaucho and indigenous population. He expressed of European immigrants and descendants that “This race mostly inhabiting cities, has a tendency to become civilized, and possesses talent and the finest instincts of progress.”¹¹ Indeed, Sarmiento’s presidency gave way to positivism in Argentina, and his efforts paralleled those of other countries such as Brazil and Mexico. Justo Sierra, a Mexican intellectual of that century, wrote that “We need to attract immigrants from Europe so as to obtain a cross with the indigenous race, for only European blood can keep the level of civilization that has produced our nationality from sinking, which would mean regression, not evolution.”¹² These elites also welcomed investors from Europe and North America to extract natural resources and exploit native labor. The West reasserted its economic and cultural hegemony over the region. Therefore, nineteenth century Latin America is

¹⁰ Simón Bolívar, “Address at the Congress of Angostura,” *Brown University Library*, [https:// library.brown.edu/create/modernlatinamerica/chapters/chapter-2-the-colonial-foundations /primary-documents-with-accompanying-discussion-questions/document-3-simon-bolivar-address-at-the-congress-of-angostura-1819/](https://library.brown.edu/create/modernlatinamerica/chapters/chapter-2-the-colonial-foundations/primary-documents-with-accompanying-discussion-questions/document-3-simon-bolivar-address-at-the-congress-of-angostura-1819/).

¹¹ Domingo F. Sarmiento, *Facundo, or Civilization and Barbarism* (New York: Penguin, 1998), 16.

¹² Justo Sierra, *Political Evolution of the Mexican People*, trans. Charles Ramsdell (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), 368.

characterized by its rise of neocolonialism. At the brink of the Spanish-American War, the Cuban poet, José Martí, who obtained a degree in philosophy from the University of Madrid, defended the indigenous peoples as a crucial element of Latin America's identity in his semi-philosophical book, *Nuestra America* (1891). Martí advocated for Latin Americans to embrace their roots and reject the neocolonial regimes and mentalities of his day. Similarly, the Peruvian Marxist philosopher, José Carlos Mariátegui, also called for an end to the oppressive neocolonial regimes to liberate indigenous peoples. Believing that Inca models could be combined with Marxist theory, he expressed that “the renaissance of the Indian is not pinned to the material process of ‘Westernizing’ the Quechua country. The soul of the Indian is not raised by the white man’s civilization or alphabet but by the myth, the idea, of the Socialist revolution.”¹³

In 1910, Mexico’s mestizo peasants and indigenous people successfully overthrew the neocolonial regime of dictator, Porfirio Díaz. Soon after, the mainstream nationalist culture of post-revolutionary Mexico embraced its rural and indigenous folklore. A Mexican philosopher, named José Vasconcelos, who will be the focus of the first chapter, wrote *La Raza Cósmica* (1925), in which he argued that Latin America’s strength would derive from its long history of racial and cultural mixing. Throughout the twentieth century, many other Latin American countries similarly embraced their indigenous and African heritage, although Mexico downplayed its African heritage more than other countries. Another Mexican philosopher, Leopoldo Zea, who will be the focus of the second chapter, argued that Latin America needed to confront its colonial legacy to understand how its systems of oppression were created and how they can be deconstructed. In the middle of the Cold War, the Brazilian philosopher and educator, Paulo Freire, wrote the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), and his writings gave

¹³ José Carlos Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretive Essays on the Peruvian Reality* (1928; University of Texas Press, 1971), chap 2, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/mariateg/works/7-interpretive-essays/essay02.htm>.

sectors of the Catholic Church the radical impetus to practice liberation theology. Enrique Dussel, the focus of the third chapter, was inspired by Freire and even paralleled his efforts in the liberation theology movement. He argued that the global south must have an authentic and unique voice to critique the disadvantages placed by the global north's modern and imperial practices. Dussel believed that formerly colonized countries need political and communal principles for human flourishing, and the people themselves, who are of that context and culture, need to lead that change.

Evolution of Racial Ideology in Mexican Philosophy

The trajectory of this discussion will span over the course of the twentieth century and will encompass Mexico's post-revolutionary period, economic miracle, and age of neoliberalism. Over the course of this century, nationalism played an enormous factor into this trajectory; the more nationalistic a philosopher was, the more he aspired to have Mexico's native population assimilated. José Vasconcelos' writings responded to the Revolution of 1910, and he believed that the indigenous peoples who participated in it needed to assimilate into a homogenous *mestizo* culture that would define the nation. Vasconcelos racialized the narrative of the 1910 Revolution, not to understand the oppression of the indigenous peoples or even to empathize with them, but rather to observe how his vision of a unified Cosmic Race would be fulfilled in Mexico, specifically, and Latin America, at large.

The writings of Leopoldo Zea also responded to the Revolution of 1910, but he reflected on the event from his respective time: the economic miracle (1940s-1970s). He too embraced Vasconcelos' expectation that indigenous peoples should assimilate into a mestizo nationalism, yet he encouraged other nations from the global south to embrace their indigenous heritage, as

they were decolonizing from other European empires. He linked the Mexican Revolution's goal to end neocolonialism to the struggles of other countries fighting for their independence at that time. Essentially, Zea wanted his decolonial theories to apply to all Latin Americans in a homogenous way by racially categorizing them as mestizos. Though he should have been more understanding about Latin America's racial diversity, it is not the intent of the author to counterargue his observations about Western imperialism and its current-day effects on the third world. The second chapter of this thesis is meant to highlight Zea's willingness to exclude some people from decolonial discussions, when he himself was opposed to the principle of exclusion that came with colonialism.

The writings of Enrique Dussel respond to the Zapatista uprising of Chiapas in 1994, which coincided with the rise of neoliberalism. Unlike the other two thinkers, Dussel cited the Zapatista's cause as reason to recognize Mexico as a diverse and plurinational country. As one of the founding and leading intellectuals of liberation theology and liberation philosophy, Dussel's writings are committed to provoke ethical sensitivity towards the marginalized and downtrodden of Latin America. This is why he expressed himself favorable to the Zapatistas' goals of attaining recognition and respect towards their culture, their rights, and their political autonomy.

This thesis is, by all means, an intellectual history. By using primary sources that were written by these three philosophers, this thesis will discuss how they reflected on what was going on in the world around them; it will not necessarily discuss the impact that their ideas had on the world around them, although it will be mentioned that, as Mexico's Secretary of Public Education, José Vasconcelos did have administrative powers to disperse his ideas. The discussion of this thesis is intended for general audiences who are unfamiliar, perhaps, with the mainstream philosophical milieu of Latin America. Thus, it will have a substantial amount of

biographical and philosophical background on the three intellectuals discussed. It will be demonstrated that, in many ways, the observations and ideas of these three intellectuals are better understood when they are contextualized with their biographies. With that into consideration, it is also important to be mindful of the fact that these three intellectuals were not indigenous themselves, and some of the many prejudices and shortcomings in their writings can be explained by the fact that they had little to no contact with indigenous peoples or their cultures, even though they wrote about them. This is why the author found it urgent to also contextualize the arguments of these three philosophers with the narratives of the 1910 Revolution, Mexico's economic miracle, and the Zapatista uprising. With the use of scholarly literature written by present-day historians, the author presents these three narratives in a way that mostly focus on the participation and experiences of Mexico's diverse indigenous population. Also, rather than following an exact chronological order of this narrative's events, this discussion will be organized thematically. It will present the publications of these three authors in chronological order, but the events that they reflected on will, by necessity, be organized by analysis, instead. For all three authors, for example, their reflections will be provided, not just on the revolutions that took place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but also on the conquest of Mexico because, as María Herrera Lima argues, "the idea of [the indigenous peoples'] historical rights should be preserved as a part of a 'politics of memory' that can be very important for a critical reconstruction of a national history."¹⁴

¹⁴ María Herrera Lima, "On the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: The Case of Chiapas," in *Latin American Philosophy: Currents, Issues, Debates*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 166.

Historiography

There are several works from the monumental historiography of the Mexican Revolution worth mentioning to better understand how this thesis will contribute to this body of literature. One of the earliest works on the revolution is Frank Tannenbaum's *Peace by Revolution: Mexico Since 1910* (1933). The author claimed that the revolution was agrarian, indigenous, and nationalist in nature, and he wrote about the war's outcomes in a very optimistic way. For example, he believed that the revolution's land reforms demonstrate that "undeveloped nations ... are not entirely incapable of self-defense [and self-determination]."¹⁵ However, because the PRI regime became corrupt and oppressive, many historians in the 1970s questioned the legacy of the revolution, including Tannenbaum's thesis. Adolfo Gilly, for example, wrote *The Interrupted Revolution* (1971), in which he argued that the uprising had two characters: one bourgeois and one radical.¹⁶ He argued that while bourgeois interests interrupted the radical revolution of the peasant majority, he hoped that the people of Mexico would rise against their elite oppressors and re-appropriate their radical revolutionary heritage. In 1981, Friedrich Katz gave an international perspective, in which the revolutionaries took a nationalist stance against US-neocolonialism and European economic interests. He used US interventions in the war and the Zimmerman Telegram as examples, and he pointed out that the revolutionaries "attempted to use the rivalries of the great powers for their own ends."¹⁷ Two years later, Gilbert Joseph focused on how the revolution played out less violently – yet more radically – in the Yucatan

¹⁵ Frank Tannenbaum, *Peace by Revolution: Mexico Since 1910* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), 261.

¹⁶ Adolfo Gilly, *The Interrupted Revolution* (Mexico D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1971), Kindle edition, location 331, chap. 1.

¹⁷ Friedrich Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, the United States, and the Mexican Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), xi.

region; thus, he argued that the revolution was not monolithic.¹⁸ His study made clear that each region of Mexico had its own local social, political, economic, and cultural factors. Alan Knight published a two-volume series on the revolution. Despite the skepticism of historians from the 1970s, Knight argued that even though many of aspects of the Porfiriato stayed the same after the war, the uprising against Díaz was indeed populist and, at least initially, successful. He believed that this was a unique historical event in which the masses deeply impacted their course of events.¹⁹ In 1987, John Mason Hart gave a very strong class analysis to his narrative, and he focused more on revolutionaries from the urban sectors rather than rural sectors. According to Hart, “the emergent industrial working-class movement developed strong revolutionary propensities during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century.”²⁰ Following the example of Joseph, Mark Wasserman wrote about the revolution with a regional focus on the state of Chihuahua.²¹ He pointed out how elite families, such as the Terrazas-Creel family, tried to maintain their wealth and privilege after the revolution by doing economic favors and intermarrying with the new revolutionary elite. However, the revolutionary government still centralized politics, and the lower classes still got land and higher wages. This thesis will address the long-run failures of the revolution to redeem Mexico of its mental and institutional racism towards its indigenous population, but it will mainly do so by reflecting on the social observations and writings of José Vasconcelos.

¹⁸ Gilbert Joseph, *Revolution from Without: Yucatán, Mexico, and the United States, 1880-1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), xi.

¹⁹ Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, volume 1, *Porfirians, Liberals, and Peasants* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), xi.

²⁰ John Mason Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 52.

²¹ Mark Wasserman, *Persistent Oligarchs: Elites and Politics in Chihuahua, Mexico, 1910-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), Kindle edition, location 327, introduction.

The historiography of Mexico's post-revolutionary society features more works that focus on indigenous people and their associations with national identity. Alan Knight discusses how issues of race were hinged to Mexico's post-revolutionary society in an article for the book *The Idea of Race in Latin America* (1990). He argued that even though Mexico's long history of mestizaje between Spaniards and indigenous people has made its racial categories very ambiguous, indigenous people have always been affected by racial exclusion and oppression nonetheless.²² It was not until the post-revolutionary period that Mexican society elevated them as their national symbol. As indigenous people were being praised, however, Sinophobia and even anti-Semitism became prevalent in the country. Alexander S. Dawson, for his part, focuses on the indigenista movement and post-revolutionary programs that attempted to undo Mexico's social and institutional racism during the 1920s and 30s. Dawson mainly focuses on the work of elite politicians and social scientists in the movement. He even points out that "Revolutionary elites found Indigenista social science appealing because it promised to extend federal authority throughout the national territory."²³ Thus, elite indigenistas made possible the PRI's seventy-year regime. In 2010, Rick A. Lopez published *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution*. This book reveals the ways in which Mexican artists and intellectuals from 1910-1920, such as Diego Rivera, Manuel Gamio, and Moises Saenz elevated rural, indigenous arts, music, and customs to become "proud symbol[s] of Mexico's authentic national identity."²⁴ Alan Shane Dillingham wrote about how indigenista policies changed during the 1970s because the Mexican government was orchestrating ethnocide against indigenous

²² Alan Knight, "Racism, Revolution, and *Indigenismo*: Mexico 1910-1940," in *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940*, ed. Richard Graham (Austin: University of Texas, 1990), 72.

²³ Alexander S. Dawson, *Indian and Nation in Revolutionary Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004), xvi.

²⁴ Rick A. Lopez, *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) Kindle edition, location 171, introduction.

cultures.²⁵ He discusses how Mexican anthropologists worked against the wishes of their government and educated indigenous communities to challenge their local governments and stand up for their rights. In 2016, María Muñoz published *Stand Up and Fight: Participatory Indigenismo, Populism, and Mobilization in Mexico, 1970-1984*. Her narrative focuses more on the ways in which indigenous communities themselves worked to determine their own social, political, and economic ways of life. These communities asserted their autonomy against government organizations, such as the First National Congress of Indigenous Peoples and the Department of Colonization and Agrarian Affairs, which tried to determine their communal ways of living.²⁶ This thesis will put the intellectual biography of Leopoldo Zea in conversation with the history of indigenismo to show that there were racial conflicts within Mexico that Zea overlooked and downplayed in his writings about decolonialism.

The Chiapas uprising of 1994 also has a large body of scholarly literature, despite the fact that this historical event is much more recent than the 1910 Revolution. Four years after the Zapatistas declared war on the Mexican government, the historian Neil Harvey published a monograph on the event. He traced the origins of the EZLN to three older movements (from the 1970s and 80s), in which indigenous communities from Chiapas demanded land rights and social/economic justice. He argued that the government's indifference to the movements led these communities to take up arms.²⁷ In *A Rebellion in Chiapas: A Historical Reader* (1999), John Womack found it crucial to look at the Spanish Conquest of Chiapas to better understand the long history of racial inequalities that led up to the rebellion, five hundred years later.

²⁵ Alan Shane Dillingham, "Indigenismo Occupied: Youth and Mexico's Democratic Opening," *The Americas* 72, no. 4 (2015): 549.

²⁶ María Muñoz, *Stand Up and Fight: Participatory Indigenismo, Populism, and Mobilization in Mexico, 1970-1984* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016), 3-6.

²⁷ Neil Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion: The Struggle for Land and Democracy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998) Kindle edition, location 609-637, introduction.

Womack also shed light on the role of the Catholic diocese in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, especially under the leadership of Bishop Samuel Ruíz, in supporting the Mayan communities and teaching them how to promote social justice in non-violent ways.²⁸ In 2002, Jan de Vos published *Una tierra para sembrar sueños: Historia reciente de la Selva Lacandona 1950-2000*. Although not about the Zapatistas per se, this book is the final volume of a three-book series that focuses on the history of the Lacandon Jungle, from the colonial era to the year 2000.²⁹ De Vos's narrative is primarily based on the testimonies of eight individuals from Chiapas who stood for different economic and political interests. This illustrates why the Zapatista rebellion took hold the way it did. In his book, *Understanding the Chiapas Rebellion: Modernist Visions and the Invisible Indian* (2004), Nicholas Higgins argues that the Zapatista rebellion called for recognition and respect towards the identities of indigenous people. The Zapatistas, he pointed out, opposed globalization and notions of the modern nation-state, which called for assimilation and erasure of ethnic-indigenous identities.³⁰ Stephen E. Lewis argued that a crucial reason why the Mayan communities of Chiapas rebelled, while other indigenous communities in Mexico did not, was because during the 1920s and 30s, the Ministry of Public Education and president Lázaro Cárdenas did not extend their education and land reforms to that region. According to Lewis, there was an "inability of the federal government to fully impose itself in Chiapas."³¹ Therefore, land rights and assimilationist policies lacked in the state of Chiapas, so the native communities had more motives to rebel against the Mexican government. In 2008, Gloria Muñoz Ramirez gave the EZLN historiography a great contribution with *Fire and the Word: A History*

²⁸ John Womack, *A Rebellion in Chiapas: A Historical Reader* (New York: The New Press, 1999), 23-30.

²⁹ Jan de Vos, *Una tierra para sembrar sueños: Historia reciente de la Selva Lacandona 1950-2000* (Mexico D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2002) Kindle edition, location 26, introduction.

³⁰ Nicholas Higgins, *Understanding the Chiapas Rebellion: Modernist Visions and the Invisible Indian* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 3.

³¹ Stephen E. Lewis, *The Ambivalent Revolution: Forging State and Nation in Chiapas, 1910-1945* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005) xiv.

of the Zapatista Movement. This book is mostly based on testimonies from the Zapatistas who initiated the rebellion. It even has a preface by Subcommander Marcos himself.³² This thesis will show that Enrique Dussel's empathy towards the EZLN reflects a change in Mexico's mainstream mentality. Despite the afterlife of racial inequalities in Mexico since the revolution, popular support towards the indigenous-led Zapatistas was very vocal across the nation.

There is a large body of literature on the philosophers, José Vasconcelos, Leopoldo Zea, and Enrique Dussel, but most of it is not written by historians. However, this body of literature is still considered historically valuable because it was written with the use of historical evidence. For example, Mario Vasconcelos Aguilar, who has a background in law and social science, published a biography of Vasconcelos, which covers the main epochs of the philosopher's life, such as his leadership in the Ateneo de la Juventud, the Secretary of Public Education (SEP), his defeat in the presidential election, and his resignation from politics because of its lack of "thought, emotion, and action."³³ The main primary source used in this work is Vasconcelos' autobiography, *Ulises Criollo*, and as the title suggests, the main focus of the book is on the philosophers' legacy on education and culture in Mexico. Luis A. Marentes, a specialist in Latin American Literature, published *José Vasconcelos and the Writing of the Mexican Revolution* (2000). His discussions are almost entirely based on primary sources, such as Vasconcelos's publications, autobiographies, and personal letters. It reads like a biography written by a historian, although Marentes does provide literary criticisms against Vasconcelos' racial views and logical contradictions.³⁴ Ilan Stavans, a specialist in Latin American Studies, also points out

³² Gloria Muñoz Ramirez, *Fire and the Word: A History of the Zapatista Movement* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2008), 19.

³³ Mario Vasconcelos Aguilar, *José Vasconcelos: Maestro de América* (Mexico D.F.: Editorial Jus. 1978), 18.

³⁴ Luis A. Marentes, *José Vasconcelos* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 2000), 73.

the dangers of Vasconcelos' writings, saying that *The Cosmic Race* uses "Social Darwinism as his platform, is pseudoscientific, not to say spurious."³⁵ Stavans not only discusses the literature and ideas of Vasconcelos, but he also provides the historical context in which his ideas were dispersed and popularized throughout Latin America and the United States, especially among Chicano activists and intellectuals. Mexican historian, Enrique Krauze wrote an entire chapter on Vasconcelos in his book *Redeemers: Ideas and Power in Latin America* (2011).³⁶ The chapter is titled "José Vasconcelos, the Cultural Caudillo," and as an intellectual history, it puts the philosopher's biography and writings about racial and cultural identity in conversation with three other Latin American thinkers, whom the author collectively calls the "four Josés" (José Rodó, José Carlos Mariátegui, José Martí, and José Vasconcelos). The philosopher Mario Sáenz wrote about how Leopoldo Zea put existentialist philosophy in conversation with Latin American history and culture to better understand the region's identity and social issues.³⁷ Sáenz argues that the post-revolutionary environment in Mexico contextualizes the rise of intellectuals like Zea, who criticized global structures of colonial and neocolonial dependency. This book has historical significance to historians of liberation theology and philosophy because it focuses on the origins of the movements in Mexico, a country that is often overlooked in this field when compared to South and Central America. As already mentioned, this project will discuss these three intellectuals to reveal a trajectory of how Latin American philosophy has thought about the associations between race and revolution, and it will do so in an interdisciplinary fashion by combining history, philosophy, anthropology, and ethnic studies.

³⁵ Ilan Stavans, *José Vasconcelos: The Prophet of Race* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011), xi.

³⁶ Enrique Krauze, *Redeemers: Ideas and Power in Latin America* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2011) Kindle edition, location 896-1514, chap. 3.

³⁷ Mario Sáenz, *The Identity of Liberation in Latin American Thought: Latin American Historicism and the Phenomenology of Leopoldo Zea* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 1999), 75-6.

CHAPTER ONE

JOSÉ VASCONCELOS & THE REVOLUTION OF 1910

José Vasconcelos lived through the Mexican Revolution and was prominent in Mexican academia during the early years of the post-revolutionary society. As rector of the national university and head of the country's public education system, his ideas towards race and the 1910 Revolution had a lot of influence in the country. Historian William Beezley explains that Vasconcelos "had the idea that mestizos would become the new revolutionary Mexicans, and he had the goal of redefining the indigenous peoples from a national embarrassment to an integral component of the revolutionary nation."³⁸ However, Vasconcelos' agendas for public education in the post-revolutionary society were meant to promote linguistic and cultural assimilation at the cost of the existing indigenous diversity. While the advisors of Porfirio Díaz wanted to whiten Mexico's population, Vasconcelos wanted to promote Mexico's mixed-race society, which he saw as more advanced than traditional indigenous societies. In other words, Vasconcelos promoted *mestizaje*, not *indigenismo*. In his own words, he said, "youth would be the new cosmic race which we could forge; but Indianism means going back for millennia."³⁹ Indeed, Vasconcelos looked back on Mexico's history and praised what the colonial legacy of Catholic Spain did for indigenous peoples, and he opposed the neocolonialism under Porfirio Díaz because it was not led by Spain's traditional Catholic values. In order to understand why the Porfiriato and the 1910 Revolution raised questions about Mexico's racial and cultural identity for thinkers like Vasconcelos, it is important to provide some historical background.

³⁸ William Beezley, "José Vasconcelos, National Education, and Revolutionary Culture in Mexico," *ORE of Latin American History* (Sep 2016): 4.

³⁹ William Beezley, "José Vasconcelos," 2.

As demonstrated in the historiography section above, historians of the 1910 Revolution have a tendency to portray the war more in class terms rather than racial terms. However, both categories of analysis are legitimate when interpreting the revolution; it would be unfair for one interpretation to completely overshadow the other. Indigenous peoples were extremely oppressed during the Porfiriato, and the post-revolutionary muralists, such as Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros, depicted them and other rural peasants as the protagonists of the revolution. During the thirty-five years that he ruled Mexico, Porfirio Díaz (who was a *mestizo* with Mixtec ancestry) engaged in projects of economic development that only benefited himself and the elite minority, namely the wealthy landowners, the *Jefes Politicos*, the *Científicos*, and the *Rurales*.⁴⁰ Díaz welcomed investors from Europe and North America who had the knowledge and technology to modernize Mexico's economy and infrastructure; he invited them to extract natural resources and exploit native labor to the point of having more economic power than the Mexican people. Privately owned mines, commercial agriculture, and newly constructed railroads concentrated most of the nation's wealth to Mexico City, and the use of so much land for Díaz's neocolonial projects displaced peasants & indigenous peoples from their communal and ancestral lands.

Díaz also gave these foreign companies and investors the approval to take advantage of indigenous communities in their own lands. In northern Veracruz, for example, the Huastecos (or Teenek, as they call themselves) lost their lands to an American owned oil company. Historian Myrna Santiago points out that, by 1911, "Edward L. Doheny and Weetman Pearson, the men who founded the Mexican oil industry in 1900, [produced] ... 85 percent of Mexico's total oil

⁴⁰ Frank McLynn, *Villa and Zapata: A History of the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 7-11.

output.”⁴¹ All of this oil was sent to US refineries and, later, to Europe’s Allied Forces in World War I. Though they had no official land titles, the Teenek lived in the region since 2500 BCE, and they used some of the oil (or *chapotote*, in their language) “for sealing canoes, painting pottery, and burning as incense in ceremonies”⁴² Initially, the Teenek only encountered American geology students who surveyed their lands, but eventually, the oil company obtained the lands by deceit and violence. The company representatives tricked the Teenek into selling their plots when they thought they had rented them. Since many were illiterate, they penned an X or made a thumbprint on documents they could not read. Uncooperative Teenek men were murdered or had their homes set on fire. Having their options limited, much of the Teenek worked for the company, sometimes against their will.

By 1902, Diaz sold land from the Yaqui Valley, in Sonora, for 6.60 pesos in order to introduce privately owned mines, commercial agriculture, and newly constructed railroads. Evelyn Hu Dehart points out that the Díaz regime wanted to pacify the Yaquis and use their manpower for “rapid development in the state.”⁴³ Most of the Yaquis relocated to the outskirts of the valley and worked in the mines and railroads. Many of them were worked to death, just like the Mayans who were worked to death in the plantations of the Yucatan Peninsula. Desperate, many of the Yaquis engaged in guerilla warfare, and they raided haciendas, ranches, mines, and rural communities for sustenance.⁴⁴ However, Yaquis who resisted were sent to the Yucatecan plantations to be worked to death, and Mayans who resisted their authorities were sent to the Sonoran mines to be worked to death. This was meant to displace potential rebels from the

⁴¹ Myrna Santiago, “Culture Clash: Foreign Oil and Indigenous People in Northern Veracruz, Mexico, 1900–1921,” *Journal of American History* 99, no. 1 (2012): 63.

⁴² Santiago, “Culture Clash,” 64.

⁴³ Evelyn Hu-Dehart, “Development and Rural Rebellion: Pacification of the Yaquis in the Late Porfiriato,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 54, no. 1 (1974): 74.

⁴⁴ Hu-Dehart, “Development and Rural Rebellion,” 78.

places where they were fomenting rebellions. False arrests of non-Yaqui indigenous groups were very common, and even wandering bands of women and children, who were obviously not guerilla fighters, were detained. Even during the Revolution of 1910, the Yaquis had their own rebellion, independent of the other warring factions.

Rather than recognizing the racial problems that came with Western modernity, the Porfiriato elites only sought to emulate it at the cost of the livelihoods of the poor, darker-skinned majority. Many indigenous and rural peasants relocated to the cities, hoping to find industrial jobs that were, not surprisingly, also owned by foreign investors. They lived in poor tenement apartments, yet Díaz used his wealth to remodel the rich sectors of the cities to look like replicas of European cities, especially Paris. At the behest of the *científicos*, Díaz supported European immigration into Mexico to “breed out” its indigenous heritage. One such *científico*, Justo Sierra, argued that “The division of races . . . has had a steadily diminishing influence as an obstacle to social evolution since the intermediate mestizo has grown steadily more numerous; in him the dominant middle class has its center and its roots.”⁴⁵ Here, Sierra demonstrates that he believed in racial ideas that were very similar to those of Social Darwinism, which claimed that certain groups of people, especially people of color, are morally and intellectually inferior and are an obstacle to social evolution. Even foods of indigenous origin (that are celebrated as Mexican, today), such as tortillas, tamales, pozole, and pulque, were avoided by Europeanized Mexican elites. Senator, Francisco Bulnes, wrote that “maize has been the eternal pacifier of America’s races and the foundation of their refusal to become civilized.”⁴⁶ Almost every aspect of North American and European culture hegemonically grew in vogue during the Porfiriato.

⁴⁵ Justo Sierra, *Political Evolution of the Mexican People* (1900-2), 360.

⁴⁶ Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *¡Que Vinas los Tamales!: Food and the making of Mexican Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 77.

French cuisine and fashion, for example, became very popular among Mexican elites; in fact, “a dinner for five hundred held in the National Theater to celebrate ... Díaz’s birthday in 1891 featured French food, wines, and cognac.”⁴⁷ Inspired by Austrian-style polkas, which were introduced to Mexico during the French invasion, Díaz ordered the Mexican army to organize military bands in order to professionalize its image.⁴⁸ The liberal elites in Mexico emulated the cultures of France, Britain, and the United States because those countries became modern and industrial while Spain lagged far behind in these two respects.

As Díaz grew older, his elite supporters grew concerned about who would succeed him, and that issue led to his eventual downfall. He appointed Ramón Corral (governor of Sonora who oppressed the Yaquis) to become his vice president and successor. The *científicos* and *jefes políticos* thought of Corral as incompetent and were resentful about Díaz’s judgement. During an interview with the American reporter James Creelman, Díaz falsely announced that he would not run for reelection, and that encouraged Francisco Madero to run for the presidency in 1910. According to Alex Khasnabish, Madero considered returning lands that Díaz took from indigenous communities, such as those of Anenecuilco in Morelos, “a largely indigenous village which had fought for years against the encroachment of local haciendas [and sugar plantations] upon their lands.”⁴⁹ However, after Díaz threw Madero in jail and won by a landslide, Madero escaped, ran to the US, and called for revolution against Díaz. Two militant groups answered his call. One came from Chihuahua, led by Pascual Orozco. The other came from the indigenous community of Anenecuilco, led by a man of Nahua and Spanish descent named Emiliano Zapata.

⁴⁷ Jeffrey M. Pilcher, “Tamales or Timbales: Cuisine and the Formation of Mexican National Identity, 1821-1911,” *The Americas* 53, no. 2 (1996): 209-210.

⁴⁸ Rafael A. Ruiz, “Música y banda militar de música desde la Gran Década Nacional hasta el fin del Porfiriato,” *Revista Cuicuilco* 23, no. 66 (2016): 101.

⁴⁹ Alex Khasnabish, *Zapatistas: Rebellion from the Grassroots to the Global* (London: Fernwood Publishing, 2010), 223.

After exiling Díaz to Paris, Madero became president but failed to return the Zapatistas their lands. According to Alan Knight, “Zapata resumed his agrarian struggle, proclaiming the Plan of Ayala, which would remain the Zapatista programme and banner for nearly a decade.”⁵⁰ Madero placed Victoriano Huerta, Díaz’s former general, in charge of the national military, but Huerta killed Madero and became president.

Huerta fought the Zapatistas with extreme brutality because he had military experience from quelling rebellions led by the Yaquis and the Mayans, yet he himself “always preferred to consider himself an Indian [specifically of Huichol origin].”⁵¹ Zapata, on the other hand, joined other revolutionaries, such as Venustiano Carranza, Álvaro Obregón, and Francisco Villa, to eliminate Huerta. Robert L. Scheina points out that Villa’s troops mostly came from “the U.S.-oriented north where disenfranchised cowboys (*vaqueros*) worked the range for their masters [as opposed to Zapata’s troops who came from] the Indian-oriented south where most still lived in feudal-like bondage.”⁵² Together, these different factions exiled Huerta to Barcelona, but they later engaged in a civil war. Obregón and Carranza became Constitutionals who wanted to restore the constitution of 1857, and Villa and Zapata became Conventionals who wanted to bring radical reforms for the common people. Carranza later invited Zapata to negotiate, but he killed him in an ambush. Obregón rebelled against Carranza for not letting him run for president. Carranza fled Mexico, but before managing to escape, the Zapatistas killed him to avenge Zapata’s death. Obregón, therefore, became president, and during his regime, Villa was also assassinated in an ambush. In 1917, a new constitution was written, and it was one of the world’s

⁵⁰ Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), Kindle edition, location 1270, chap. 4.

⁵¹ George J. Rausch, “The Early Career of Victoriano Huerta,” *The Americas* 21 no. 2 (1964): 136.

⁵² Robert L. Scheina, *Villa: Soldier of the Mexican Revolution* (Washington D.C.: Brassey’s, Inc., 2004), 5-6.

most radical constitutions of its time. It promised secular education, an eight-hour work day, a six-day work week, minimum wage, equal pay regardless of gender or nationality, and collective bargaining rights to workers. Most notably, for our discussion, it guaranteed the return of lands that Diaz stole during his regime and “established one of the largest experiments in common-property management, devolving control of over 50% of farmland and an estimated 60% of forests to communities in the form of communal land grants, known as *ejidos*.”⁵³ In order to do so, the lands of great estates were distributed to landless mestizo and indigenous communities.

Vasconcelos’ Biography

Vasconcelos’ academic interests led him to be a fanatic towards Spanish and Southern European culture; therefore, he had little interest for Mexico’s indigenous heritage during the post-revolutionary period. His biography best contextualizes his intellectual and cultural preferences. In 1882, Vasconcelos was born in the state of Oaxaca. He grew up in the northern borderlands, living in Mexico but attending school in El Paso. He enrolled at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria in Mexico City, which was a hotbed of positivist thought. Initially, Vasconcelos wanted to study philosophy, but he studied law, instead, because “the predominant ideology, Comtian Positivism, had eliminated philosophy from the curriculum and replaced it with sociology.”⁵⁴ In the school library, he came across “Ariel” (1900), an essay written by the Uruguayan writer José Enrique Rodo. In “Ariel,” Rodo argued that Northern Europe and North America have become too modern, materialistic, industrialized, and capitalistic, while Southern

⁵³ Maria DiGiano, Edward Ellis, and Eric Keys, “Changing Landscapes for Forest Commons: Linking Land Tenure with Forest Cover Change Following Mexico’s 1992 Agrarian Counter-Reforms,” *Human Ecology* 41, no. 5 (2013): 707.

⁵⁴ José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race, A Bilingual Edition* trans. Didier T. Jaén (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), xx.

Europe and Latin America have preserved the spiritual, moral, and cultural values of Christianity and the Latin-Greco tradition. Rodo feared that with the collapse of the Spanish Empire after the Spanish-American War, the United States would become the next imperial force in Spanish America.⁵⁵ Rodo, therefore, called for Latin Americans to forge solidarity based on their Catholic and Latin-Greco roots. Thereafter, Vasconcelos developed a deep fascination for Spanish culture and Greek philosophy, even though he did not formally study the discipline in the Preparatoria. He and some of his fellow students founded the *Ateneo de la Juventud Mexicana* to oppose positivist education in Mexico. He despised the positivists' aspirations to model the nation after industrialized, Anglo nations rather than Spain. Vasconcelos also directed an anti-reelectionist newspaper, which opposed the Diaz regime and supported Francisco Madero to win the 1910 election.⁵⁶ When the revolution erupted, rural peasants and indigenous peoples rebelled to overthrow Diaz. In 1913, Vasconcelos left to the United States due to the fighting between the revolutionaries. Towards the end of the war, he made peace with president Álvaro Obregón so that he could return to Mexico. After his return, Vasconcelos became rector of the national university, and he used his public influence to define and promote Mexico's national, aesthetic, and ethical values, according to Rodo's vision. He even designed the seal and composed the motto of the university. He drew a Mexican eagle and an Andean condor behind a shield with the map of Latin America. The motto, *Por Mi Raza Hablará el Espíritu* (For My Race, the Spirit will Speak), surrounded that shield. Most of Mexico's post-revolutionary artists and intellectuals, including Vasconcelos' colleagues from the *Ateneo de la Juventud*, believed that in order to create a more inclusive society and national culture, they needed to highlight the country's indigenous and mestizo heritage. Vasconcelos also wanted to promote a new popular

⁵⁵ Nuccetelli, *Latin American Thought*, 194.

⁵⁶ Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race*, xxi-xxii.

and intellectual culture that encouraged Mexicans (and Latin Americans, in general) to look at themselves for national inspiration, but he did retain a strong Eurocentric mentality that was not too radically different from when positivism was the norm.

Under the Obregon regime, Vasconcelos worked to make Mexican education uphold the Spanish colonial legacy that introduced Western culture to Mesoamerica. He organized the Secretariat of Public Education (*Secretaría de Educación Pública* or SEP), of which he was minister from 1921 to 1924. SEP was divided into three departments: schools, libraries, and fine arts. He wanted to use public education for three main goals. 1) He wanted to make Mexico value Western civilization (with an emphasis on Spain). He even told president Obregón that he wanted to send out 100,000 copies of Greek classics, like Homer's *Iliad* and Plato's *Republic*, throughout the countryside. 2) He wanted to make the indigenous peoples literate in the Spanish language. To do this, he initiated a literacy program called "Missionaries of Indigenous Culture and Public Education." It was led by middle-class women who traveled to rural towns across the country and taught children who had no access to education before the revolution. It was modeled on the Franciscan missionaries from Spain who converted the indigenous peoples to Catholicism, hundreds of years earlier. 3) Vasconcelos wanted to promote Mexico as a racially mixed, Hispanic nation. He commissioned public works of art to promote a new national aesthetic that could educate Mexico about its history and identity. In fact, he first envisioned this artistic program during a trip to Italy before Obregón welcomed him back to Mexico.⁵⁷ However, the artists that he hired, such as Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros, were more committed to painting darker skinned people who embodied indigenous

⁵⁷ Ibid., xxiii.

Mexican cultures and history. Vasconcelos preferred them to paint murals with lighter skinned people who resembled the characters from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

In 1922, Vasconcelos toured through Chile, Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay to expand the revolutionary experience and inspire the youth; however, he still tried to promote the legacy of Iberian colonialism in the Americas. In Rio de Janeiro, he gave a speech at the centennial celebration for Brazil's independence, and he was told by the Mexican government to unveil a statue of Cuauhtémoc, which was a gift for the Brazilian people. Vasconcelos did speak of Cuauhtémoc as a national hero, but in one of his personal memoirs, which he wrote ten years later, he "complained about the gift's inappropriate nature. In Brazil 'there are no Indians,' ... so Brazilians would be unable to relate to an Indian figure. A more appropriate gift, he concludes, would be a figure of Latin heritage."⁵⁸ Vasconcelos made no mention of Brazil's indigenous ethnic groups in the Amazon nor the Afro-Brazilian culture that was popularized in Rio de Janeiro; he was more fascinated by Brazil's Portuguese heritage. On his return to Mexico, he had conflicts with the university students, and Obregón stopped supporting him, so he resigned from SEP in 1924. He also lost a state election in Oaxaca and later a presidential election against Plutarco Elías Calles. He died in Mexico City on June 30, 1959.

El Maestro

During the post-revolutionary era, Mexican society no longer tried to imitate Europe or North America as it did during the age of positivism, but Vasconcelos' education programs still tried to make Mexican education uphold the Spanish colonial legacy that introduced Western culture to Mesoamerica. As part of his education program, Vasconcelos published a free

⁵⁸ Luis A. Marentes, *José Vasconcelos* (New York: Twayne Publishersm, 2000), 66-7.

educational magazine for the Mexican public called *El Maestro*. Some of his ideas about race and the revolution can be found in the magazine's articles, which were accessible to many people in the country. In the opening article of his first issue, published in 1921, he explained to his readers that culture, ideas, and art are useless if they do not benefit humanity and its capability to "elevate its spirit towards the light of the highest of concepts."⁵⁹ He alluded to Plato's forms from the *Republic* in this passage. He stated, "we write for the many, more with the constant purpose of elevating them, and we will not ask ourselves what the multitudes want, rather what is more convenient for them so that they themselves can find the path to their own redemption."⁶⁰ In this passage, Vasconcelos implied that he was not interested in the local knowledge of the Mexican masses, who consisted of rural peasants and indigenous people. Instead, he alluded more to Plato's *Republic* and how an ideal society should be structured. Vasconcelos explained that, in order for Mexico to be a just society, it must go back to its Christian values and model itself after the ancient Greeks. Mexico, he argued, had a long history of liberties being constrained. The Spaniards enslaved the Aztec dynasties, and after its independence from Spain, Mexico got rid of monarchy, but presidents, such as Santa Anna, Porfirio Díaz, and Venustiano Carranza, restricted the liberties of the Mexican people.⁶¹ He argued that Mexico, thus, never learned to punish injustice and spread truth. The conquered races – the indigenous peoples – have not been placed at an equal level with the rest of the country's population. He argued that they have been left in poverty and ignorance, and they have become, in his words, "a ruinous burden."⁶² However, he believed that if they can be educated and made strong, they could strengthen the nation and make it invincible.

⁵⁹ José Vasconcelos, "Un Llamado Cordial," *El Maestro* (April 1921): 5.

⁶⁰ Vasconcelos, "Un Llamado Cordial," 6.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 7.

Because Vasconcelos displayed more interest in Western academic topics for all of the issues of *El Maestro*, he made no effort to understand the problems that peasants and indigenous peoples faced during the Porfiriato and the revolution. There was hardly any discussion about native communities being displaced from their lands, working under brutal conditions for foreign companies, or even participating in the revolution itself. Vasconcelos believed that the country can be redeemed from poverty and illiteracy if the education system can work from a top-down approach. In a paternalistic fashion, he believed that creole elites, such as himself, had the knowledge and solutions while the rest of the population lacked the vision or the motivation to uplift themselves from their oppression during the Porfiriato. While the magazine included articles with a range of topics, including science, math, philosophy, history, literature, and art, Vasconcelos seemed to have nothing positive to say about the rural, folkloric, or indigenous aspects of Mexican culture or history. In the second issue of the magazine, one of his authors, Rafael Ramos Pedrueza, wrote nine paragraphs about Mexico's ancient history and titled it, "The Primitive Civilizations."⁶³ Just like the *científicos* of the Porfiriato, Vasconcelos wanted to eradicate customs and traditions that were rural, folkloric, or indigenous, yet during the post-revolutionary era that he was living in, such things grew in vogue because they were associated with the victors of the revolution.

Vasconcelos even addressed the mass consumption of pulque (a fermented drink of Mesoamerican origin) as an issue of public health and a threat to his vision of producing intelligent and productive citizens for the post-revolutionary society. In his third issue, published in 1921, he wrote an article titled "The Aristocracy of Pulque." He stated that the maguey plant, from which pulque is extracted, is very abundant in central Mexico, and the people of that region

⁶³ Rafael Ramos Pedrueza, "Civilizaciones Primitivas," *El Maestro* (April 1921): 124.

are not as strong or vigorous as the northern farmers or southern natives. According to him, “the revolutionary chiefs knew very well that in order to recruit people, they needed to go to the north, to the south, to the coasts, but it was useless trying to recruit near the Distrito Federal because the men in this region, for the most part, are useless as soldiers.”⁶⁴ He dismissed the claims of contemporary medical experts who claimed that pulque is nutritious and good for the indigenous peoples as false science. He believed that the intestines of the indigenous people are not different from those of the rest of the population.⁶⁵ Vasconcelos argued that Mexico should make milk more affordable and wheat and maize more abundant in the countryside, rather than maguey plants. He wanted pulquerías to be closed permanently, but the federal judges sided with the *pulqueros* because they were making very good profits and the drink was affordable.

Vasconcelos criticized this decision, saying that the judges “condemned society by submitting it, once again, to obligatory drunkenness.”⁶⁶ Because of pulque’s indigenous origin (and Vasconcelos believed it was specifically of Otomí origin),⁶⁷ it is clear that he perceived elements of indigenous cultures as dangerous for Mexico’s development as a progressive nation.

According to Jeffrey Pilcher, Vasconcelos even grew resentful about maize because of its association with foods of indigenous origin; he wrote that “Mexicans would remain underdeveloped until they abandoned maize and adopted wheat.”⁶⁸ Wheat, of course, was first introduced to the Americas by Europeans.

⁶⁴ José Vasconcelos, “Aristocracia Pulquera,” *El Maestro* (April 1921): 215.

⁶⁵ Vasconcelos, “Aristocracia Pulquera,” 216.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁶⁸ Pilcher, *¡Que Vinas los Tamales!*, 77.

Raza C3smica

After Vasconcelos resigned from SEP, he published *La Raza C3smica* (1925), which became the manifesto of his racial ideology. Even though Vasconcelos made very little references to the Mexican Revolution, this book best contextualizes his interpretations about how this event raised questions about Mexico's racial identity. He argued that there are four races, each of which had, at one point, been the dominant race of the world. These included the "Black," the "Indian," the "Mongol," and the "White." The Indian race, he argued, were descendants of the lost continent of Atlantis, which he believed in because of its references in Plato's writings. He believed that the civilization of Atlantis declined into the "inferior" civilizations of the Americas, such as the Aztec, the Maya, and the Inca. The civilization of the white race, according to Vasconcelos, was founded in Greece, and it spread from Europe to the Americas. It was through the conquest that the white race "re-civilized" the continent. In page nine of the book, he even referred to the Americas as "the new hemisphere," which is, of course, a problematic concept because the hemisphere was not new to the indigenous peoples.⁶⁹ The white European, he pointed out, had become the most recent group to invade and dominate the world. Vasconcelos, as a conservative Mexican, had a very pro-Spanish mentality, and he framed his world view of history as a struggle between Latin European and Northern European might. He despised, for example, Napoleon Bonaparte for selling the French territory of North America to the United States; he even thought of him as a traitor to the Latin European culture. He also lamented the Spanish being defeated by the British in Trafalgar and the Spanish-American War, something that Jos3 Rodo cited in "Ariel." Vasconcelos also despised liberal Latin Americans who preferred to think of themselves as Northern Europeans while downplaying their Spanish

⁶⁹ Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race*, 9.

heritage. Here, of course, Vasconcelos was alluding to the elite culture of the positivist-era. Rather, he promoted the idea of all Latin American nations creating solidarity based solely on their Hispanicity. However, according to Vasconcelos' philosophy, the domination by the white race, like that of all other races, is a temporary stage. He argued that the United States will be the final empire of white supremacy.

Vasconcelos admired the ways in which the Spanish colonial legacy in Latin America made interracial and cultural *mestizaje* possible. He pointed out that the white race, in particular, the one of Latin origin, has set the moral and material basis for the fusion of all human types and cultures into a fifth universal race. This race, according to Vasconcelos, will have the best characteristics of all the previous races. In North America, he explained, the Anglo-Saxon race saw itself as having a great mission that would go down in history – a mission that was guided by God himself. This mission was to build a strong empire, and in the process remove or contain all other races. It is assumed that Vasconcelos was alluding to the ideas of Manifest Destiny. The Anglo Saxons, he believed, triumphed because they put their discipline and talents into a grand vision of their destiny. The Latin Europeans, on the other hand, unexpectedly mixed with other races and assimilated them into their own culture. For Vasconcelos, even people who are purely of indigenous or African descent can be considered Latin because they adopted the Spanish language, but he was not interested in praising indigenous or African cultures. As a matter of fact, in page sixteen, he argued that “The Indian has no other door to the future, but the door of modern culture, not any other road but the road already cleared by Latin civilization.”⁷⁰ Of the white man, he also argued that he has no choice but to mix with the universal fifth race, which he claimed is “far superior” to him.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 16.

Expanding on his previous ideas from the post-revolutionary era, Vasconcelos hoped that all of Latin America would become homogeneously mestizo. He perceived this to be a new mission for humanity – a mission that came unprecedented in history. He believed that the advantage of Latin American civilization is that it had more compassion for people of other races, and that made it destined to forge humankind into a new type of race. For Vasconcelos, this was a mandate that history had given Latin America, and it started to reveal itself with the “abundance of love” that allowed the Iberian colonizers to racially mix with indigenous Americans and Africans. Thus, the Spaniards, particularly the missionaries, spread Western culture through their indoctrination of the indigenous peoples, and this, he argued, allowed the natives to enter into a new stage of civilization. The English in North America, on the other hand, only mixed with other whites, and they nearly annihilated all of the indigenous peoples whom they came across. For Vasconcelos, this was a sign of their decadence because he believed that the American continent was not destined to be ruled by the white race, but rather to forge the fifth, universal race, which will mix all of the four races which have been moving apart from one another throughout history. He predicted that the society of this new race would be a utopia called *Universopolis*. He attempted to predict that this utopian society would be established in the Americas, where the previous utopia of Atlantis was located. Vasconcelos argued that if the Anglo-Saxons continue to strive for a purely white America, history will repeat itself, and another race will dominate over them. Other races, according to him, have similarly taken their dominance in the past, and they lost it to another race. Because Latin America had a long history of racial mixing and cultural synchronization, he believed it was destined to become the fifth, universal race and the vanguard of all of humanity. As for the other races of the world, Vasconcelos argued,

The lower types of the species will be absorbed by the superior type. In this manner, for example, the Black could be redeemed, and step by step, by voluntary extinction, the uglier stocks will give way to the more handsome. Inferior race, upon being educated, would become less prolific and the better specimens would go on ascending a scale of ethnic improvement, whose maximum type is not precisely White, but that new race to which the White himself will have to aspire with the object of conquering the synthesis. The Indian by grafting onto the related race would take the jump of a million years that separate Atlantis from our times.⁷¹

Of the northern European whites, more specifically, he argued that as the world mixes more, they will abandon their pride and mix into the “fifth race of the future.” The fifth race will not exclude or go to war with the whites; it will accept their “superior ideals” (which will dominate among the characteristics of the fifth race) but not their arrogance via conquest or economic pressure. It seems striking that Vasconcelos opposed northern European imperialism, yet he believed that the Spanish conquest of the Americas was justified. He did advocate for complete inclusion in his fictional society, but he also suggested that there are inferior races in need of improvement. He also denied the possibility that whites might control the Amazon because he argued that it is the location where *Universopolis* will be founded by the fifth race, and “History does not change her ways.”⁷² In other words, Vasconcelos believed that history is deterministic and almost has a mind of its own. He, therefore, saw Latin Americans as the “chosen people” of history.

In order to justify the Spanish conquest, Vasconcelos believed that racial dominance has always been the norm in history, and thus, he argued in favor of the racial supremacy of the mixed, universal, fifth race that he envisioned Latin Americans to become. His “universal” fifth race (which is what he believed the world should aspire to become) was a racist encouragement for all other people to abandon their cultures and identities. Indeed, he had very problematic

⁷¹ Ibid., 32.

⁷² Ibid., 25.

views about the history of race relations in Latin America, especially those of Mexico. In a 1957 interview, for the television program *Charlas Mexicanas*, he downplayed the violent conditions under which Mexico's *mestizaje* was formed, namely that of the Spanish conquest, enslavement, and rape of indigenous peoples.⁷³ In this interview, Vasconcelos praised the legacy of Hernán Cortés and honored him as a hero. He argued that Cortés is just as much of an important character in world history as Julius Caesar, and he pointed out that school books in China, Turkey, the United States, and all over the world recognize his name, his anecdotes, and his accomplishments. Thus, he said, Cortés is an important figure in world history and a symbol of humanity's heritage. He even declared that Cortés was the creator of imperialism because, according to him, even the British Empire did nothing but follow his example. Vasconcelos thought of him as a humanitarian because he brought Western Civilization to the Americas while simultaneously retaining some elements of the indigenous civilizations. He clearly thought of Europeans as culturally superior to indigenous Americans, and in several passages of *La Raza Cós mica*, he even described all of the world's races and their cultures with bigoted stereotypes. Of Africans, he said that they are eager for sensual joy, intoxicated with dances and unbridled lust. Of Asians, he said that because of their reproductive customs based on Confucianism, they multiply as fast as rats. Essentially, *La Raza Cós mica* is more grounded on nationalist rhetoric than true philosophical analysis.

⁷³ José Vasconcelos, Alfonso Junco, and Andrés Henestrosa, "Charlas Mexicanas con José Vasconcelos," TV UNAM, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. 2004, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hmhq1bcnrKM>.

Autobiographical Series

In order to uphold his pro-Spanish colonial views, Vasconcelos racialized the narrative of the 1910 Revolution, not to understand or empathize with the hardships that indigenous peoples went through during the Porfiriato and the revolution itself, but rather to see how his vision of the cosmic race would be fulfilled. A decade after publishing *La Raza Cómica*, Vasconcelos wrote more on the Revolution of 1910. Most of his ideas about race and the revolution were published in a four-volume series of his autobiography: *Ulises Criollo* (1935), *The Storm* (1936), *The Disaster* (1938), and *The Procunsulated* (1939). *The Storm* and *The Disaster* recount his experiences during the war and its aftermath. He mainly associated the participation of indigenous revolutionaries with Emiliano Zapata, whom he despised with a passion. Of the revolution itself, he had very mixed views. In *The Storm*, he wrote,

A revolution is a violent transformation of an order of things recognized as oppressive and unjust. Ideas take definite form in people's minds; anxiety and hope ferment in their hearts; then one great day ... the whole people rise in divine wrath, raise their arms in the gesture of a man breaking his chains. ... The revolution of 1910 had both [political and economic] characteristics. It was political in that it protested against the fraud committed in the general elections by the dictator Díaz. ... It was economic in that it promised remedy for the precarious condition of the rural class and the workers.⁷⁴

In this passage, Vasconcelos expressed himself favorable to the goals of the revolution, but later in the same book, he wrote, “to my mind, the whole revolution had turned into a nightmare of cannibals. In every officer of the new army I saw a villain.”⁷⁵ He highlighted Villa and Zapata's atrocities against civilians and even accused Zapata of wanting to take control of the whole

⁷⁴ José Vasconcelos, *A Mexican Ulysses: An Autobiography*, trans. W. Rex Crawford (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), 103-4.

⁷⁵ Vasconcelos, *A Mexican Ulysses*, 107.

republic. Furthermore, he believed that “those who follow Zapata, Villa, and Carranza are bad revolutionaries.”⁷⁶ He called the Villistas fanatical followers of a criminal and the Zapatistas worse than savages, “‘liquidating’ lives with their machine guns, like their forebears in the old days with their obsidian axes.”⁷⁷ Because the Zapatistas were predominantly more indigenous, he antagonized their revolutionary efforts by describing them as being just as warlike as the Mesoamerican societies. This is why he thought it was necessary to “Hispanicize” Mexico’s indigenous population all together.

In his autobiography, Vasconcelos believed that the outcomes of the revolution were going to determine whether or not Mexico would Anglicize itself or preserve its Spanish colonial heritage, and only the later, to him, would make the cosmic race possible. Indeed, his ideas of *La Raza Cós mica* are very prevalent in his autobiography. They are especially prevalent in his descriptions of Zapata and his soldiers as indigenous peoples. He wrote that the “Yankees ... knew that he [Zapata] was an Indian and they always cherished the hope that the Indian would revolt against the Spanish civilization of Mexico.”⁷⁸ In this passage, Vasconcelos, again, highlighted the antagonism between Germanic and Latin Europe, except he argued, in a conspiratorial way, that the Zapatistas were being used by the US as a means to an end. Of the Zapatistas themselves, Vasconcelos believed that their hidden doctrine was “the return of Mexico to the primitivism of Montezuma. ... The *teocalli* of human sacrifices is the only Aztec intuition that survives. The followers of Zapata perfected it with machine guns and automatics.”⁷⁹ Despite the cultural evolution that indigenous peoples underwent since the conquest, Vasconcelos perceived them to be static and unchanging. He also believed that the

⁷⁶ Ibid., 111.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 113.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 91.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 105.

Villistas saved Mexico from returning to its indigenous past. Without evidence, he argued that because the Villistas had more Spanish blood, they refused to wear *huaraches* and said of the Zapatistas, “let them wear shoes like us and dress like decent people.”⁸⁰ As the war went on, according to the autobiography, Vasconcelos believed that “the danger is not that Mexico may return to primitivism: the Indian does not have the strength for that. [Rather,] that a Spanish Mexico should give place to a Texan Mexico with the Anglo-Saxon acting as owner and builder, and the Indian as roadmender, peasant, and fellah.”⁸¹

Vasconcelos even opposed post-revolutionary anthropologists, like Manuel Gamio, who were engrossed with *indigenismo* because he believed that the post-revolutionary society needed to engross itself with its Spanish colonial heritage. Gamio was educated and trained by the so-called father of American Anthropology, Franz Boas, and historian David A. Brading explains that Gamio wanted to “reinstale Anáhuac [the heartland of Aztec Mexico] as the glorious foundation of Mexican history and culture, thus reversing a century of Liberal scorn. Equally important, he rejected neo-classical canons of aesthetic judgement and demanded a revaluation of native art forms.”⁸² Vasconcelos, for his part, opposed archeology in Mexico and all of Latin America because, in his words, “Yankee archeologists ... make Indians fashionable, the better to bury the Spanish sediment which the colony bequeathed us.”⁸³ In his later book, *The Disaster*, he wrote about his trip to several Mayan ruins in the Yucatan, including Chichen-Itzá. Of the Mayan art and architecture, he wrote that they had “no sense of beauty; ... no reliable alphabet, ... and no aesthetic emotion at all.”⁸⁴ In his autobiographical reflection of the revolution,

⁸⁰ Ibid., 105.

⁸¹ Ibid., 114.

⁸² David A. Brading, “Manuel Gamio and Official Indigenismo in Mexico,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* (1988): 76.

⁸³ Vasconcelos, *A Mexican Ulysses*, 127.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 165.

Vasconcelos tried to uphold his vision of the Cosmic Race, and he antagonized the Zapatista's cause in the process. Vasconcelos' conspiracies about the Zapatistas were highly exaggerated and without evidence. For example, on page 145 of *The Storm*, he believed that Zapata was illiterate, which was not true. However, in *The Disaster*, he did change his mind about the Zapatistas, but not of Emiliano Zapata. He described the soldiers as "men determined to rescue from the chaos of the barracks the agrarian reform which demands the destruction of the big estates and the creation of small farms, the restitution of the land, the *ejidos*, the Indian received from the Colony, which afterward was usurped by the landholders of the Díaz period."⁸⁵ Vasconcelos seemed to have finally empathized with the Zapatistas because he thought that they were protecting the lands that they "inherited" from the Spanish colony.

Breve Historia de México

As mentioned in the biography above, Vasconcelos was trained in law at the Preparatoria. He never formally studied history – or philosophy, for that matter. Regardless of his inexperience, he still wrote a nearly six-hundred-page book on Mexico's history, which includes several chapters on the Mexican Revolution. Perhaps, misleadingly, the book is titled *Breve Historia de México* (1937) or Brief History of Mexico. His methodology and research are quite shocking and unorthodox when viewed by twenty-first century historians. He relied on other history books, but he used no primary sources; he did not even cite the sources of the other authors whom he relied on. Also, his interpretations were meant to ideologically define the destiny of the country. This is more of a nationalistic intention than a historical one. Therefore, Vasconcelos' ideas from the *Raza Cósmica* are very prevalent in this book. His interpretation of

⁸⁵ Ibid., 155.

history was quite at odds with that of other mainstream artists and intellectuals in post-revolutionary Mexico. According to Luis A. Marentes, Vasconcelos “denigrates the pantheon of liberal nationalist heroes, like Cuauhtémoc, Hidalgo, and Juárez, praising instead their conservative counterparts Malinche, Cortés, Iturbide, and [Lucas] Alamán.”⁸⁶ Marentes, also points out that historians of the 1980s reasoned “that in 1937 the discipline of history in Mexico was not yet [in] the realm of specialists.”⁸⁷ This is probably the reason why the book’s methodological shortcomings were largely overlooked until later Mexican historians such as Martha Robles and Manuel Pedro González began to highlight them and simultaneously criticize the author’s bigotry.

With his vision of the *Raza Cósmica*, Vasconcelos saw Mexican history and, by extension, Mexican society and culture from a very pro-Spanish point of view. In the prologue of the *Breve Historia*, he argued that Mexican history should begin with its “discovery” by the Europeans because before their arrival, Mexico did not exist as a country. Although this is true, Mexico as an independent country still did not exist until three hundred years after that so-called “discovery.” He wrote that the narrative should begin “with the exposition at the point in which Mexico surges at the sight of civilized humanity. We will begin to see it through the contemplation of the soldiers of the conquest, according to their entertaining chronicles.”⁸⁸ He believed that “America was a final crusade in which the Castilians, flowers of Europe, after defeating the moors, won for Christendom, with the nations of America, the dominion over the planet, the supremacy of the future.”⁸⁹ When referring to the Americas, however, he argued that Spain, through the “civilizing conquest,” did not destroy anything because there was nothing

⁸⁶ Marentes, *José Vasconcelos*, 62.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁸⁸ José Vasconcelos, *Breve Historia de México* (Mexico City: Mexico Editorial Continental, 1937), 15.

⁸⁹ Vasconcelos, *Breve Historia de México*, 15.

worth saving, whether it was the cannibalism of the Caribs, the human sacrifices of the Aztecs, or the despotism of the Incas. The Spanish, he believed, needed to colonize America because no other group of Europeans had their spiritual capabilities. Thus, like in the *Raza C3smica*, he heroized Hern3n Cort3s and argued that he was “the most humanistic of the conquistadores ... [who] leagued himself spiritually with the conquered to convert them to the [Catholic] faith, and his action left us the legacy of a nation.”⁹⁰ He also thought that he is a “figure whom the Anglo-Saxons are jealous of, more so than the territories of his conquest, which are our legacy.”⁹¹ It must be made clear that Vasconcelos was not in favor of returning Mexico to Spain; he was an ardent nationalist. In his fourth edition of *El Maestro*, published in 1921, Vasconcelos wrote about the anniversary of the country’s independence in a very celebratory way, pointing out that the Mexican people, all over the country, will “repeat, as it is the custom to do so, that heroic scream ... [from] the mouth of Hidalgo ... ¡Viva la Libertad!”⁹²

Unlike the prologue, Vasconcelos did not racialize the narrative of the revolution in the chapters of this book. However, he did begin the narrative by racializing Porfirio D3az’s identity. Because D3az was mestizo with Mixtec ancestry, he wrote that “in D3az there are no conflicts of blood nor of ideas. In his organism the Mixtec vain has forged with the Spanish vain, creating a firm equilibrium. And his ideas are very few so that they can wage battle.”⁹³ Of the Zapatistas, he continued to insist that they “advocated for an indigenous republic and a distribution of land, according to the Plan of Ayala.”⁹⁴ However, because Vasconcelos relied on the work of other historians, he acknowledged, through his writings, the different forms of political and economic

⁹⁰ Ibid., 19.

⁹¹ Ibid., 18.

⁹² Jos3 Vasconcelos, “Cuando el Aguila destroce la serpiente,” *El Maestro* (July 1921): 441.

⁹³ Vasconcelos, *Breve Historia de M3xico*, 407.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 452.

oppression that rural Mexicans faced during the Porfiriato. This he did not do when he published *El Maestro* as the minister of SEP. What makes his writings in this book strikingly different from those of his autobiographies is that he rarely discussed race. Other than the above quote about the Plan de Ayala, he did not even stress his conspiracy about the Zapatistas wanting to de-Hispanicize Mexico. In one sentence, he briefly mentioned himself as the minister of education, under the Obregón regime, but he left race out of his educational goals.⁹⁵ Not surprisingly, he also avoided discussing the vogue of *indigenismo* in the national culture. There is no mention of artists and intellectuals, such as the anthropologist Manuel Gamio, the novelist Mariano Azuela, or the muralists Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Frida Kahlo. He also did not mention foreign films that were made about the revolution or indigenous folk culture, such as Sergei Eisenstein's *¡Viva Mexico!* or Elia Kazan's *Viva Zapata!*

Conclusion

As this chapter discussed, Vasconcelos had pro-Spanish views towards both the legacy of the conquest of Mexico and the participation of indigenous peoples in the Revolution of 1910. Since the very beginning of his public career, Vasconcelos only viewed the problems of Mexico (and Latin America more generally) from the point of view of José Enrique Rodo's "Ariel." He saw them framed in a Latin/Germanic conflict that manifested itself in US imperialism, European neocolonialism, and positivism. He had less impetus to address the problems of the most marginalized classes and ethnic groups within Mexico, and more generally Latin America. During the actual years of the revolution, Vasconcelos spent most of his time abroad in luxury hotels and libraries, and he returned to Mexico in a very well-off position as the leading figure of

⁹⁵ Ibid., 475.

the nation's education system. Rather than promoting a style of public education that was suited to the social realities of the veterans and the children of the revolution, he promoted a form of elitist education that promoted provincial knowledge from places unknown to the revolutionaries, but that nonetheless was intended to be very accessible. After retiring from his duties in public education, Vasconcelos wrote several interpretations about how indigenous peoples participated in the revolution. Whenever he did write about them, namely through the Zapatistas, he brought up conspiracies about them interfering with his hopes of the *Raza Cómica* being forged. Other times, he avoided writing about race all together.

Vasconcelos' pro-Spanish mentality in *La Raza Cómica* and towards the 1910 Revolution is, unmistakably, a form of fundamentalist thought because, in both cases, he ethically defended the violence and ethnocide that resulted from the Spanish conquest. He did not believe that, in principle, colonizing and inferiorizing non-Europeans was wrong. He only pointed out how it was wrong when English colonists did those same practices in North America. He also pointed out how it was wrong for Anglo North Americans to hegemonically control Latin America through neocolonialism and military interventions. Given the racism of the early twentieth century, Vasconcelos actually embraced the European and North American norm of colonizing and inferiorizing non-Europeans and their cultures. In some ways, he recycled the ideology of the industrial north, and he overlooked and downplayed the violence of the Spanish conquest to argue that it did not compare to the mass genocides of indigenous peoples in North America. This reveals Vasconcelos' unwillingness to empathize with the indigenous peoples in his own country, and that limited the radicality of his ideas to promote racial equality in Mexico's post-revolutionary society.

Intellectuals like Vasconcelos wholeheartedly embraced homogenizing models of nationalism for countries that were, and continue to be, largely mixed-race. A positive outcome of that was the mainstream self-acceptance that the mixed-race majorities in Latin America enjoyed, and that was a radical difference compared to the earlier goals of positivism, which pushed for whitening policies. However, such mixed-race, homogenizing models most often left out the people who were not (or at least did not identify as) mixed-race. In the case of Mexico, Vasconcelos' model of the *Raza C3smica* left out people who were not or did not identify as mestizo. Rather, it encouraged their immediate assimilation. Vasconcelos' racial philosophy reflects the homogenizing tendencies of other nationalist movements that took place in Latin America. In Brazil, for example, the anthropologist Gilberto Freyre promoted Brazilian nationalism by emphasizing its mixture of Portuguese and African cultures and people. He too wrote about that synchronization in a very celebratory way while downplaying the violent conditions under which it happened, namely slavery and rape. Thomas E. Skidmore argues that Brazilian critics who read Freyre's book, *The Masters and Slaves* (1933), "experienced a shock of recognition of how planters' sons got their sexual initiation from the domestic slaves. They saw the truth in details, but were frightened by the conclusions."⁹⁶ What makes Mexico's nationalist movement striking, when compared to those of other Latin American countries, is that it came about from a violent revolution, and arguably the leading intellectual of that nationalist movement still looked more to southern Europe rather than Mexico for national inspiration. He rejected the epistemic diversity within Mexico so that it could conform to his nostalgic longing for the colonial past. It is important to keep in mind the language and words of Vasconcelos and really consider their implications before using them in academia. Such should have been the case

⁹⁶ Thomas E. Skidmore, "Gilberto Freyre (1900-1987)," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 68, no. 4 (1998): 804.

with Colin M. MacLachlan and Jaime E. Rodriguez's historical survey of colonial Mexico: *The Forging of the Cosmic Race: A Reinterpretation of Colonial Mexico* (1980).⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Colin M. MacLachlan and Jaime E. Rodriguez, *The Forging of the Cosmic Race: A Reinterpretation of Colonial Mexico* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980), 3-4.

CHAPTER TWO

LEOPOLDO ZEA & THE REVOLUTION OF 1910

Leopoldo Zea Aguilar also endorsed Vasconcelos' notion of the cosmic race and his belief that indigenous peoples should assimilate into a form of nationalism that only acknowledged mestizos. Simultaneously, Zea looked at many other countries that were decolonizing from Europe in the twentieth century, and he encouraged them to decolonize their mentalities by taking pride in their race, culture, and history. He pointed out that these countries were trying to end the colonial regimes of European empires the same way in which the Mexican Revolution tried to end the neocolonial regime of Porfirio Díaz. In other words, he encouraged other nations from the global south to embrace their indigenous heritage as they were decolonizing from other European empires, but he did not support indigenous Mexicans to do the same after the revolution. Zea applied his decolonial theories to all Latin Americans in a homogenous way by writing about them as if they were all racially mestizo. Zea rarely demonstrated a deep understanding of Latin America's racial, ethnic, linguistic, and regional differences; in fact, he downplayed and overlooked them in many of his writings. Zea was aware that, even though most of the people of Mexico and Latin America were mestizo, there was still a significant presence of indigenous people and people of African descent in the region. In many respects, Zea's exclusive acknowledgement and celebration for mestizaje is equivalent to the notion of colorblindness. Zea believed that mestizaje was proof that Latin America had overcome its racial prejudices and inequalities from colonial times; therefore, he believed that race was no longer an issue in Latin American society. Even though Zea had a lot of merit for observing how Western imperialism is responsible for many of the hardships and bad perceptions of the third world, this chapter will demonstrate that Zea was still willing to exclude

some people from decolonial discussions, when he himself was opposed to the principle of exclusion that came with colonialism in the first place.

Zea's intellectual upbringing demonstrates that, despite his interests in decolonizing the epistemology, identity, and culture of Latin America, he had very little interest in the legacy of Mexico's indigenous culture. Zea was not an open book about his life, but he briefly shared his intellectual upbringing in a 1985 interview with David R. Maciel. According to the interview, Zea initially studied law and philosophy at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). One of his teachers, José Gaos (a Spanish philosopher who fled Francisco Franco's regime), was so impressed by Zea's work that he used his influence to pay for Zea's tuition with the condition that he only study philosophy. Zea accepted. He wanted to explore Greek philosophy, but because it had been extensively commented on by Europeans and North Americans, Gaos "recommended that I choose a Mexican or Latin American subject and thus contribute to a field that was little known."¹ Therefore, Zea wrote his doctoral thesis on the development and decline of positivism in Mexico, which he later published into two books. These works, *El Positivismo en México* (1943) and *Apogeo y decadencia del positivismo en México* (1944), "represented the first major historiographical view of the intellectual history of México."² After finding errors and misinterpretations in William Rex Crawford's book, *A Century of Latin American Thought* (1944), the faculty of UNAM asked the Rockefeller Foundation to fund a similar study from a Latin American perspective. The school assigned the task to Zea so that he could visit libraries, archives, and intellectuals all over Latin America and the US. Thus, he published *Dos etapas del pensamiento Latino Americano* (1949). In the 1960s,

¹ Leopoldo Zea and David R. Maciel, "An Interview with Leopoldo Zea," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* (1985): 4.

² Zea and Maciel, "An Interview with Leopoldo Zea," 1.

he began teaching at UNAM, and his graduate seminars attracted students from all over Latin America, Europe, and even Japan. To prevent scholars from working in isolation from scholars of other cultures, as he witnessed during his travels throughout South America, he also organized seminars in various cities of Latin America, North America, Europe, and the Middle East to encourage a dialogue between intellectuals of all such regions. His works, which include more than fifty books, have been published all over the world and translated into many languages. They explore existential and ontological questions about the essence of Mexico's people and culture. Inspired by Franz Fanon's decolonial thought, Zea grew motivated "to examine Latin America and the Third World's relationship to the industrial powers."³ Essentially, Zea wanted to "make the Latin American community sensitive to its need to reduce its dependence on North American and European scholars to interpret its own reality."⁴ He died on June 2004 in Mexico City, the same city where he was born.

Zea ardently believed that philosophers have a moral obligation to address the world's contemporary problems and use history as tool to understand how such problems can be approached, but he was colorblind in his reflections on Latin America's past. In 1973, he published an article titled "From the History of Ideas to the Philosophy of Latin American History." In the beginning of this article, Zea recognized that most scholars of his time were opposed to interdisciplinary research, pointing out that "whether in written form, in international conferences, or even publicly, it has been demanded that historians and sociologists avoid any contamination, and just like Plato asked of the poets, philosophers have also been expelled from such investigations."⁵ For Zea, philosophy is a connection of thought to history, and "to separate

³ Ibid., 9.

⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁵ Leopoldo Zea, "From the History of Ideas to the Philosophy of Latin American History," in *Dependency and Liberation in Latin American Culture* (Mexico City: Cuadernos de Joaquín Mortiz, 1974), 11.

ideas from their circumstance is to remove philosophy from its history. For me, history cannot exist without philosophy, nor philosophy without history.”⁶ In a way that parallels present-day critics against scholars living in “ivory towers,” Zea pointed out in the same article that “professional philosophers seem like a confraternity of characters unlinked from their reality and dedicated to exclusive tasks.”⁷ He also disagreed with US historians, like Charles Hale, who believed that writing from one’s personal or cultural background makes native historians less objective and, therefore, foreign historians have a better opportunity to express themselves, as they were not affected by patriotic sentiments. To this, Zea counterargued that historians from Westernized universities write “objectively” because the demand for them to do so is an expression of their own circumstance, of the historical context in which they find themselves, and of the dominant ideology of a society that has not transcended its own nationalism, but those of other nations.⁸ In other words, as Carlos Alberto Sanchez explains, Zea counterargued that if one has to be an *outsider* to a particular circumstance in order to be objective about what is happening *inside* of that circumstance, it suggests that North Americans and Europeans are not capable of making their own histories objective.⁹ If people are not allowed to speak about their inner turmoil, are they required permission from an external authority to speak about it? To Zea, this ignored the value and power of self-knowledge and self-critique. North Americans, Zea believed, practice a passionless detachment from their realities and circumstances and expect every other scholar to do the same. This passionate refusal of a passion has been made to pass as universal.

⁶ Quoted in Carlos Alberto Sanchez, *Contingency and Commitment: Mexican Existentialism and the Place of Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), 75.

⁷ Zea, “From the History of Ideas,” 14.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁹ Carlos Alberto Sanchez, *Contingency and Commitment*, 76.

Zea did much to defend his argument that colonized peoples around the world must reflect on their own past and speak up against their oppression, but as the rest of this chapter will show, he also wanted to keep indigenous Latin Americans from expressing their own particular histories and social realities as colonized peoples. Zea took a serious look at the history of colonialism and its impacts on Mexican society and the rest of the world. Zea believed that, no matter how unpleasant a colonial legacy may be, there are real social consequences when nations bury their own past. Because in the nineteenth century, Latin American liberals cut ties from their Iberian past, they had nothing to support the realization of their future, but rather a new superposition. He referred to the emergence of positivism, in which Britain, France, and the United States became the new national models for Mexico. In another 1973 article, titled “Latin American Philosophy as a Philosophy of Liberation,” Zea expressed that “we remove our chains and replace them with new ones. We do not take ownership of our past to turn its chains into weapons for our liberation.”¹⁰ Zea believed that “taking consciousness of our past, of our history at a national, continental and universal level is to do philosophy of history. A philosophy of history, from our own and original situation of dependent and colonized nations.”¹¹ Despite making this claim, Zea made clear that it is enriching to learn and assimilate from many diverse human expressions, as long as it is not the global norm to abandon one’s own concrete human expression. Zea also expressed his discontent with the idea of the colonized one day carrying out the wrongs that the colonizers had done unto them. Using a Biblical reference, he rhetorically asked “¿would history change if Abel was resuscitated and killed Cain?”¹² Zea also cited

¹⁰ Leopoldo Zea, “Latin American Philosophy as a Philosophy of Liberation,” in *Dependency and Liberation in Latin American Culture* (Mexico City: Cuadernos de Joaquín Mortiz, 1974), 35.

¹¹ Zea, “From the History of Ideas,” 26.

¹² Leopoldo Zea, “Colonization and Decolonization of Latin American Culture,” in *Dependency and Liberation in Latin American Culture* (Mexico City: Cuadernos de Joaquín Mortiz, 1974), 54.

Jawaharlal Nehru for saying that “in this way we will continue being real Indians and Asians and we will become simultaneously good internationalists and citizens of the world.”¹³ Indeed, Zea himself was inspired by European existentialism because it indirectly encouraged people of color and people from the third world to uphold and appreciate their own existential identities. Even though he gave credit to Europeans, like Jean Paul Sartre, for developing this philosophy, he thought that it needed to be applied to Mexico’s realities in a very fitting and original way. In his words, he said that “Sartre’s situation is not our situation.”¹⁴

Background of the Mexican Revolution’s Transnational Legacy

Zea’s claim that Mexico’s Revolution and post-revolutionary society resonated with several decolonial movements throughout Latin America was correct, but he failed to point out that *indigenismo* was very much hinged to this phenomenon. *Indigenismo* was, in Laura Giraudo and Stephen E. Lewis’ words, “a diverse political, economic, and cultural movement that celebrated indigenous people and their traditions, on the one hand, but usually also called for their modernization, assimilation, and ‘improvement,’ on the other.”¹⁵ In 1940, representatives from nineteen countries, including the United States, gathered in Pátzcuaro, Mexico to form the Inter-American Indian Institute (or III). According to Giraudo and Lewis, “Mexico became the hemispheric leader of indigenista policy in the 1950s largely because indigenismo was presented as fulfilling the promises of the Mexican Revolution, among them national integration and social justice.”¹⁶ Most of the III’s members came from a wide range of different academic fields, but

¹³ Zea, “From the History of Ideas,” 30.

¹⁴ Quoted in Carlos Alberto Sanchez, *Contingency and Commitment*, 72.

¹⁵ Laura Giraudo and Stephen E. Lewis, “Pan-American Indigenismo (1940-1970): New Approaches to an Ongoing Debate,” *Latin American Perspectives* 39, no. 5 (2012): 3.

¹⁶ Giraudo and Lewis, “Pan-American Indigenismo,” 4-5.

they themselves were not indigenous. Despite the widespread appeal of indigenismo throughout the Western hemisphere, the movement had a lot of shortcomings and even racist implications. Bolivia, for example, created its national indigenous institution in 1949, almost two decades after it originated in Mexico. Brazil never joined the III, but in 1910, the year that coincided with the Mexican Revolution, it did organize an indigenous institute called Serviço de Proteção de Índios. In Guatemala, president Jacobo Árbenz tried to return indigenous lands that were taken by the United Fruit Company, but the US backed coup created dictatorships that later carried acts of genocide. Indigenista intellectuals who tried to stand up against such injustices easily gave up with the smallest opposition against them. In Peru, radical indigenismo died down mostly because intellectuals of the *Instituto Indigenista Peruano* (Peruvian Indigenist Institute IIP) rarely provided radical solutions to political and economic injustices caused by the military dictatorships of the 1920s and 40s.¹⁷ Ecuador's III intellectuals may have published very productively, but they did little to bring social and economic justice to the indigenous communities they were writing about. Instead, in 1944, the indigenous communities themselves organized the Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios (Ecuadorian Indian Federation or FEI) and worked from below to bring about reforms. In 1971, a new generation of "Latin American anthropologists at a symposium in Barbados indicated the allegedly colonial and classist nature of indigenista policies and accused national states of direct or indirect responsibility for 'many crimes of genocide or ethnocide.'"¹⁸ They advocated for plurinationalism and indigenous self-determination. Throughout the 1970s, indigenous communities themselves organized their own political agendas of cultural autonomy and multi-ethnic states. This made even classical indigenistas abandon their own paternalistic views and joined them. In 1970, a Mexican

¹⁷ Ibid., 8.

¹⁸ Ibid., 5.

anthropologist named Mercedes Olivera Bustamante challenged her government's assimilationist policies in the indigenous communities of Chiapas. In 1994, she became an advisor for the Zapatista uprising, and she observed that the downfall of indigenismo was the rise of neoliberalism in Latin America.¹⁹ This will be the focus of chapter three.

Zea was also correct to point out that the 1910 Revolution was affiliated with other decolonial movements beyond Latin America, but he made no mention of how post-revolutionary indigenismo was used to legitimate colonialism in other places. In the mid-1950s, the indigenista movement from Mexico inspired the French Empire to hold on to Algeria as its colony. Superficially, this seems striking because the Revolution of 1910 was a war against a neocolonial regime, and the French Empire was, by its very nature, pro-colonial. The French government, under Interior Minister François Mitterrand, used The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to understand other countries' assimilationist models, and it learned about Mexico's efforts to assimilate its indigenous people into a homogenous *mestizo* nationalism. French politicians, bureaucrats, and social scientists replicated those efforts in North Africa to prevent the Algerian nationalists, in the metropole and the periphery, from violently demanding their independence. According to Todd Shepard, "French officials worked to increase Mexican influence within the institutional structures of UNESCO."²⁰ This was how the Mexican politician and *indigenista* writer, Jaime Torres Bordet, became president of the organization from 1948-1952. Shepard also points out that "In conjunction with UNESCO, the French Ministry for Overseas sent at least one person to Mexico to study their 'basic education' and cultural missions, with the intention of then posting him 'to an African

¹⁹ Ibid., 9.

²⁰ Todd Shepard, "Algeria, France, Mexico, UNESCO: a transnational history of antiracism and decolonization, 1932—1962," *Journal of Global History* 6 (2011): 286.

territory to apply and develop the knowledge and techniques' that he acquired."²¹ Mexico and France both wanted to differentiate themselves from the United States under racial segregation and South Africa under the apartheid regime. However, Mexico and France's assimilation efforts both ignored the social realities that kept the indigenous people and the native Algerians disadvantaged in their respective societies. For example, Mexican anthropologist Manuel Gamio, one of the leading intellectuals of *indigenismo*, had paternalistic views towards indigenous Mexicans, and he was, for the most part, ignorant about their social conditions. In his book *Forjando Patria* (1916), Gamio viewed the goal of indigenous equality as a mandate of the 1910 Revolution, but he believed that such equality would be accomplished by linguistic and cultural assimilation, rather than land distribution or social reforms. Even though he rejected Social Darwinism and traced the social disadvantages of indigenous Mexicans to colonialism, he still believed that indigenous ways of life were useless and needed to be modernized. Shepard argues that intellectuals, like Gamio, believed "that Indian arts and music (rather than, say, moral values or intellectual frames) would form the *mestizaje* nation."²² Likewise, the French published articles that praised the empire's efforts of improving race relations in the peripheries, such as granting citizenship to former slaves in the French West Indies and building schools in Cameroon. They did not associate racism in the peripheries to colonialism itself. The French even kept the United Nations from discussing the escalating problems in Algeria. During the Algerian Revolution, French leftists denied their own racism by arguing that categorizing French citizens by race was itself racist. Simultaneously, white Algerians, or *pied noirs*, rejected political reforms and supported violent repression towards the independence movement. Again, the French government associated this problem with domestic racism and not colonialism itself.

²¹ Shepard, "Algeria, France, Mexico, UNESCO," 287.

²² *Ibid.*, 279.

Thus, the French government erased race mainly for their advantage to disempower their colonized citizens. French Anthropologist, Jacques Soustelle, who did ethnographic research on the Lacandon, Pames, and Otomí, left his post in Mexico City to work for Charles de Gaulle as his leading policy maker in Algeria. Before making this decision, Soustelle explained in his book, *The Four Suns: Recollections and Reflections of an Ethnologist in Mexico* (1971), that it is imperative to “Think of the sometimes crushing errors which the Western nations could have avoided, either in colonizing or in decolonizing, if their conduct had been guided by some accurate notion of ethnic realities.”²³ Later in Algeria, however, he worked to oppose the independence movement.

Zea also failed to point out that people of Mexican descent in the United States were expressing solidarity with Mexico via their indigenous heritage. Being a war against the neocolonial regime of Porfirio Díaz, the Mexican Revolution inspired decolonial ideologies among Chicana/o intellectuals and activists in the United States. By identifying more with their indigenous heritage, rather than their European heritage, Chicana/os in the 1960s and 70s self-identified as people colonized first by the Spanish and contemporarily by the United States. Nydia A. Martinez points out that “at the 1969 Denver Youth Liberation Conference, hundreds of Chicana/o youth debated the manifesto *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*. ... Chicana/os self-proclaimed their indigenous ancestry as part of their search for a political identity and declared the U.S. Southwest (which had formerly been Mexico) the mythical homeland of the Mexica.”²⁴ The people of this generation asserted that all Mexicans had at least one indigenous ancestor, and

²³ Jacques Soustelle, *The Four Suns: Recollections and Reflections of an Ethnologist in Mexico*, translated by E. Ross (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1971), 12.

²⁴ Nydia A. Martinez, “The Struggles of Solidarity: Chicana/o-Mexican Networks, 1960s-1970s,” *Social Sciences* 4 (2015): 522.

the amount of indigenous blood they carried did not matter for them to self-identity as indigenous. Radical Chicana/o activists and intellectuals also developed a decolonial mentality. They associated US imperialism with domestic racism, and they expressed solidarity towards the Cuban Revolution, the Vietnamese against the US, and other decolonial movements that took place in the global south. Inspired by Mexico's post-revolutionary society, Chicana/os also embraced the legacy of *mestizaje* as an alternative to US assimilation and its racist implications. Problematically, they embraced such a legacy without emphasizing the fact that mestizos were second class citizens in colonial Mexico, and José Vasconcelos argued in *La Raza Cósmica* that mestizos should privilege their European heritage. Martinez also points out that, simultaneous to the Chicano civil rights movement, the regime of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) in Mexico increased economic disparities, rather than upholding the goals of the 1910 Revolution. To this, she added that

the working class and rural origins, the Spanglish, and the Indianness that Chicana/os embraced with pride and used as a resource for political mobilization were the same qualities that Mexican elites used to denigrate Indians, the working classes, Afro Mexicans, Asian Mexicans, and Arab Mexicans. Ironically, the most politicized Chicana/os who tried to reconnect with Mexico were university students.²⁵

Indeed, Chicana/o activists expressed transnational solidarity with Mexican activists, and Martinez even compared the East LA Blowouts, led by Sal Castro, to the Student Massacre of Tlatelolco in 1968. However, Chicana/o and Mexican activists did not share the same ideologies. Martinez argues that “While Chicana/os adopted Mexico’s state-sponsored revolutionary nationalism to their own cultural nationalism in order to resist cultural erasure and racism [in the United States], Mexican leftists [and urban students] identified those same ideas with ...

²⁵ Martinez, “The Structures of Solidarity,” 528.

repression [from a government whose legitimacy rested in an idealized revolutionary past].”²⁶
 Mexican activists, for their part, tended to be Marxist-Leninist-Maoists.

Zea’s Views on Race and Decolonization

Unlike Vasconcelos, Zea blamed Europe’s colonial legacy for most of Latin America’s identity problems, yet he made a minimum effort to discuss the identity problems that indigenous people, per se, faced since the conquest of the Americas. In his 1970 article, “Colonization and Decolonization of Latin American Culture,” he urged Latin America and the rest of the third world to realize that the global norm of modeling themselves after the West is a result of colonialism and has made the people of these regions think less of themselves. He lamented that most of Latin America’s history, from the conquest to the nineteenth century, had been tormented by a self-identity crisis and a dependency on the progressive, industrial nations of the global north. Indeed, Zea expressed that the issue of colonial hegemony is “dearly a Latin American problem, but one that is also apparently of other nations in similar situations to those of this America, of those nations from the so-called Third World.”²⁷ He, of course, mentioned that throughout the history of European colonial expansion into the Americas, Africa, and Asia, the colonizers asserted their culture as superior to those of the colonized and, to different degrees, tried to avoid mixing with the native cultures. Of the Americas, Zea did write in a lamenting way that when the indigenous people could not be eliminated as in North America, they were exploited like the flora and fauna for the happiness and progress of the colonizers.²⁸ Because of the long history of colonial interferences, first from the Spanish and later from the

²⁶ Ibid., 521.

²⁷ Zea, “From the History of Ideas,” 19.

²⁸ Ibid, 23.

United States and Western Europe, the main concerns of Latin American literature and culture, Zea argued, have centered around the problem of originality. He believed that, besides having a political or economic dimension, colonialism also had an intellectual and mental dimension that inferiorized the colonized people. In his own words, Zea explained that “it was our colonizers the ones who planted the problem of our humanity. ¿Are the inhabitants of the American lands men or not?”²⁹ In that disparaging process, Western cultures and languages became the model and universalization for all other cultures and languages. The best way to realize what he termed a “mental emancipation” is to seek and uplift those things that define the unique human experiences of the colonized culture.

Zea’s thoughts are a striking contrast to Vasconcelos’ longing nostalgia for the Spanish colonial past, but he did not take into account what would become of Mexico’s existing ethnic, linguistic, and regional differences if it were to decolonize its mentality and culture. He did acknowledge José Enrique Rodó for being one of the first critics of positivism and Latin America’s lack of impetus to create, rather than follow foreign models.³⁰ Zea thought that there was always something in Latin America’s past that gave people the impulse to liberate themselves, yet that sentiment of liberty was always suppressed for following foreign models. Zea thought that Latin Americans in the nineteenth century found it necessary to select certain elements of their being and neglect others in order to adapt to those foreign models and hopefully find that sense of liberty that they were searching for. Zea suggested that rather than denying one’s being from the past, one had to continue growing and learning from that past to attain a better future. He disagreed with the argument of René Descartes, the so-called father of modernity, about how people can recreate their world by first doubting everything and relearning

²⁹ Zea, “Colonization and Decolonization,” 52.

³⁰ Zea, “Latin American Philosophy,” 33.

everything. To him, this was not what Latin Americans could do in their world because the West was also incapable of completely escaping its past and what it built off that past.³¹ For Zea, Latin America must similarly grow and develop from on its own past rather than start off as a blank slate in a different model. This is why, for Zea, Latin America had been unable to solve its own problems. In the nineteenth century, for example, economic liberalism advertised itself as freedom of commerce and freedom to invest, but that just lead to domination, exploitation, and crimes in Latin America. Zea said that this dependency led Latin American philosophers to develop Liberation Philosophy, and he gave credit to the figure of the next chapter, Enrique Dussel, for developing this philosophical trend. In his words, he praised Dussel for asking questions like, “is it possible to have an authentic philosophy in our undeveloped ... and oppressed continent?” From this, he quoted Dussel on saying that

Latin American philosophy is, then, a new moment in the history of human philosophy, an analogical moment that was born after European, Russian, and North American modernity, but anteceded postmodern African and Asian philosophy which will constitute with us the next global future: the philosophy of the poor nations, the philosophy of global human liberation.³²

Zea wanted acts of political liberation to go hand in hand with mental and cultural liberation, but he made no reference of how this would play out in Mexico, given its ethnic diversity after the revolution.

Zea’s Views on Race and the Revolution

Zea believed that the Mexican Revolution is an example of how the people of Mexico resisted self-loathing perceptions that were made possible by its long history of colonialism, but

³¹ Ibid., 36.

³² Ibid., 40.

he left Mexico's racial and ethnic differences out of the discussion. In a 1951 article, titled "Dialectic of Mexican Consciousness," Zea warned how imperialism, from the Spanish conquest to the North American interventions, created an archetype or a paradigm that portrays the Mexican people as weak, irrational, less human, and therefore capable of being taken advantage of. Such an archetype, to Zea, is a transcendental form of imperialism, and it forces the people of Mexico to order their lives according to the archetype's dictates. By contrast, Western men see themselves as arbiters of what is universally good and rational, and they deem the people who do not fit that archetype as barbarous and subhuman. Therefore, Zea insisted that if philosophy recognizes one's existential circumstances, one is resisting the hegemony of colonial power, and philosophy is thus reconceptualized and challenges the archetype.³³ He even proposed the idea of "Mexicanness" being considered an ontological category that is based on the subjective expression and demand for recognition of the Mexican people. Because the world is filled with different perspectives and different human expressions, Zea thought that the best humanizing approach to decolonize the world's mentalities is to embrace difference and account for similarities. For Zea, the Mexican Revolution can be considered an historical example of how the people of the country were initially seen as being capable of being taken advantage of, whether by the domestic, neocolonial regime or the foreign investors, yet through the revolution, the people themselves challenged the archetype. Zea believed that this negative archetype applied to all Mexican people as a single race, but he ignored the negative archetypes that existed within Mexico against its indigenous people.

Like Vasconcelos, he saw Northern Europe and North America as more Protestant, individualistic, and materialistic, which is why it became modern and industrial, and he saw

³³ Carlos Alberto Sanchez, *Contingency and Commitment*, 73-4.

Southern Europe and Latin America as more Catholic, communal, and spiritual. In Latin America's case, the bourgeoisie of North America and Europe allied with the privileged classes to keep progressive liberalism from taking fruition. Zea argued that the neocolonial nature of the Porfirian regime led the people of Mexico to start the Revolution of 1910, which eventually stopped the Western bourgeoisie from exploiting Mexico's natural resources. According to Charles Hale, Zea identified himself as a liberal Mexican of the nineteenth century, and he strived to make possible Latin America's "mental emancipation" from Spain's colonial values. Through his writings and reflections, he tried to locate and define the essence and characteristics of what it meant to be Mexican. Simultaneously, as Hale notes, Zea deviated from the values of liberalism and the enlightenment, which pushed non-Europeans to the margins of history and humanity itself.³⁴ In his first book, *El Positivismo en Mexico* (1943), Zea did not write to critique the philosophical qualities or validity of positivism during the Porfiriato; instead, he wrote about how positivism was implemented in the country. He determined that the principles of positivism were modified and adapted to the social, political, and cultural realities of Mexico. Positivism in Mexico, according to Zea, was not universal; it was circumstantial to the realities of the bourgeoisie of Mexico. Zea stated in his own words that "We must see positivism in a very special relationship with a circumstance called Mexico."³⁵ He made the same argument about the rest of Spanish America in his later book *Dos etapas del pensamiento en Hispanoamérica* (1949). He argued that positivism thrived in each Latin American country through a distinct mode.³⁶ Despite his analysis and understanding of positivism, however, Zea was not an apologist

³⁴ Charles A. Hale, "Sustancia y metodo en el pensamiento de Leopoldo Zea," *Historia Mexicana* 20, no. 2 (1970): 288-89.

³⁵ Leopoldo Zea, *Positivism in Mexico*, translated by Josephine H. Schulte (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), 5.

³⁶ Maria del Carmen Velasquez, "Pensamiento Hispanoamericano" *Historia Mexicana* 1, no. 2 (1951): 324.

to the Porfirian regime. He blamed Díaz's neocolonial regime for causing the revolution, and he believed that Latin America and the rest of the third world needed to react against the global supremacy that modern Western colonialism imposed on them.

Zea, however, did have a racialized view of the Mexican Revolution that attempted to downplay the importance of indigenous people in that historical narrative. In *El occidente y la conciencia de México* (1953), Zea argued that the Mexican Revolution had a mestizo spirit that had its roots in the nineteenth century. Indeed, he racialized the Mexican liberals of this era as largely mestizo, and he racialized their conservative counterparts as criollos. According to Hale, "Zea sustained in principle that the 'authentic' revolution was a rebellion of the indigenous masses not inspired on imported European theories."³⁷ Zea initially praised this because, throughout its modern history, Mexico almost always sought "universal" Western solutions to its national problems, but he did agree with European existentialism for acknowledging that human beings are not universal abstractions but situated in concrete historical events. Despite calling it an "authentic" indigenous-led revolution, however, Zea was not an indigenista because he believed that Mexican authenticity was not synonymous with indigeneity. He believed that the current stage in Mexico's history was not indigenous, as it was before the conquest. He believed that the current state in Mexico's history was mestizo. Therefore, he urged indigenous peoples to incorporate themselves into modern mestizo society, which he saw as Western but distinct from the West at the same time. According to Hale, "mestizaje was for Zea equivalent to an ethnic and cultural nationalization; it is also equivalent to economic modernization."³⁸ For Zea, the Mexican Revolution created a mestizo spirit and an authentic Mexican Bourgeoisie subservient to national interests, instead of Western interests. He even believed that the Mestizo ideals of liberalism and

³⁷ Hale, "Sustancia y metodo," 292.

³⁸ Ibid., 291.

material progress were being realized since 1940. Thus, the quest for Mexico's cultural ontology required a rejection of positivism, even in its "Mexicanized form." There are, however, several confusing points about Zea's interpretation of the Revolution. Porfirio Díaz, himself, was liberal and mestizo, and the revolution was opposed to his regime. How could he have been in favor of the revolution and liberalism? Was Zea opposed to Díaz's economic liberalism yet supportive of the social or political liberalism that the dictator did not uphold?

Negritud e Indigenismo

Zea downplayed the significance of indigenous people in his racialized view of the Mexican Revolution, and he did the same in his racialized view of Mexico's post-revolutionary society. In "Negritud e Indigenismo" (1979), Zea compared the movements of negritude and indigenismo at a conference in Dakar, Senegal. As explained in his biography above, Zea, on behalf of UNAM, organized international conferences to enter in dialogue with scholars of other cultures, especially from the global south. Zea pointed out that the ideologies of negritude and indigenismo had common decolonial purposes. They attempted to raise the consciousness of people who were marginalized by European and North American imperialism, racism, and hegemony. Zea described negritude and indigenismo as intellectual approaches for people of color to assert that they were not subhuman and to express their cultural dignity. To this argument, he added that men are equal but distinct, and throughout the article, he masculinized his word usage, in a way that did not acknowledge women of color. However, he asserted that

Negritude and indigenismo are purely and simply concrete expressions of man. The white man has made his whiteness an abstraction of what is human in which only he can fit. The man of Africa and the man of Latin America, on the contrary, will do what distinguishes them racially and culturally from other men ... Because being a man is to have a determined skin color, just like being a man is to form part of a determined social and cultural situation or circumstance. Humanity is not therefore an abstraction, nor the

decal of a determined physical ... model.³⁹

Zea, therefore, believed that no one can be more or less human because of their determined skin color or social/cultural upbringing. In an existentialist way, Zea argued that individuals are a concrete reality that converges with other concrete realities. However, Zea correctly pointed out that Negritude originated from black Africans and Afro-descendants who directly experienced racism and dominance, while indigenismo originated from white and mestizo Latin Americans who themselves were not indigenous. In his words, he explained that “It is not the indigenous who wave the flag of indigenismo demanding the recognition of their humanity and their being accepted in the community of the dominators.”⁴⁰ If anything, he argued that indigenous peoples who did join the movement of indigenismo abandoned their roots to join the existing Latin American communities, created by whites and mestizos. Although he was sympathetic to the need to uplift the dignity of indigenous people in Latin America, he still leaned on assimilation, rather than pluralism. In his words, he elaborated that

It is this one, which we will call Latin American, which has raised the flag of indigeneity as an inescapable complement of its affirmation as a concrete man in this America, The Indian is part of this concrete humanity an expression of the American man. Their assimilation is considered necessary and urgent because through that assimilation Latin American man will establish the necessary unity of his being.⁴¹

Essentially, Zea wanted to simplify the racial identities of Africa and Latin America into a binary paradigm of black and mestizo. He did not want to acknowledge the racial and ethnic diversity that existed within Latin America, so he denied recognition towards indigenous people. He did not even mention what would become of Afro-Latinos in the discussion.

³⁹ Leopoldo Zea, *Negritud e Indigenismo* (Mexico City: Cuadernos de Cultura Latinoamericana, 1979), 5-6.

⁴⁰ Zea, *Negritud e Indigenismo*, 6.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

In the same document, Zea then provided a brief history on the origins and development of indigeneity, and he ultimately favored their assimilation into the nation-states of Latin America. Of course, after traveling all over Latin America as a university student, he must have familiarized himself with the intellectual thought of those countries, and he was not ignorant about what other intellectuals said about the existence of indigenous people in their respective countries, even intellectuals who defended pluralism. Zea started his narrative with eighteenth century historians and naturalists from Europe who believed that America was naturally degenerate and so were its native peoples. Zea cited contemporary Latin American historians and naturalists, such as Francisco Javier Clavijero of México, Juan Ignacio Molina of Chile, Benito María de Moxó of Catalonia, and Hipólito Unanue of Perú to counterargue with the Europeans that indigenous, mestizo, and criollo people were capable of creating great cultures and nations independent of Europe.⁴² He then discussed the age of positivism by mentioning that after independence, there was a need for elite Latin Americans to imitate the United States, Britain, and France – and simultaneously deny its “barbarous” indigenous and Iberic roots – because Spain and Portugal were no longer Europe’s leaders of modernization and industrialization. He also mentioned the Argentinian writer and president, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, author of *Facundo: Civilización y Barbarie*, who called on Latin America to imitate the United States and Western Europe and genocide the native population in the process. He later presented José Enrique Rodó and José Martí as intellectuals who presented an alternative. In *Ariel*, Rodó called on Latin America to take pride in its Greco-Latin roots, and in his book *Nuestra America* (1891), Martí called on Latin America to take pride in its indigenous roots.⁴³ He also cited the Peruvian Marxist, José Carlos Mariátegui, who reflected on the devastating effects of neocolonialism and

⁴² Ibid., 8.

⁴³ Ibid., 11.

liberalism on the agrarian economies and lifestyles of the indigenous people in Peru.⁴⁴

Regardless of the ways in which other Latin American intellectuals were embracing indigenous people and cultures as integral to Latin America's identity, Zea wanted to transform indigenismo into *latinoamericanismo*, which still challenged issues of domination and dependency in this region of the continent. He went on to explain that the Mexican Revolution was associated with indigenismo because

The racial division, imposed by the [Spanish] colony and maintained by its criollo and mestizo heirs throughout the nineteenth century was erased by the Revolution. Men from all of the corners of the Mexican land, of the diverse racial groups that inhabited, were displaced throughout this territory to fight against old and new injustices. Like in a great melting pot these men mixed giving place to a nation no longer divided by racial differences, looking for a way to equalize their diverse interests, trying to put without end diverse forms of exploitation. However, groups of exploited indigenous people whom the revolutionary wave had kept out of the mestizo melting pot, were left subjected to new forms of exploitation, realized now by members of the national community to which they stayed away from.⁴⁵

Such was the justification that Zea presented to assimilate indigenous Mexicans into the nation. He thought that by doing so, their exploitation would come to an end, but as explained earlier assimilation policies eventually failed in Chiapas in 1994, as they did earlier for the French in Algeria.

Towards the end of his article, Zea praised Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, director of the National Indigenist Institute, for advocating the assimilation of Mexico's indigenous population to redeem it of its social disadvantages, dependency, and subordination. Beltrán, according to Zea, argued that the term *Indian* was created and imposed by the Spanish Empire, not to identify an ethnicity, but to categorize people into a marginalized social condition. Incorporating them to the national community, Beltrán believed, would end their isolation and marginalization. Again,

⁴⁴ Ibid., 12-13.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 14.

erasing racial differences is exactly how France believed it would solve its problems in Algeria. Similarly, Latin America still marginalizes its native population. Like Manuel Gamio, however, Zea did believe that indigenous assimilation could preserve and introduce native folk art to the national aesthetic (rather than moral or intellectual values). Zea did favor the hopes of Pablo Gonzalez Casanova, who predicted that the indigenous people, once in modern urban environments, would never want to return to their rural communities. Casanova explained that just the same way how Benito Juarez left his indigenous community in Oaxaca and abandoned his indigenous roots for the national culture, he hoped that all future generations of indigenous people would do the same.⁴⁶ Ultimately, Zea favored Vasconcelos' agendas from *La Raza Cosmica*, rather than Sarmiento's *Civilización y Barbarie*. Whereas Sarmiento argued that the Spanish conquistadores and the conquered indigenous were both inferior, Vasconcelos argued that the mestizaje between both races would "superiorize" Latin America. Zea, therefore, believed that it was morally preferable to assimilate a "misfortunate" racial group than to carry out genocide towards it.⁴⁷ Essentially, he wanted to see blacks and mestizos (not any other racial group in Latin America) assert their humanity and culture in this binary way. He did not even urge white Latin Americans to mix in the same way that he urged the indigenous peoples to do, nor did he suggest the possibility that ending white privilege in Latin America (with or without assimilation to mestizaje) would create social, political, and economic equality. Thus, Zea's assertions seriously have racist implications.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 17.

Conclusion

Zea supported mestizaje until the end of his life, and he expressed his support in an academic conference that was held four years before his death. On February 8, 2000, Zea and an American historian, David Brading, held an academic conference titled “From the Region to Globality.” In the beginning of the conference, Zea remarked that globalization had alarming consequences to the entire world. To him globalization was a form of imperialism in which the rich, potential countries can impose their will on the poor, less potential countries. He pointed out that some empires, such as those of the Mediterranean Greeks and Romans, were more understanding of diversity within their empires. Others, such as the Nordic empires, were less understanding of diversity within their empires. In his speech, he praised Simón Bolívar for advocating the concept of a nation of nations that integrates diversity, rather than a nation over nations such as those of the British and French empires. Zea also praised Vasconcelos for inventing the *Raza Cósmica* and for hoping that all of the world’s races would be integrated and universalized without having any one of those races impose themselves on the rest as superior. Given Zea’s decolonial philosophy, it seems striking that he would completely overlook Vasconcelos’ praise of the Spanish conquest and its impact on Mexico’s history. It would seem that Vasconcelos’ philosophy should be incompatible with Zea’s philosophy because Zea blamed Mexico’s social ills on colonialism from the conquest to the twentieth century. However, Zea was critical of the US presenting itself as being openly tolerant about its diversity when much of the country still had institutional racism towards people of color and had hate groups such as the Klu Klux Klan. When the conversation shifted towards the Chiapas uprising led by indigenous communities, he said to his Mexican audience that “first of all, we are all indigenous.”⁴⁸

⁴⁸ “LEOPOLDO ZEA Y DAVID BRADING - De la region a la globalidad,” [Cátedra Alfonso Reyes](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUJG6FZZEQ&t=5s), Tecnológico de Monterrey, July 26, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUJG6FZZEQ&t=5s>.

Then, he quickly shared an anecdote of one of his Pan-American conferences in Switzerland. He said that a Swiss journalist asked him about interviewing an indigenous Mexican, and Zea responded that he, himself, was indigenous, but the journalist insisted “no, no; one with feathers.”⁴⁹ This shows that even towards the end of his life, Zea still saw the people of Mexico as racially and culturally homogenous, despite the fact that he himself was light-skinned and did not speak an indigenous language. In that same conference, Zea cited the Chiapas uprising as an example of how the rich and powerful set up the oppressed and disadvantaged to retaliate with violence so that the rich and powerful can have the justification to take advantage of them. He described news images of unarmed indigenous people throwing rocks and mud at Mexican soldiers. To Zea, when oppressed communities or countries accuse their powerful oppressors of violating human rights and provoke them violently, the powerful oppressors find a justification to use their power to suppress them. Without specifying, he argued that Mexico signed certain treaties with European nations that do not care about mestizo and indigenous people but just want to take advantage of them. Zea’s critique of the Chiapas uprising was brief, but this event will be the focus of the following chapter.

Evidently, it is contradictory that Zea favored people of African descent to be decolonial, yet he did not encourage indigenous peoples in Latin America to be exactly as decolonial as Africans or African Americans. Zea argued that “For the Latin American, the concern for indigeneity comes from the necessity of fully realizing racial and cultural mestizaje. The Indian needs to stop being Indian and transform into a concrete Latin American.”⁵⁰ In the last five pages of *Negritude e Indigenismo*, he no longer used the word indigenismo, but rather mestizo to refer to Latin Americans. In his own words, he expressed that that “the black does not want to cease

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Zea, *Negritud e Indigenismo*, 17.

being black to be white and neither does the Latin American want to cease being mestizo to be European or Anglo-Saxon.”⁵¹ He believed that blacks should not be incorporated or assimilated, but rather they should incorporate and assimilate from other cultures, and likewise, Latin Americans, Westerners, and all other cultures should learn and interact with one another. In this explanation, he did not argue that all of the world’s cultures should abandon their identities and assimilate, but he did argue this towards the indigenous. It is more accurate to describe Mexico as “Many Mexicos” and equally recognize the indigenous, mestizo, European, African, and other racial identities that make the country multi-ethnic and multi-racial.

Even though indigenous Americans in both North and Latin America had a long history of being colonized, Zea did not acknowledge their cause in the same way as other races or ethnicities in the global south. During the 1960s and 70s, the Mexican Revolution appealed to people within and outside of Mexico in very contradictory ways, and coincidentally, Leopoldo Zea’s views towards the role of *indigenismo* in Mexico’s post-revolutionary society is also full of contradictions. Zea expressed himself favorable to all of the global south’s decolonial movements, as they were happening during his lifetime. He saw them as extensions of the Mexican Revolution because they too were all movements against colonialism and neocolonialism. In such decolonial processes, Zea argued that oppressed races should assert their identities and address their realities to uplift their own humanity and dignity against the European colonizers or whites in the United States who brought upon them racism, discrimination, and violence. Indeed, through his writings, Zea encouraged Africans and even African Americans to assert their blackness in order to challenge their oppressors, take self-pride, and find their sense of belonging in the world. Zea, however, did not believe the same of

⁵¹ Ibid., 18.

indigenous Mexicans or Latin Americans, more generally. Instead, he adhered to the writings of Vasconcelos in *La Raza Cómica*. Like Vasconcelos, he favored nationalist assimilation and the process of *mestizaje*, in which indigenous peoples would no longer see themselves as indigenous but rather as “Mexicans” or “Latin Americans.”

CHAPTER THREE

ENRIQUE DUSSEL & THE ZAPATISTA UPRISING OF 1994

Enrique Dussel was a prominent decolonial intellectual in Mexican Academia during the time of the Zapatista uprising. Dussel was a prominent intellectual and a professor at UNAM, as the uprising took place. Thus, the bulk of Dussel's world views and philosophy were better developed than Vasconcelos' on the eve of the revolution. Although he is native to Argentina, his permanent residence in Mexico and his citizenship in the country resulted in him being referred to as a Mexican-Argentinian. He has published more than fifty books, and he is even one of the founding fathers of liberation philosophy.¹ His philosophical works have addressed ethical and social issues that relate to all of Latin America, and like the other two philosophers in this discussion, he too wrote about the participation of indigenous Mexicans in revolutionary uprisings, particularly that of the Zapatistas. Of the three philosophers, thus far, Dussel has the most tolerant and empathetic views towards indigenous peoples, but that does not suggest that his following analyses do not have any problematic claims. His ethical analysis of the Zapatista uprising has its merits, but his historical understanding of that situation has some inaccurate exaggerations. Regardless of such issues, Dussel differs significantly from the other two thinkers in his support of plurinationalism in Mexico rather than indigenous assimilation. In order to understand why and how Dussel responded to this uprising the way that he did, it is important to discuss his biography.

Dussel's education, travels, and intellectual development made him sensitive to the legacies of colonialism around the world. On December 1934, Dussel was born in La Paz,

¹ Enrique Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty, Taylor, and the Philosophy of Liberation* (Amhearst: Humanity Books, 1998), xvi.

Argentina to a family of German and Italian origin. He attended the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo in Mendoza (1946-1951), where he received his undergraduate degree in philosophy and participated in the student movements against the Peronist regime.² In 1957, Dussel traveled to Europe by boat, and his stops in Brazilian and African ports made him realize that he was not merely a descendent of European immigrants (as most Argentinians are), but a Latin American from the global periphery. In his autobiography, he wrote that “I desired with a passion to go to Europe, and going towards it I discovered ... the global periphery, which has been out of my horizon.”³ He initiated his doctorate studies at the University of Madrid, and he spent approximately two years (1959-1961) working manual labor jobs in Israel, where he learned Hebrew and Arabic. His openness to new languages, cultures, and histories led him to write several books about Middle-Eastern contributions to Western culture and knowledge, including *Hellenic Humanism* (1961) and *Semitic Humanism* (1964). While studying in Paris and Münster, Dussel also finished an undergraduate degree in theology. He completed a doctorate in history at the Sorbonne in Paris, during which he wrote a dissertation on Bartolomé de las Casas and his role in using Christian interpretations to defend indigenous Americans from the oppression of the conquest. His voyages to the Middle-East made him recognize the values and contributions of non-western cultures to humanity, and his studies on Las Casas made him empathize with victims of oppressive colonialism. According to his autobiography, he felt that he was “a completely different person, ... from then on I would see [the world] *from below*.”⁴ He even meditated on Leopoldo Zea’s book, *América en la historia* (1957), which urged for more

² Enrique Dussel, “Autopercepción Intelectual de un Proceso Histórico,” *Anthropos* no. 180 (1998): 15.

³ Dussel, “Autopercepción,” 16.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

recognition of Latin America's existence in world history to better understand its impoverished realities.⁵

Dussel blamed much of Latin America's problems on its legacies of Western colonialism, and he sought a way for Latin Americans to think and speak for themselves on this matter. He returned to Argentina in 1969, where he taught Latin American history and philosophy at the University of Resistencia. In his autobiographical film, directed by Sergio García Agundis, Dussel said that, in 1977, he was invited to Quito, Ecuador, at the behest of the Latin American Bishops' Pastoral Institute (IPLA), to discuss the social realities and historical significance of Latin America. In that seminar, Dussel argued that the decadence of the Catholic Church came when Constantine leaned on God's favor to justify his victory at the battle of the Melvin Bridge, and Cortés and Pizarro similarly felt justified to bring the cross and the sword together during the conquest. Thus, he urged that in order for Latin American history to truly have a moral sensitivity, it must be written from the point of view of the oppressed, the poor, and the indigenous peoples. Such peoples became the focus of liberation theology, and the fact that clergy like Gustavo Gutiérrez and Óscar Romero were present in these meetings suggests that Dussel was a participant of the movement in its early stages. Also, at the behest of IPLA, he traveled around Latin America to observe and report on a great variety of social movements, and this compelled him to develop an "authentic" Latin American thought that finds relevance in the concrete realities of contemporary society and politics. He believed that this new intellectual thought had to be from the point of view of the global periphery, and he coined it liberation philosophy, which was an offshoot of his experiences from the liberation theology movement.⁶

⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶ "Caminante no hay camino: Retrato documental de Enrique Dussel," directed by Sergio García Agundis (2014; Kinoproducciones).

Dussel wrote an article titled “Una Decada Argentina (1966-1976) y el Origen de la ‘Filosofía de la Liberación,’” in which he argued that philosophy professors in Latin America must not merely be commentators of Western thinkers and only label themselves as Cartesians, Marxists, Existentialists, and so on. Instead, they should also contribute to an authentic Latin Americanist philosophy that discusses the problems and realities of Latin America. In his own words, he wrote that European categories of thought “could have been improved, retouched ... keeping in mind reality as a reference.”⁷ He used liberation philosophy to empathetically reflect on the violent student movement in Tlatelolco, and he expressed his support of the students who participated in the Cordobazo of his native Argentina.⁸ This forced right-wing extremists to bomb Dussel’s house and throw his books into the streets. Despite these threats, he wrote more books on this topic, including *Para una Destrución de la Historia de la Etica* (1972) and *Para una Etica de la Liberación Latino Americana* (1973). Again, he toured all over Latin America to speak out against military dictatorships, including the one of Juan Carlos Onganía in his native Argentina, but he received death threats by paramilitary squadrons because of it. Thus, in 1976, he was compelled to go into exile in Mexico City, and he now teaches at UNAM.⁹ From Mexico, Dussel visited the United States numerous times, and in New York City, he founded the Association of Third World Theologians, which organized conferences with participants from all over the world. Later on, he not only held more conferences all over Asia, Africa, and Latin America, he also taught in North American universities like Notre Dame, NYU, Duke, and Harvard.¹⁰

⁷ Enrique Dussel, “Una Decada Argentina (1966-1976) y el Origen de la ‘Filosofía de la Liberación,’” in *Historia de la filosofía latinoamericana y la filosofía de la liberación* (Bogotá: Nueva América, 1994), 70.

⁸ Dussel, “Autopercepción,” 20.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁰ “Caminante no hay camino: Retrato documental de Enrique Dussel,” directed by Sergio García Agundis (2014; Kinoproducciones).

The liberation aspect of Dussel's philosophy comes from thinking about how the global south can escape dominant world systems of oppression that were made possible by European colonization and modernity, such as globalization, neoliberal capitalism, cultural hegemony, and racism. The processes of Western modernity rejected the languages, cultures, and ideas of colonized peoples throughout the world. Indeed, Western modernity justified colonialism by claiming to bring its civilization and "rationality" to the far reaches of the globe and, in that process, remove the "weaker and unintelligent" races. However, rather than thinking through postmodernism (which Dussel believes still has Eurocentric tendencies), he developed his own transmodern approach. Without attacking Western thought *per se*, transmodernity takes into account the Others' thought to critique the West's irrational justification for violence and colonization. Dussel believes that people from all cultures can bring forward moral and intellectual values to humanity if they can converse without having one culture being considered superior to the rest. Indeed, Dussel's writings seek to combine the best ideas of Western thinkers with those of non-Western thinkers to reveal consistencies and relevancies. For example, he points out how the German philosopher, Martin Heidegger, awakens his readers to their existential realities in his book *Being and Time*, while the French-Jewish philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas (a Holocaust survivor), awakens the oppressed of their status as the Other, whom he believed exist in every system and relationship (i.e. the poor, the persecuted, the widow, or the orphan). Similarly, Dussel argues that Paulo Freire and liberation theology awaken Latin Americans to think of their oppressed realities and find solutions. Historically, in Latin America, indigenous peoples were oppressed by colonialism, women were oppressed by *machismo*, and the poor were oppressed by the rich and powerful.¹¹ Dussel also wrote, and continues to write,

¹¹ Dussel, "Autopercepción," 20.

extensively on Karl Marx to understand Latin America's poverty, economic dependency, and its treatment as the Other in an unfair global system.¹² With the help of Latino intellectuals in the United States, such as Eduardo Mendieta, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, and Ramón Grosfoguel, Dussel also promoted the decolonial turn in philosophy. Through this intellectual turn, he and his colleagues urged attention to the lack of self-consciousness that the global south has, due to the hegemonic culture and knowledge that the West imposed via colonialism. Without discrediting the West for its intellectual, cultural, and technological accomplishments, Dussel urged scholars to recognize not only parallel achievements of people of color in their own cultures, but also the vital roles they played in helping the West with its achievements. He basically believes that the global south must stop being intellectual and cultural colonies and instead be more equal to the global north.¹³ He continues to live and write to this day.

Background of the Zapatista Rebellion

Dussel was no stranger to Mexico when the Zapatistas rebelled in Chiapas; he was living in the country since 1976. Carlos Salinas de Gortari was the president of Mexico from 1988 to 1994, and he wanted to establish a trade zone with the US and Canada so that Mexico could increase trade, improve jobs, and expand investment. There were many forms of opposition within these three countries, but the US wanted to create a trading bloc that could compete with the economic prosperity of European Union. According to Evan H. Potter, “Until the ratification of NAFTA [the North American Free Trade Agreement], the EU represented the largest trading

¹² Ibid., 24.

¹³ “Caminante no hay camino: Retrato documental de Enrique Dussel,” directed by Sergio García Agundis (2014; Kinoproducciones).

area in the world, with a total GDP that exceeded US\$8.5 trillion.”¹⁴ Thus, Brian Mulroney of Canada, Bill Clinton of the US, and Carlos Salinas of Mexico signed the NAFTA agreement in 1993. While the Canadian and American economies experienced prosperity, the Mexican economy suffered in the long run because, unlike the US, Mexico was not allowed to subsidize its agricultural goods, and in addition to that, Mexican agricultural businesses were unable to successfully compete with US or Canadian ones. President Salinas even revised Article 27 of the Constitution, which protected *ejidos* (communal lands used for agriculture). For many Mexicans, this amendment was the epitome of the agrarian reforms of the 1910 Revolution, but Salinas believed that it was responsible for rural underdevelopment and the national need to import foods. In a very neoliberal fashion, the revision allowed for “the privatization of collectively held *ejido* lands, opening the door to private sales.”¹⁵ Indeed, neoliberal changes, such as these, were taking place all over Latin America, and they resembled the liberal economic models of the nineteenth century, during positivism’s popularity. Just like in the Porfiriato, Mexico received foreign investors and industrialized goods, rather than producing them. The PRI government even tried to redeem the image of Porfirio Díaz, whom the nationalists accused of having sold the country to the foreigners. School textbooks stopped celebrating revolutionaries like Emiliano Zapata, and they focused more on “the economic, cultural, and administrative advances associated with Díaz’s rule.”¹⁶

However, on the night of January 1, 1994, the date that coincided with the day that NAFTA would go into effect and the year of the presidential election, indigenous Mayans from

¹⁴ Evan H. Potter, “Transatlantic Free Trade: Myth or Reality?” in *Between Actor and Presence: The European Union and the Future for the Transatlantic Relationship*, ed. George E. Maclean (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2001), 195.

¹⁵ June C. Nash, *Mayan Visions: The Quest for Autonomy in an Age of Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 81.

¹⁶ Denis Gilbert, “Emiliano Zapata: Textbook Hero,” *Mexican Studies* 19, no. 1 (2003): 149.

Chiapas declared war on the Mexican government. These Mayan rebels consisted of many local ethnic groups, including Tzotziles, Tzeltales, Choles, Tojolobales, Kanjobales, and Lacandones. On that night, they put on black ski masks and stormed the municipal palace of a small town in Chiapas, called San Cristóbal de las Casas. Coincidentally, in 1848, San Cristóbal de las Casas was named in honor of Bartolomé de las Casas, who advocated for indigenous rights in the region hundreds of years earlier.¹⁷ Las Casas, for a short time, was the bishop of Chiapas, so this reveals that issues of indigenous rights have a long history in this region of Mexico. According to María Herrera Lima, “The effects of agrarian reform in post-revolutionary Mexico were minimal in Chiapas, and the policy of linguistic assimilation ... was either reduced to a system for getting laborers ... or opposed from the perspective of a conservative conception of the separation of ethnic groups.”¹⁸ After storming the municipal palace, the Mayan rebels announced the “First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle.” They announced, “Today, we say ‘enough!’ We are the inheritors of the true builders of our nation. We are armed to make a revolution to search for peace and justice for our Chiapas and Mexico. Long live the revolution!” Thus, the event that took place in Chiapas was, in fact, a revolution led by indigenous peoples. In order to remind Mexico of its revolutionary past, the rebels decided to call themselves the *Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN), and according to Dennis Gilbert, they “made a smart, if predictable, choice ... when they attached ... [Emiliano Zapata’s] name to their movement.”¹⁹ An important member of this movement was a philosophy professor from UNAM named Rafael Sebastián Guillén Vicente – better known as Subcomandante Marcos – who was actually not

¹⁷ Thomas Benjamin, “A Time of Reconquest: History, the Maya Revival, and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas,” *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 2 (2000): 425.

¹⁸ María Herrera Lima, “On the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: The Case of Chiapas,” in *Latin American Philosophy: Currents, Issues, Debates*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 166.

¹⁹ Gilbert, “Emiliano Zapata,” 128.

indigenous, but he too wore a black ski-mask and became the EZLN's most recognized spokesperson. The EZLN demanded respect towards indigenous peoples, programs to relieve poverty in Chiapas, and the prevention of unemployment that would result from NAFTA. June C. Nash validates this concern by pointing out that employment in Mexico decreased ever since neoliberal policies were introduced in the 1980s: "Unemployment increased from a low of 1.4 million in 1982, when there were 21.5 million workers in the employed workforce, to 8.9 million in 1990, when there were 22.8 million in the workforce."²⁰ Indeed, Chiapas was the poorest state in Mexico and had the largest indigenous population in the country, so the movement addressed problems that were not addressed as seriously or provocatively in the past. After taking over San Cristóbal de las Casas, the Zapatistas went on to take over five more cities in Chiapas, including Tuxtla Gutierrez, Chanal, Otosingo, Altamirano, and Las Margaritas. They did not stay in San Cristóbal for long; they left the city the following morning, and the Mexican army found none of the rebels when they arrived. There were, however, a few violent confrontations between the national army and the rebels, the bloodiest of which took place at the town of Otosingo. Despite such confrontations, Lima argues that "presenting the Zapatistas as terrorists is not supported by the facts, since their use of violence has been minimal, rather symbolic, and a way to get attention for their cause."²¹ Back in Mexico City, that very same year, president Salinas said before the national government, "It's not about an indigenous assault, rather the participation of the indigenous. Many of them in needy circumstance. ... There exists nothing in this aggressive group that can pass the capability to respond from the Mexican state."²²

²⁰ Nash, *Mayan Visions*, 80.

²¹ Lima, "On the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," 166.

²² Quoted in *Zapatistas, Crónica de una Rebelión*, directed by Victor Mariña and Mario Viveros (2004; Mexico City, Mexico: *La Jornada*, 2007), DVD.

As in the aftermath of the 1910 Revolution, the EZLN's revolution also raised questions about Mexico's racial and national identity. On January 12 of that year, there was an enormous manifestation in Mexico City's Zocalo to stop the national army's attacks on the indigenous communities in Chiapas. Protestors carried signs that said "DO NOT KILL OUR INDIAN BROTHERS ¡¡IMMEDIATE RETREAT OF THE ARMIES!!"²³ In his first analysis of the uprising, *Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism, and Liberation Theology* (2003), Dussel rightfully pointed out that "the uprising received massive and deeply solidarious support from all segments of civil society, from the country's urban population, as well as from *criollos* (white Mexicans) and *mestizos*."²⁴ People from various sectors of Mexican society reacted to the situation in Chiapas, and in response to this public mobilization, the national authorities took action. President Salinas announced that he would grant amnesty to all EZLN participants who got involved from January 1 to January 16. The Archbishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Samuel Ruiz, acted as a go-between to negotiate a cease fire between the EZLN and the national government. On February 20, at the Cathedral of San Cristóbal de las Casas, the national government and the EZLN (who brought with them a Mexican flag) wrote the San Andrés Accords. However, on March 23, after the assassination of PRI Candidate, Luis Donaldo Colosio, Ernesto Zedillo substituted him in the election and became Mexico's next president. The EZLN got in high alert, broke discussion with the government, and organized its own national democratic convention. President Zedillo wanted to open new negotiations with the Zapatistas in order to avoid violence, but they did not trust him. They kept mobilizing to form autonomous lands, but Zedillo accused the EZLN of terrorism and announced an offensive

²³ *Zapatistas, Crónica de una Rebelión*, directed by Victor Mariña and Mario Viveros (2004; Mexico City, Mexico: *La Jornada*, 2007), DVD.

²⁴ Enrique Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism, and Liberation Theology*, trans. Eduardo Mendieta (Laham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 168.

attack. Once again, with public demonstrations in Mexico City, the government decided to retreat. Protestors chanted and carried signs, saying “Todos Somos Marcos!”²⁵ Subcommander Marcos, the leading spokesperson of the EZLN, became so popular that t-shirts of his masked face appeared all over the country. The EZLN also started a website to connect with outside sympathizers; their “media-savvy behavior ... quickly aroused a multitude of foreign activists associated with human rights, indigenous rights, and other types of nongovernmental organization (NGOs) to swarm – electronically as well as physically – out of the United States, Canada, and Europe into Mexico City and Chiapas.”²⁶ However, the Mexican government mostly wanted to deport these observers and crush the rebellion. Rock en Español artists, such as Andrés Calamaro, Fito Páez, El Tri, and Café Tacuba, even wrote songs about the movement. Later on, in March 3, 2001, at the Estadio Azteca of Mexico City, two Mexican rock bands called Maná and Jaguares organized a concert called Unidos Por La Paz. It was televised by TV Azteca and Televisa, and at the end of the show, they played a Spanish cover of John Lennon’s “Give Peace a Chance.” During the song, the lead singers of both bands gave small speeches to express their support of the Chiapas movement. Fher Olvera of Maná said, “We have an historical opportunity with this new national conscience – for a more plural government. Let us ask for respect towards the indigenous peoples, who are the strength of this country. Because the strength of this country lies in the richness of our diversity.”²⁷

²⁵ *Zapatistas, Crónica de una Rebelión*, directed by Victor Mariña and Mario Viveros (2004; Mexico City, Mexico: *La Jornada*, 2007), DVD.

²⁶ David Ronfeldt, John Arquilla, Graham E. Fuller, and Melissa Fuller, *The Zapatista Social Netwar in Mexico* (Santa Monica: RAND Arroyo Center, 1998), 3.

²⁷ Fer H. “Jaguares - Unidos por la Paz - Concierto Completo.” Filmed March 2001. YouTube video, 2:01:24. Mar 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsrxdG2Bql8>.

Dussel's Reflection of the Zapatistas

Just like Vasconcelos and Zea, Dussel addressed Mexico's colonial legacy and history in order to make his interpretations on the indigenous revolutionaries of his time. In his book, *Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism, and Liberation Theology* (2003), Dussel dedicated his tenth chapter to the Zapatistas, and he titled it: "Ethical Sense of the 1994 Maya Rebellion in Chiapas." In this short piece, Dussel applied liberation philosophy to his reflection of the EZLN uprising, and he pointed out the ethical merits of their movement. He mainly argued that the struggles of indigenous peoples in Mexico have a continuity from the Spanish conquest to 1994. Dussel published this philosophical reflection nine years after the uprising initiated, but his writings mainly rely on Zapatista sources from 1994 (which *La Jornada* made accessible to the public). At the beginning of his chapter, Dussel expressed how spontaneous the movement's emergence was from his point of view: "On January 1, 1994, to everyone's surprise ... Mexico listened to news broadcasts informing of a Maya uprising in the state of Chiapas."²⁸ According to María Herrera Lima, however, "the government had known about the Zapatista rebellion since at least 1993, but it was not made public so as not to endanger the signing of the NAFTA treaty."²⁹ Nevertheless, Dussel's observations of the Zapatistas are very consistent with the main principles of his decolonial philosophy, which he outlined in his autobiographies.

Dussel was intrigued by the Zapatista's written records and communiques because, as a transmodernist, he wanted to take into account the thoughts of the Other to critique forms of oppression that were made possible by colonization and modernity. What mainly distinguishes Dussel's analysis of the indigenous revolutionaries from those of Vasconcelos or Zea is his inclusion of indigenous perspectives. Of course, during the Revolution of 1910, indigenous

²⁸ Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy*, 168.

²⁹ Lima, "On the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," 166.

peoples were mainly illiterate and left little to no written sources. According to John H. Flores, Frances R. Aparicio, Juan Mora Torres, and Maria de los Angeles Torres, “Mexican census figures suggest that only 20 percent of Mexico’s population was literate in 1910.”³⁰ However, Vasconcelos deliberately made no effort to empathize with their experiences and hardships during the Porfiriato and the revolution itself. Dussel, on the other hand, was fortunate enough to live in a time when the indigenous Zapatistas were creating written records and communiques. To Dussel, “The early comunicués of the EZLN used a vocabulary similar to the ones employed by revolutionary movements in Latin America, Africa, or Asia.”³¹ He even found their rhetoric similar to that of Franz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*. Dussel believed that, in a surprising way, the language used in these communiques were “no longer hiding the usual speech of the Maya people.”³² He pointed out that the language had a new ethical character, and that was the main focus in his chapter. He cited the Zapatista’s writings to point out their ethical validity.

As a decolonial thinker, Dussel traced the root of the Chiapas conflict to the Spanish conquest because that event made possible the long history of cultural and human oppression towards the indigenous peoples in the region. In the first section of his chapter, titled “The Earlier Roots of the Conflict,” Dussel urged his readers to recognize the importance of listening to the voices and ideas of the historically marginalized communities in Chiapas. He claimed that

We are in the presence of a truly historical event. There have been few serious dialogues, in Latin American history, between the original inhabitants (ill-named “Indians”) and the white population (the conquering Spaniards or their criollo successors), and the mestizos

³⁰ John H. Flores, Frances R. Aparicio, Juan Mora Torres, and Maria de los Angeles Torres, *The Mexican Revolution in Chicago: Immigration Politics from the Early Twentieth Century to the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 18.

³¹ Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy*, 167.

³² *Ibid.*, 168.

(who always try to pass as whites).³³

In this passage, Dussel alluded to the racial categories of the colonial era that kept people with less European ancestry at the bottom of society and compelled people of mixed race to strive to be recognized as white. This does, in many ways, parallel contemporary Latin American society, and Vasconcelos himself recommended the Mexican mestizo to be more Europeanized than indigenous. Most importantly, however, Dussel believed that the same unwillingness of the Mexican government to empathize with the Zapatistas and understand their values and ideas parallels the unwillingness of the Spanish to do the same with the indigenous peoples whom they conquered. There is a very strong merit to this argument because when the Zapatistas took off on a national tour – The Zapatour – to promote their cause and forge solidarity with other indigenous ethnic groups, they were boycotted by the National Government. In 2001, president Vicente Fox welcomed them to the National Palace, but Felipe Calderón encouraged politicians from all parties (PRI, PAN, and PRD) to not show up to the discussion. A female leader of the EZLN, Commander Esther, said the following speech at the National Palace,

No one should feel attacked humiliated or demeaned by the fact that I occupy this platform today and speak. Those who are not here today refused to hear what an indigenous woman came to tell you and turned down the opportunity to talk so that I could hear them. That is the country that the Zapatistas want. A country where difference is acknowledged and respected. Where being and thinking differently is not cause for imprisonment, persecution, or for death³⁴

³³ Ibid., 168.

³⁴ *Zapatistas, Crónica de una Rebelión*, directed by Victor Mariña and Mario Viveros (2004; Mexico City, Mexico: *La Jornada*, 2007), DVD.

In April 25, 2001, the so-called “Indigenous Law” was passed by the Senator’s Chamber. It was a constitutional amendment that denied Indigenous self-government and decisions to manage their own natural resources. It was approved by the PRI, PAN, and PRD, and all three parties even turned their backs on the San Andres Accords. Thus, the EZLN continues to fight for its cause to this very day, and despite his admiration for their decolonial struggle, Dussel pointed out that the nature of this conflict is constantly changing, so his writings are not a final analysis because no one knows “if it will end peacefully or violently.”³⁵

Dussel compared the conquest of Mexico to the violence done to the Zapatistas, and his views of the conquest are strikingly different from those of Vasconcelos. Dussel despises the conquering Spaniards for disparaging indigenous codices as “barbaric,” when they themselves were, in his words, “often illiterate, uneducated, and brutal.”³⁶ Whereas Vasconcelos argued in his *Breve Historia* that the indigenous civilizations had nothing worth saving by the Spanish, Dussel argued in favor of recognizing the merits of pre-Hispanic knowledge and culture. However, he emphasized the Aztecs and not the Mayans, whom the Zapatistas descended from. Without establishing the fact that not all of Mexico’s indigenous peoples are of the same ethnic group, Dussel narrated two different stories of Aztec scholars who tried to preserve their writings, paintings, and world views from the conquering Spanish. He told the story of three *tlamatinime* from Ehécatl who turned themselves in to the Spanish to introduce their artworks and codices but were thrown to a pack of dogs to be eaten.³⁷ He also narrated the dialogues between the first twelve Franciscan missionaries from Spain and the *tlamatinime* of the Aztec philosophical school – *Calménac* – which can be read in *Colloquios y Doctrina Cristiana* (1524).

³⁵ Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy*, 168.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 169.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 168.

Thinking from a transmodern approach, he argued that “it was a conversation between ‘the reason of the Other’ (the Amerindian) and ‘the discourse of (nascent) Modernity.’”³⁸ However, the Spanish, for their part, were unwilling to appreciate other forms of knowledge and started indoctrinating with a catechism “not very acceptable even to a Christian.”³⁹ Although Dussel’s parallel connection between the conquest and the aggression towards the Zapatistas is compelling, such a connection would have been stronger if he provided an example of how the Spanish tried to wipe out Mayan knowledge and culture because the Zapatistas, themselves, were Mayan. He could have narrated the ways in which Diego de Landa, the bishop of Yucatan, burned hundreds of Mayan manuscripts and tortured Mayan individuals for resisting conversion.⁴⁰ Dussel did, however, make a strong connection between the Chiapas uprising and Bartolomé de las Casas, whom he wrote a dissertation on at the Sorbonne in Paris.

Las Casas, he pointed out, was the bishop of Chiapas, shortly after the conquest of Mexico; however, even as the bishop of the region, he struggled to dissuade the Spanish encomenderos from enslaving the indigenous peoples. Las Casas refused to hear confessions and absolve the sins of the encomenderos. He even excommunicated the dean of the cathedral for absolving the encomenderos who held indigenous people in their lands. After being left without a single secular priest or the support of the Dominicans, Las Casas resigned from his position as bishop, and he left Chiapas. Dussel concluded his first section of the chapter by indicating that “long indeed would be the history of the injustices committed in Chiapas since the Conquest. But let us return to the present.”⁴¹ Many traces of liberation philosophy can be found in this analysis.

³⁸ Ibid., 169.

³⁹ Ibid., 169.

⁴⁰ David E. Timmer, “Providence and Perdition: Fray Diego de Landa Justifies His Inquisition against the Yucatecan Maya,” *Church History* vol. 66, no. 3 (1997): 479.

⁴¹ Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy*, 170.

Dussel cited the Zapatistas as an example of how the legacies of colonialism impacted the social realities of the indigenous people in Mexico, specifically, and Latin America, generally. Even Lima argues that the racial discrimination of indigenous Mexicans “can be shown in a reconstruction of their condition from colonial times (when they were considered “minors” incapable of owning land or signing contracts).”⁴² Such is the reason why they had no say in the signing of NAFTA.

Dussel’s Criteria of Ethical Validity

Dussel used his own transmodern approach to deduce three criteria of ethical validity that, he believed, the Zapatistas were upholding to stand against the immorality of colonialism and neocolonialism. The three criteria that he deduced were 1) respecting the dignity of the ethical subject, 2) fulfilling the requirements for the reproduction of life, and 3) communal solidarity. Dussel deduced these three criteria by repeatedly quoting the EZLN communiqués and allowing them, as oppressed subjects, to speak for themselves in his chapter. Again, this is a striking contrast to the ways in which Vasconcelos and Zea wrote about indigenous participants in the revolutions of their respective times. Dussel deduced these three criteria to emphasize his ethical concerns of the Chiapas uprising, rather than any nationalistic concern, such as assimilation. Indeed, Maria Herrera Lima herself would agree with Dussel because she argues that “considering indigenous peoples simply to be regular citizens only masks the conditions of extreme inequality and social disadvantage in which they actually live.”⁴³ As pointed out earlier, Dussel demonstrated how Mexico’s colonial legacy made such inequalities possible.

⁴² Lima, “On the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,” 173.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 171.

Dussel describes the first two criteria as the Zapatistas' righteous responses to their social challenges, which were set in place by Mexico's long history of colonialism. For the first criterion that he deduced, Dussel cited specific EZLN communiqués that discussed the importance of respecting the dignity of the negated historical subject. From the "Cartas al Frente Cívico de Mapastepec" (12 February 1994), for example, he provided the following quotation,

[Those who have treated us unjustly] have denied respect and dignity to those who, well before them, inhabited these lands. They have forgotten that human dignity is not only patrimony of those who have taken care of the basic needs of life. Even those who have no material possessions have that which makes us different from things and from animals: dignity!⁴⁴

Dussel then pointed out that this EZLN quote resonated with a different quote from Emmanuel Levinas' *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*: "my responsibility for the Other imposes itself before any decision, before any deliberation (before all argument or discourse)."⁴⁵ As a transmodernist, Dussel made this connection to demonstrate how the ethical values of Western and non-Western people are not always at odds with one another, as most Western philosophers have historically assumed. The connection between these two quotes also reveals that, for Dussel, basic human concerns are more important than the nationalistic concerns of Vasconcelos and Zea. For the second criterion, Dussel, again, cited EZLN communiqués to discuss how the requirements for the reproduction of human, corporeal life must be fulfilled. From Delegate Juan's communiqué, "We Fight so that We Could be Respected as Indigenous" (25 January 1994), he quoted that "it is because of this that we rose . . . , so that we would have worthy

⁴⁴ Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy*, 171.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 172.

housing, and a reasonable job, and land to toil.”⁴⁶ From yet another EZLN document, titled “Message to the National Coordinator of Civic Action” (22 February 1994), Dussel pointed out that the Zapatistas knew that their

misery meant the wealth of the few; that on the bones and dust of our ancestors and our children the powerful built their house. [We understood] that our steps could not enter that house, and that the light that brightened it was fed by the darkness [imposed on] our people. [We understood] that the abundance on the table at that house was fed by the emptiness of our stomachs, and that their children were borne by our misery. [That house’s] roof and walls were built over the fragility of our bodies; and the health that filled its spaces resulted from our death; and the wisdom lived in that house nourished itself of our ignorance. The peace that sheltered it was war waged on our people.⁴⁷

Dussel concluded this section by arguing that “the one responsible for the impossibility of reproducing life is perverse *por excelencia*.”⁴⁸ Once more, he also traced similarities between the Zapatista’s communiques and the ethical writings of other world cultures, such as the ancient Egyptian *Book of the Dead* and the New Testament. From these extremely diverse sources, Dussel concluded that the act of providing for basic, corporeal needs is a universal, ethical principle. This is another example of how Dussel applied transmodernity into his analysis.

However, in his effort to recuperate indigenous achievements destroyed by colonialism, Dussel made the controversial claim that the EZLN practiced a “Mayan Democracy” that predates the Spanish conquest. The Third Criterion that Dussel deduced from the Zapatistas’ communiques is the importance of having communal solidarity, and he praised their decision-making processes based on communal consensus. According to *La Jornada*’s documentary, the Zapatistas organized, and continue to organize, their own autonomous, democratic governments,

⁴⁶ Ibid., 172.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 173.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 173.

called *caracoles*. Five *caracoles* represent thirty autonomous municipalities and are headed by *Juntas de Buen Gobierno* (Committees of Good Government). According to Dussel, these communal institutions and practices go back to their ancient Mayan roots and were not “inspired on the political, “democracy” writings of Aristotle, Rousseau, or Bobbio.”⁴⁹ There are several reasons why Dussel made this case. Firstly, he cited Delegate Juan’s communique in order to reveal a passage that implies that the EZLN’s political practices and organization are a Mayan Democracy: “This is why we rose . . . , so that we may have freedom of expression, and so that we may participate in *what we consider* democracy.”⁵⁰ Dussel, then, cited the “Communique of the General Command: Democratic Elections” (27 February 1994) to argue that the EZLN’s political organization and practices have their origin before the conquest and that, according to the communique, “another word came from far away, and it named this government ‘democracy.’”⁵¹ According to this document,

When the EZLN was only foggy and opaque in the mountains, and when words like “justice,” “freedom,” and “democracy” were only words, they were a dream that had been given to us by our communities’ elders – the true guardians of the *word* of our ancestors. . . . And they said: “It is reasonable and the will of good men and women to seek and find the best way to govern and be governed. What is good for the many is good for all. But the voices of the few may not be silenced, rather let them be in their place, hoping that the thought and the heart might become shared within the will of the many and in the view of the few. . . . It was always our path that the will of the many might be shared by the heart of the men and women who govern. . . . That was how our strength was born in the mountains.”⁵²

According to Dussel, the Mayans discuss their issues to the point of having a majority agreement on what needs to be done, and then they choose a community member to perform that task. Even

⁴⁹ Ibid., 173.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 174.

⁵¹ Ibid., 174-5.

⁵² Ibid., 174.

though Dussel did not provide his own critique of the PRI-led government, which ordered all the acts of aggression towards the Zapatistas, he allowed the Zapatistas to speak from their own political point of view in his text by quoting their “Communique of General Command”:

We see that the path of governing is not now a path for the many. We see that the few are not the ones who govern, and they govern without obedience, and they govern by power. And among the few they pass power among themselves, without ever listening to the many; ruling for the few, without obeying the rule of the many. . . . the manner of our government – ‘democracy’ – is good for the many and for the few.⁵³

Despite Dussel’s insistence that the Mayans created a system of government that is similar to democracy in the Western sense, there is evidence that the EZLN got their political inspiration from other sources, namely Liberation Theology and Maoism. This will be the discussion’s focus later on.

Dussel also argued that the concept of the nation-state is a Western construct that got imposed throughout the world via colonialism, and that is why he promoted plurinationalism as an alternative to Mexico’s race relations. To Dussel, the situation in Chiapas raised political questions about the concept of the nation-state. He argued that nation-states all over the world have historically imposed themselves on other, more vulnerable, nations. This, he pointed out, happened in countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Spain, and Italy. The Castilian nation, for example, dominated the Catalonians, the Basques, and other nations in the Iberian Peninsula. Similarly, he argued, the indigenous nations, in what today is Latin America, went unrecognized as nations with their own languages, religions, histories, and political institutions.⁵⁴ Likewise, Lima argues that “Even if indigenous peoples share with other national

⁵³ Ibid., 175.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 176.

minorities a resistance to ‘nation-building policies’ ... they differ from other groups in that they can make an appeal based not only on their unjust incorporation into the state, but also on the fact that their cultural differences are more radical.”⁵⁵ Dussel, then, suggested that Mexico could follow the example of Colombia, which recently adopted a constitution that made the state plurinational. According to Dussel, this means that “one state ... institutionalizes the life of *many nations*. The native populations now have their own direct representation in the country’s Congress, directly and without mediators.”⁵⁶ Such a proposition would not be at odds with the Zapatista’s goals because, as Lima argues, the Zapatistas “are not separatist, but they want political autonomy within the nation-state.”⁵⁷ Of course, Carlos Salinas did legally acknowledge Mexico’s multiculturalism, but Dussel could have specified that the next step for Mexico is to grant political autonomy. He urged for such a solution to be offered to the indigenous peoples of Latin America because they are the original nations of the continent and are “older by far than all the mestizo and white Latin Americans who came later.”⁵⁸

Understanding the Origins of Neo-Zapatismo

As mentioned earlier, Dussel’s claim that a Mayan form of democracy survived the Spanish Conquest is an exaggeration because there is evidence that the EZLN took inspiration from other sources. Dussel is not the only scholar who argued that the Mayans were original in their thinking; many others have also made a similar insistence. In 2013, for example, Nick Henk published an article titled “The Subcommander and the Sardinian: Marcos and Gramsci.” In this article, Henk traced what is known about Subcommander Marcos’ biography to point out that

⁵⁵ Lima, “On the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,” 169.

⁵⁶ Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy*, 176.

⁵⁷ Lima, “On the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,” 167.

⁵⁸ Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy*, 177.

Marxist ideology, especially that of Antonio Gramsci, was nearly absent in his intellectual career before he joined the Zapatistas. Marcos, or Rafael Sebastián Guillén Vicente, was a philosophy student (and later professor) at UNAM. In 1980, he presented an award-winning thesis that cited Western thinkers, such as Chomsky, Marx, Engels, Weber, Hegel, Kant, Foucault, Descartes, and many more. Before joining the Zapatistas, Marcos brought with him a few books to Chiapas, but none of these were about political philosophy. According to Henk, Gramsci became popular among leftist intellectuals in Mexico, but Marcos was in the jungles of Chiapas, isolated from the trends taking place at the universities. In a 2000 interview with Kara Zugman Dellacioppa, the EZLN's founding member, Sergio Rodriguez, said that "There had been many political changes in Mexico since the early 1980s that the Zapatistas were not aware of."⁵⁹ It was just assumed that Gramsci influenced the EZLN because their contemporary revolutionaries in Central America (like the Ejercito Revolucionario del Pueblo ERP in El Salvador) were influenced by him. Henk cited Marcos and several philosophers to argue that the EZLN's ideology was original Mayan thought. He cited a 2008 interview with the journalist, Laura Castellanos, in which Marcos denied being influenced by any Western thinker. Instead, Marcos emphasized the Zapatista concept of *mandar obedeciendo* (to rule and obey at the same time), which was practiced by the indigenous councils of good government. Henk also cited the Mexican philosopher, Walter D. Mignolo, who wrote that the concept of *mandar obedeciendo* is originally Mayan, and "there is a principle from Amerindian wisdom among the Zapatistas that is both engrained in the intersubjective structure of their language and in their corresponding conception of social relations."⁶⁰ Henk even cited Enrique Dussel's chapter on the Zapatistas, and he

⁵⁹ Nick Henck. "The Subcommander and the Sardinian: Marcos and Gramsci," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* vol. 29, no. 2 (2013): 439.

⁶⁰ Henck, "The Subcommander and the Sardinian," 448.

embraced the title of “Mayan Democracy.” Henk also cited a 1994 interview with Adolfo Gilly, in which Marcos said that “the real creators of zapatismo were the translators, the theoreticians of zapatismo, people like Major Mario, Major Moisés, Major Ana María, all of those people who had to translate in dialects. Tacho, David, Zevedeo are really the theoreticians of zapatismo ... They constructed a new way of seeing the world.”⁶¹ Essentially, Henk argued that Western political philosophy inspired Guillén, and indigenous thought inspired Marcos.

While Dussel and Henk both argue that the Zapatista’s ideology is original because it seems to have no traces of Western thought, Christopher Gunderson, professor of sociology at Howard University, argues that Liberation Theology and Maoism provided the intellectual origins of the movement. The same year that Henk published his article, Gunderson wrote a dissertation on a similar topic: “The provocative cocktail: Intellectual origins of the Zapatista uprising, 1960–1994.” Referring to the native people of Chiapas, Gunderson pointed out that “while certain elements of the culture of the indigenous communities undoubtedly have pre-conquest origins, the meanings and organization of those elements were radically reconfigured in response to both the trauma of the conquest and the demands of the colonial order that was erected in its aftermath.”⁶² This makes it highly unlikely that the EZLN’s ideology and political traditions are purely Mayan. Like Dussel, however, Gunderson did acknowledge Las Casas as a major radical figure in Chiapas’ history of indigenous rights. According to Gunderson, the EZLN’s democratic practices seem more reminiscent of the religious confraternities that formed during the colonial era. In his words, he pointed out, “the *cofradia* was certainly more egalitarian than either the old pre-conquest order or the larger Spanish colonial order.”⁶³ It was through

⁶¹ Ibid., 449.

⁶² Christopher Gunderson, “The provocative cocktail: Intellectual origins of the Zapatista uprising, 1960–1994” (PhD diss. City University of New York, 2013), 157. PQDT Open (AAT 3589725).

⁶³ Gunderson, “The provocative cocktail,” 164.

these organizations that the indigenous communities asserted their dignity and equality for generations.

A complete history on the origins of the EZLN's ideology is beyond the scope of this discussion, but this is a brief summary of that narrative for the purpose of our discussion. In the early 1950s, the diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas trained indigenous men and women to be local catechists, and this is what eventually made the communities in Chiapas radicalized and literate. In 1960, the new bishop of Chiapas, Samuel Ruíz García, continued this practice and introduced liberation theology to the region. Even though liberation theology was not as popular in the rest of Mexico as it was in other Latin American countries, Ruíz did popularize it in Chiapas. He himself was present at the Second Vatican Council and the Latin American Bishop's Conference in Medellín.⁶⁴ Thus, Bishop Ruíz accelerated the literacy and social consciousness of the indigenous communities through liberation theology. Maoist organizations that emerged from the student movements of the 1960s, such as *Unión del Pueblo*, *Línea Proletaria*, and *the Organización Revolucionaria Compañero*, "trained the communities in the deliberative use of the assemblies as a means of systematically building popular political power."⁶⁵ After the Tlatelolco Massacre of 1968, many of these organizations went underground and secretly operated among the urban and rural poor of Mexico. Thus, they had a lot of success in Chiapas by organizing and training indigenous communities.

Conclusion

Of the three intellectuals discussed in this thesis, Enrique Dussel had the most tolerant and empathetic views toward indigenous peoples, but that is no reason to romanticize his works;

⁶⁴ Ibid., 241-244.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 275.

he had several shortcomings in his analyses. This discussion is by no means an attack on transmodernity or liberation philosophy. This chapter is simply meant to correct some of the historical facts in Dussel's research. In his chapter, Dussel did not provide any ancient Mayan writings or evidence that reveal any form of democratic practices before the Spanish conquest. Instead, he presented anecdotes of the Aztec conquest and made very little distinction between the two cultures. Henk, for his part, argued that there is no evidence that Subcommander Marcos, and by extension the EZLN, was influenced by the Marxism of Antonio Gramsci; therefore, their movement's ideology was originally Mayan. However, saying that there is no evidence for something does not prove or disprove anything; it only makes something less likely to be true. Gunderson points out that Maoism was embraced by the EZLN, independently of Marcos. In fact, Marcos called himself *Subcommander* rather than *Commander* because he never claimed to be the intellectual leader of the movement; he spoke on behalf of the movement.

Despite his shortcomings, it seems that Dussel only intended to showcase the Zapatistas as an example of how people of non-Western cultures can think for themselves about social issues that revolve around them, rather than relying on Western thinkers to do that for them. However, it must be argued that the Zapatistas should be celebrated for their intellectual resourcefulness. As Gunderson indicated, they were influenced by a unique Latin American spin on Christianity (Liberation Theology), and they were influenced by a unique Asian spin on Marxism (Maoism). Both of these intellectual resources are non-Western in origin, and a transmodern analysis could have been applied in this case. Had he done a complete research, Dussel could have applied his transmodern approach to reveal not only how the Zapatistas used non-Western intellectual sources for their cause but, most importantly, how they used non-Western sources other than their own. Being a liberation philosopher and an early participant of

liberation theology, Dussel would have been surprised to know that the Zapatistas share his values because they were radicalized by the same intellectual movement as his. Samuel Ruíz was a liberation theologian just like him.

However, it can be agreed that Dussel did not get everything wrong; he avoided Vasconcelos' and Zea's pro-assimilation views and respected indigenous diversity. Six years after he wrote his chapter on the Zapatistas, Dussel wrote an article titled "'Being-in-the-World-Hispanically': A World on the 'Border' of Many Worlds" (2009). In this article, he presented his views on Hispanic/Latino identity and argued that there is no "one way" of being Hispanic or Latino. The first line of his article said, "I DO NOT INTEND TO propose a utopic 'cosmic race' like that of José Vasconcelos ... but rather a moving discovery of the *hispanos* as 'located' creatively 'in-between' many worlds that continuously constitute a historical identity on the intercultural 'border.'"⁶⁶ In other words, according to Dussel, Latin Americans and their relatives in the United States live in a world within many worlds. In his own words, he explained, "The *hispano* can be an indigenous Guatemalan in Chicago, a Mexican *mestizo* in San Diego, a white *criollo* Uruguayan in Washington, an Afro-Caribbean Puerto Rican in New York or Cuban in Miami, a *mulato* from the Dominican Republic in Huston, to name few."⁶⁷ Clearly, Dussel explains that he does not expect Latin Americans or people of Latin American descent to be homogenous. Of Mexicans in the United States, for example, he pointed out that "When one encounters a ... Zapotec from Oaxaca ... one discovers a *hispano* who differs from many others who identify with this same cultural, historical, and political community."⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Enrique Dussel, "'Being-in-the-World-Hispanically': A World on the 'Border' of Many Worlds," *Comparative Literature* 61, no. 3 (2009): 261.

⁶⁷ Dussel, "Being-in-the-World-Hispanically," 262.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 263.

In the article, Dussel even celebrated Chicano muralism that was inspired by the indigenous styles of Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco – the artists who were hired by Vasconcelos after the 1910 Revolution but were not as appreciated by him. For Dussel, such murals represent the fact that indigenous and mestizo Mexicans, for the most part, identify their ancestral land as the Americas and do not see it as the “‘vacant’ land of John Locke or Walt Whitman.”⁶⁹ With a striking contrast to *La Raza Cósmica*, Dussel very explicitly expressed that Hispanics who have any form of indigenous ancestry should not be ashamed of their roots, but rather embrace them with dignity and pride. Likewise, Dussel argued that Hispanics can simultaneously embrace their European and African roots. Of white and mestizo Latinos, he argued that they “should be conscious of the fact that his/her language, culture, and Baroque religion all have a European component that cannot be denied and must be integrated with his/her Amerindian past.”⁷⁰ Of Afro-Latinos, he argued that “*Hispanicity* neither negates nor confuses *africanicity*.”⁷¹ Because he specifically wrote this article for a Latino audience in the United States, he concluded by saying that “This culture can show the North American citizen other continental horizons and impart an increased responsibility for the poverty of millions and for populations who are not just markets but dignified human beings.”⁷² Such a quote can relate to his reflection on the Zapatista uprising because it alludes to neoliberal economic practices, such as NAFTA, that caused the movement.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 263.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 268.

⁷¹ Ibid., 270.

⁷² Ibid., 273.

CONCLUSION

Vasconcelos, Zea, and Dussel were all compelled to confront the legacies of the conquest of Mexico so that they could better interpret the indigenous roles in the revolutions that they wrote about. They offered new ways of thinking about Mexican history so that they could express their opinions, values, and judgements towards these revolutionary participants and the social changes that would come about from these revolutions. What gave both the assimilationist and the pluralist philosophers the impetus to reflect on this matter were precisely the actions of indigenous revolutionaries who raised attention towards their conditions. Both the Mexican Revolution and the EZLN uprising were responses to the problematic outcomes of liberal and neoliberal economic policies that gave the northern, industrial nations and their investors the justification to take land and resources from the country without owing any moral obligation to the people who live there. Throughout the twentieth century, the mainstream milieu of Mexican philosophy has come a long way in terms of how it thinks about its race relations. The trajectory of racial thought, from Vasconcelos, to Zea, to Dussel, has made a significant shift from emphasizing racial and cultural assimilation into a homogenous national identity to emphasizing plurality and diversity within the nation. Vasconcelos and Zea believed that Mexico, as a singular nation, could stand up against the various forms of colonialism that have plagued its history, whereas Dussel believed that Mexico, as a plural nation, could do the former and challenge its own forms of racism and exclusion.

During Mexico's post-revolutionary era, Vasconcelos gained a very prestigious position as minister of public education, and he vowed to use his education programs to educate the rural mestizo and indigenous population to value only their Western heritage, primarily that of Spain. He did this by sending rural teachers modeled on the Franciscan missionaries who introduced

Christianity to the native population, and he also disseminated his own ideas about education, race, and culture through his magazine, *El Maestro*. In 1925, he published *La Raza C3smica* to express his hopes of Latin America being the vanguard of humanity as a homogenous race that included the what he deemed to be the best traits of all the other races. After resigning from SEP, he published autobiographies and history books in which he racialized Mexico's past in order to observe whether or not his vision of the cosmic race would be fulfilled.

During Mexico's economic miracle, Zea became one of the earliest and most prominent thinkers of decolonial philosophy and history. He made connections between Mexico's 1910 Revolution with other decolonial movements throughout the third world, and he expressed solidarity with them. However, the same ways in which he, perhaps mistakenly, saw all Africans as racially "African" or all Asians as racially "Asian," he too wanted to analyze Latin Americans as racially "Latin American." Mestizos, in his view, would be this "Latin American" race, and they would share their decolonial mission in unison, regardless of the heavier struggles that indigenous Latin Americans faced with their respective problems that arose from colonialism. It was easy for this assimilationist philosopher to identify mestizos, particularly of native and Spanish ancestry, as the "homogenous" population that would define the racial and cultural identity of Mexico. Afro-Mexicans and other ethnic groups within Mexico, including the significant demographic that identified as indigenous or predominantly indigenous, were not encouraged to showcase the "Many Mexicos" that more accurately portrays the diverse histories, experiences, and cultural expressions that can be found within Mexico's borders.

In the age of neoliberalism, from the signing of NAFTA onwards, Dussel reflected on the Zapatista uprising of Chiapas to advocate respect for their culture and ways of life. Although he was originally from Argentina, Dussel was committed to address all of Latin America's social

and historical realities, as he participated, very early on, in liberation theology and liberation philosophy. This was his approach to ethically defend the Zapatistas' cause of asserting their land rights and human dignity. The pluralist philosophers, like Dussel, had far more sensitivity towards the excluded communities and individuals whose marginalized conditions were the result of colonialism, racism, patriarchy, and class oppression. By recognizing the unequal conditions of particular members in Mexican society, liberation thinkers, like Dussel, realized that there are problems that national unity alone could not solve. Dussel realized that specific groups of people have specific needs and require different modes or degrees of assistance. However, Dussel's claim that the EZLN's ideology is "pre-Columbian" implicates that he saw indigenous Mexicans' values and world views as being static and no different from before the Spanish conquest.

Vasconcelos, Zea, and Dussel all wanted to provide critiques of Latin America's social and historical realities to make sense of the racial inequalities and tensions that arose during the times of the Mexican Revolution and the Chiapas uprising. Fortunately, today, assimilation is less commonly promoted in Mexico's universities and academic circles. In our present time, especially in the United States, academia is fascinated and very willing to explore various ways of decolonizing their curriculum. However, as this thesis demonstrated, the earliest decolonial thinkers in Latin America had their unfair prejudices, and they have been challenged as newer generations of decolonial scholars started updating their worldviews. What must be understood from this discussion is that the opinions, judgements, and values of past scholars are reflections of their own time periods, and that suggests that no one interpretation or argument from a scholar is final and complete. Scholars need to evolve, and new generations of scholars need to build upon and revise what was done before them. As explained in the introduction, Pope Francis' visit

to Chiapas in 2016 and Alfonso Cuarón's *Roma* have brought mainstream attention to Mexico's indigenous people who are often overlooked by other issues, such as government corruption, drug trafficking, and immigration. Within Mexico and all of Latin America, there should be a greater effort to make connections between race and colorism to issues of inequality and class struggles because people of color, including most mestizos, in this region tend to be the most marginalized. Today, the people of Mexico continue to reflect on who they are, what they share in common with other Mexicans, and what makes them different from other Mexicans.

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