DEFIANT PEOPLE, STUPID PEOPLE: THE MEXICAN LIBERAL PROJECT, ITS CONDESCENDING DEPICTION OF AMERINDIANS, AND THE ACCULTURATION OF THE COLONIZED OTHER

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the discursive practices of the Mexican liberals regarding ignorance and knowledge during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century. These practices infantilized the indigenous population, derided their traditions, and frantically advocated for their acculturation. The racialized portrayal of the ignorant Other cannot be understood without the colonial anxieties triggered by indigenous revolts. Accordingly, this thesis tries to explain why cultural cleansing is such an imperative for colonial projects. Simultaneously, this thesis focuses on how these colonial projects aimed to accomplish a thorough acculturation. Exclusion is never categorical in colonial projects such as the one implemented by the Mexican liberals. However, the conditional inclusion of the colonial Other demands her cultural capitulation.

In order to achieve these objectives, I offer a close reading of three different sets of texts. The first one (although it is not part of the liberal canon) offers a better understanding of the origins of the liberal discourse. Sahagún's evangelizing strategy, as outlined in his *Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva España*, offers an interesting parallelism to the civilizing strategy pursued by the Mexican liberals during the nineteenth century (chapter I). The second set of texts I analyze are the records of the Constitutional Congress of 1856-1857 (chapter II). I focus on the debates regarding religious freedom because these discussions are telling of the extent to which the Mexican liberal project was a racialized project, even when we account for the core elements of its creed. Additionally, these discussions highlight the relationship between colonial anxieties and the need for acculturation. Finally, I analyze the oeuvre of Emilio Rabasa, a key source for understanding the rationale behind cultural cleansing (chapter III). Rabasa tried to reconcile the

colonial project with purported democratic convictions. His solution (i.e., the thorough and efficient cultural cleansing of Amerindian Otherness) is relevant because it underscores the importance of culture for colonizing projects, and because it offers a clearer picture of what efficient acculturation actually means. For the *fin de siècle* liberals (and for Sahagún), cultural cleansing cannot be accomplished by merely universalizing formal education. For acculturation to produce optimal results, an in-depth, multifaceted, and permanent disciplinary process must take place.

Finally, this thesis applies the genealogical approach to better understand the discursive practices deployed by the Mexican liberals. The liberal project was neither the only rational alternative nor the inevitable outcome of historical evolution. The (re)emergence of conceptual oppositions such as civilization and barbarianism, as well as the new iterations of the will to know, cannot be fully understood without considering their conditions of possibility. If the Mexican liberals emphasized so vigorously that the inclusion of the Indigenous population in the westernized society was conditional on their acculturation, this is so because they feared that Indigenous revolts may lead to the collapse of their colonial project. However, colonial anxieties where not unwarranted: Amerindian rebelliousness may have been exaggerated by the liberal intelligentsia, but rural revolts became a constant feature of Mexican society during the second half of the nineteenth century. Thus, this thesis underscores the linkage between the trope of the uncivilized Other and the colonial interests of the Mexican political elite.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In Trieste, one of the few references to my country was a local business called “Mexico” … It was a strip club.

The tortilla chip bags that are sold at Billa are decorated with cacti and sombreros … The chips are called “Mexicanos” … The brand that produces them is Austrian (the creator of Speedy Gonzales could not be prouder).

Neighbor S approached me to ask me a 'serious' question. He wanted to know if I was somehow related to Mexican drug lords. According to him, I have a ‘stereotypical narco look’ ... Neighbor S gets his news about Mexican drug lords from an on-demand series. (Thank you for creating and spreading new stereotypes of my country, Netflix) ... For Mexican standards, I am a White(ish) privileged male. Just because of my phenotypic traits, most strangers would assume I am a well-to-do and decent man.

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Classmate A said she felt safer going out at night in her hometown than in Favoriten … She added that there are not that many immigrants in her home country. Apparently, the Whiter a district is, the safer it becomes.

While discussing colonialism in India and the need for reparations, classmate C argued that colonialism was ‘not that bad’ because the colonizers also built bridges and trains … She was not kidding … Classmate C was one of the recipients of the Alumni Scholarship.

Classmate D complained about some of the readings for one of our courses. He claimed that one of the authors criticized the West too much. He described this text as a ‘political manifesto’, as a text not suitable for being discussed in an academic setting. Apparently, the people from the Global South are so backward that they cannot even write scholarly papers that

comply with the standards of (Western) academia. Apparently, the Western way of writing scholarly articles is the only thinkable format in which true knowledge can be reproduced and disseminated. Why should he, such an intelligent and dedicated student, be forced to read this kind of underdeveloped rubbish? … The topic of the course was colonial rule and its micro-physics.

Classmate K argued that we do not need more courses on the history of regions like Africa and Latin America because we already have a class about global history… Classmate K was not kidding either… Classmate K made this claim while performing his duties as a student representative… He actually never consulted us about this discussion, nor did he brief us about his activities as a student representative.

Professor I is a vocal advocate of imperialism. He has justified 'lesser' forms of torture by reproducing the Orientalizing trope of the evil terrorist…Professor I teaches one of the most popular graduate 'seminars' on Human Rights.

Some people argue that studying Latin America at the CEU History Department is out of place. After all, if the name of the University is CENTRAL EUROPEAN University, why should the institution encourage or even support the research on non-Central European regions? … The history of the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and Ukraine are some of the most popular research topics in the department nowadays.

CEU will focus its recruitment efforts on its "traditional regions" (What is wrong with people from Latin America? Are we too uncivilized or is it that we do not have as much money as the Americans and the Europeans?) ... CEU prides itself of being "one of the most densely international universities in the world" … The vestibule of the Vienna campus is decorated with larger-than-life portraits of students of color (did someone say tokenism?).

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According to the thematic organization of the Weltmuseum room “Stories from Mesoamerica”, Amerindians played exotic sports, believed in many gods (and superstitions), and elaborated colorful handicrafts ... The museography does not include a single word about their scientific production, their philosophy, or their mastery of ‘higher’ art forms … This is not a souvenir shop that caters to the whims of the average Western tourist in Cancun, but an actual ethnographic museum in the Global North.

In the same room's section dedicated to huipiles (a textile traditionally weaved by Indigenous women in Mexico and Central America), there is a picture of a group of women in the Mayan community of Xecam in the Guatemalan department of Quetzaltenango. The Indigenous women of this community are famous for the quality of their traditional textiles. However, only one of the 21 women is identified by her name... the White Austrian curator responsible for acquiring (i.e., not weaving) the huipiles. Authorship is still part of White privilege.

The Amerindian objects from the Colonial period possessed by the Weltmuseum stem from the treasure chambers and cabinets of curiosities of the Hapsburgs. Specifically, Ferdinand II, Archduke of Further Austria, was responsible for amassing an important amount of these objects. Moctezuma's headdress was described as a "Moorish hat" in Ferdinand II's treasure chamber inventory at Schloss Ambras. (However, this is not the only Amerindian object from this collection that was so noticeably misidentified.) Neither the inventory of the Hapsburgs' treasure chamber nor modern historians are able to provide a clear reconstruction of how the Penacho arrived in Austria … Despite these clear indications of art trafficking, the Weltmuseum

consistently (and unmockingly) describes Ferdinand II as a generous art collector… Even the British Museum acknowledges that the Benin bronzes were plundered by imperialist troops.

The Penacho is arguably the most popular object in the Weltmuseum collection. It is not only a must-see for everyone who visits the museum; the Weltmuseum itself displays prominently Moctezuma's headdress on its website and in its institutional advertising campaign… The Weltmuseum has not only refused to repatriate the Penacho, but it has not offered any reparations to the Nahua people… Souvenirs with the image of the Penacho are amongst the best-selling products in the Weltmuseum's gift shop.

According to the Weltmuseum, one of the individuals who 'bequeathed' to the institution most of its pre-Columbian Amerindian objects was Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian of Hapsburg … Maximilian 'collected' these objects after entering Mexico as a nineteenth-century Denis Pushilin… Although he styled himself as 'Emperor of Mexico', his main source of 'legitimacy' was the military support of the invading forces of the Second French Empire… Despite the lack of finesse that enabled his ~~imperial adventures~~ collecting activity in Mexico, the Weltmuseum not only described Maximilian as a 'passionate' art collector, but also as the 'Emperor' of Mexico.

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INTRODUCTION

> *Imperialism used to be the white man's burden. This gave it a bad reputation. But imperialism doesn't stop being necessary because it is politically incorrect. Nations sometimes fail, and when they do, only outside help—imperial power—can get them back on their feet.*
> Michael Grant Ignatieff

> *Los españoles fuimos allí y acabamos con el poder de tribus que asesinaban con crueldad y saña a sus vecinos, y que por eso, unos pocos ayudados por los que eran perseguidos y esclavizados, se conquistó y civilizó esa tierra. [*sic*]*
> *[We, the Spaniards, went there and put an end to the power of tribes that murdered their neighbors with cruelty and fury. Thus, a few of us, with the help of those who were persecuted and slaved, conquered and civilized those lands.]*
> Rafael Hernando Fraile, current Senator and former spokesperson of the Spanish People's Party, 26.3.2019.

> *La labor civilizatoria hispana expandió los horizontes de pueblos indígenas hasta entonces encerrados en un microcosmos biológico e histórico —se desconocían unos a otros— abriéndolos al mundo, relacionándolos entre sí e integrándolos en una totalidad hispanoamericana.*
> *[The Hispanic civilizing labor expanded the horizons of indigenous peoples hitherto trapped in a biological and historical microcosm —they ignored each other— opening them to the world, relating them to each other, and integrating them in a Hispanic American totality.]*
> Francisco Jose Contreras, current Member of the Spanish Congress of Deputies of VOX, 6.6.2020.

This thesis explores the central role acculturation plays in colonial projects. I argue that acculturation is not a side effect of colonialism, but one of its driving forces. Colonial projects are doomed to fail wherever the colonized Other survives. In order to dispel colonial anxieties,

cultural cleansing has to be thorough. The colonized Other hides in the most unsuspected places; it lurks behind ambiguous gestures and awkward silences. To the settler's gaze, even the most pious actions may hide a sacrilegious double meaning. The overseer is permanently assailed by the ghost of insubordination. For the colonizing eye, there are few things more disconcerting and threatening than the unruly barbarian who insists on speaking her own unintelligible language and who uses this obscure code to organize with her peers.

Indigenous cultures not only provide a blueprint for non-colonial alternatives; they also offer the means to disseminate cryptic references that remain inaccessible to the policing eye of the foreman. Accordingly, the fearful settler is obsessed with nipping rebelliousness in the bud. And once the colonizer figures out that unruliness is enabled (and even encouraged) by Indigenous cultures, he knows where to strike. Thus, acculturation amounts to defusing a potential threat. From the colonizer's perspective, the acculturation of the native population is an auspicious indicator of the effectiveness of his disciplinary techniques.

Therefore, acculturation in colonial settings is one of the main themes of this thesis. However, this is not a comprehensive analysis of how acculturation operates nor of its multifaceted effects. I focus on the colonial projects that ravaged the Amerindian communities that inhabit the territory of what is today known as Mexico. My object of analysis is the discursive practices that enable acculturation. Specifically, I am interested in studying how the claim to true knowledge was used to infantilize and tutor the colonized Other.

Knowledge and power have always been coconspirators. Oligarchs discovered since Antiquity the antidemocratic effects of the will to know. Although knowledge and domination are by no means perfect synonyms, we often find them together in contemporary societies. Colonial settings are not an exception to this trend, but here the binomial knowledge-domination

faces special challenges. In order to banish the (alter)native ways of inhabiting the world, colonial projects must double-down on displacing local knowledges. If hegemonic knowledges permanently try to belittle their competitors, native and established projects are particularly threatening in colonial settings.

But the colonizers know all too well that their interests may seem both prosaic and unpopular. Consequently, they have to promote discursive practices that make the colonial project more palatable to their audience. They do not present themselves as overprivileged warmongers, bigoted exploiters, or greedy pillagers, but as an altruistic force that helps unsuccessful nations to get back on their feet. They are not the bearers of genocide, sexual violence, and dispossession, but the custodians of progress, civilization, and justice. When they look back to contemplate their legacy, they do not see a somber wake of misery and devastation, but the bright dawn of a new era. Of course, these discursive practices are not mere ideology. They are ways of inhabiting the world that regulate how knowledge is produced; they simultaneously foreclose and enable certain ways of interpreting reality.

In the last five centuries, colonial discursive practices in Mexico have been transformed and have been adapted to the changing conditions of possibility. It is not my purpose to offer a comprehensive catalog of these discursive practices, but to analyze one of the most popular ones in Mexico during the last half of the nineteenth century: that of the Mexican liberals. Mexican liberalism has traditionally been portrayed as a consequential ideology for fighting the conservatives and their unpatriotic project, and for overcoming the threat imposed by European colonial powers. Furthermore, Mexican institutions in the nineteenth century cannot be explained without referring to how liberalism shaped their development. Nevertheless, the colonial dimension of Mexican liberalism is often overlooked. Even when racism is acknowledged as a

pervasive feature of Mexican history, the liberal project does not seem to be significantly connected to racist assumptions. However, the liberal project played a major role in enabling the infantilization and the dispossession of Indigenous communities. Consequently, analyzing the discursive practices of the Mexican liberals will offer us a better understanding of the close relationship between the colonial project, the infantilization of the colonized Other, and the acculturation of the Indigenous population.

The overarching research question that inspired this thesis is the following: What was the relationship between knowledge, cultural cleansing, and colonial settings in Mexico during the second half of the nineteenth century? However, in order to satisfactorily answer this question, this research also required addressing the following problems: Why is cultural cleansing supposed to be necessary? What are the purported benefits of acculturation? Is the acculturation of Amerindian communities the logical and necessary conclusion of unbiased reasoning? Is it the unavoidable consequence of progress and social evolution? What are its conditions of possibility? Is this discourse completely new? What is the source of its constitutive elements? In what ways are knowledge and epistemic hierarchies conducive to acculturation? What was the relationship between acculturation and the social mechanisms that regulate inclusion and exclusion?

Before I fully engage with these questions, it is important to explain from a theoretical perspective why acculturation and colonial projects are so closely related. Is it justified to describe Mexican Liberalism as a colonial project? Is it not the case that colonialism implies exclusively relations between nations? An important point of departure to understand the relationship between acculturation and the Mexican colonial projects is the theory of internal colonialism. In a nutshell, this theory claims that the independence of American countries from

the European metropolis did not lead to the liberation of the indigenous peoples. The configuration of the nation state originated a new type of colonial relationship and thus reinvented domination.[1] Unequal development and the division of labor that ensues from it are not exclusive of international relations. Within the territory of the nation state, we can also find unequal development. In this case, division of labor and exploitation are organized along cultural lines. Thus, one of the contributions of the theory of internal colonialism was highlighting the relevance of culture for understanding colonial projects.[2]

However, while this theory pays significant attention to exploitation, it does not explain why acculturation is conducive to strengthening the colonial project. In fact, some of the formulations of this theory might suggest that acculturation is not such an undesirable outcome given that it would simplify and strengthen social contradictions. Culture provides the coordinates for locating colonial exploitation, but it is barely regarded as a tool that may be used to either further or counter colonial projects. Culture does play a role in colonial settings, but only as a secondary intervening factor. In other words, according to the theory of internal colonialism, culture can only help us to understand *where* exploitation takes place, but it is not relevant as an active force of oppression and resistance.

[1] Andrés Fábregas, *Historia mínima del indigenismo en America Latina*, Historia mínima (México: El Colegio de México, 2021), 152. The two seminal works of this approach are Pablo González Casanova, "Sociedad Plural, Colonialismo Interno y Desarrollo," *América Latina* 6, no. 3 (1963): 15–32; Rodolfo Stavenhagen, *Clases, colonialismo y aculturación: Ensayo sobre un sistema de relaciones interétnicas en Mesoamérica* (Editorial J. de Pineda Ibarra, Ministerio de Educación, 1968).

[2] This theory directly addressed the "indigenismo" of the twentieth century. *Indigenismo* can be characterized as a state policy that claimed that the Indigenous population would achieve its liberation by assimilating itself to the national state and becoming part of the proletariat. On the contrary, the theory of internal colonialism was skeptical about the emancipatory effects of assimilation. However, Indigenismo is not a mere repetition of the nineteenth-century liberal acculturation. While the *indigenistas* admitted that the Amerindians where exploited, the liberals ignored the class dimension of the problem and assumed that the economic integration of Indigenous people in the capitalist society was an advantage. For a brief summary of this debate, see Fábregas, *Historia mínima del indigenismo en America Latina*, 152–69.

Consequently, to better understand the role that culture plays in colonial settings, it is important to adopt a theoretical point of departure that acknowledges the relative autonomy of cultural factors. There is a long tradition of research that has emphasized that culture is not merely an epiphenomenon. Max Weber, Antonio Gramsci, and the Frankfurt School are only the best-known representatives of this trend. However, since I am interested in exploring the role acculturation plays in colonial settings, a better theoretical approach can be found in Ann Stoler's research. The approach of Stoler to cultural racism in colonial settings is particularly important for understanding why acculturation played a major role in the Mexican liberal project.

Stoler is aware that the strong relationship between race, culture, and national identity has always been a feature of the colonial landscape.[3] A recurring element of colonial settings is that not everyone gets to enjoy the privileges of citizenship. But how do the colonizers decide who are the fortunate ones who can be entrusted with full citizenship? What are the markers of national identity? In countries such as Mexico, where *métissage* became a widespread practice since the early stages of colonization, and where authority oscillated between incorporation and distancing of the colonized Other, race is not a useful criterion for deciding which individuals are susceptible to be included in the national community. Consequently, in contexts where we routinely find individuals with an ambiguous racial membership, cultural competencies became an important criterion for defining who gets to be classified as a citizen: "cultural competence, family form, and middle-class morality became the salient new criteria for marking subjects, nationals, citizens, and different kinds of citizens in the nation-state."[4] In such contexts, it is a series of invisible moral bonds which upholds colonial divides, and which marks racist

[3] Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (University of California Press, 2010), 97.
[4] Stoler, 100.

pedigrees.[5] It is not that race does not matter anymore in settings where *métissage* has become an ubiquitous practice. But since race as a series of phenotypic traits is a poor indicator of loyalty, it has to be redefined in cultural terms. Therefore, in such contexts, a collusion between race and culture as markers of colonial identity is to be expected.

This emphasis on culture explains the special status of education in colonial settings. Education becomes a powerful tool for colonial authorities not only because it helps construct national identity, but also because it modulates desires for privilege and tempers aspirations.[6] By domesticating unreasonable expectations, education contributes to the stability of the colonial order. Moreover, education not only inculcates the right values, but it eradicates attitudes that may undermine colonial rule. This is the reason why education and upbringing became central elements of colonial projects all around the world.

However, the colonial order is always on the verge of a nervous breakdown.[7] Despite their outward image of strength and virility, colonial settings are populated with anxieties. Even where education and upbringing are actively implemented to exorcize the threat of insubordination, there is no assurance that these procedures will yield satisfactory results. The specter of the "indigene in disguise" is particularly triggering for colonial anxieties.[8] It is all too easy to dress up and adopt the appearance of the colonizer but remain deeply native; it is all too easy to take part in the colonial education system but remain faithful to Indigenous traditions. Therefore, it is never enough to imbibe colonial subjects with a couple of Western habits, or to

[5] Stoler, 87.
[6] Stoler, 95.
[7] Harald Fischer-Tiné, ed., *Anxieties, Fear and Panic in Colonial Settings: Empires on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (Springer, 2017).
[8] Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 94.

make them memorize a couple of phrases from the colonial creed. Acculturation has to be thorough in order to dispel the threat of insubordination.

Accordingly, culture is not only a criterion for marking potential citizens and emphasizing colonial divides, but also for appeasing colonial anxieties. Similarly, acculturation is not only a useful mechanism for efficiently defining who gets to be a full member of Westernized societies, but also for inhibiting the undesired emergence of defiant dissidents.

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In the first chapter of this thesis, I analyze an early attempt to legitimate and improve the acculturation of Amerindian people. Bernardino de Sahagún was not only a pioneer of anthropological studies but also an articulate advocate of the acculturation of the Amerindian population. His approach is all the more interesting not only because it antedates the liberal project by almost three centuries, but also because it is explicitly driven by religious convictions. Thus, its analysis will allow us to gauge the extent to which the liberal project iterated a discursive practice that appeared first in a religious context.

In chapter II, I analyze the racialized arguments regarding religious freedom that were presented during the Constitutional Convention of 1856-1857. Some of these arguments directly advocated for the acculturation of indigenous peoples. The men who participated in this process were distinguished members of the Mexican political elite and consistently manifested their liberal convictions. In addition to offering us a better understanding of the Constitution of 1857 —a critical element of the liberal project during the second half of the nineteenth century—, the proceedings of the constitutional debates documented those arguments and ideas that resulted more persuasive to the Mexican political class.

In chapter III, I offer a close reading of the works of Emilio Rabasa, one of the most influential liberal ideologues at the turn of the nineteenth century. The advantages of this close reading are manifold: on the one hand, since Rabasa addressed explicitly, the 'Indian problem', analyzing his works will allow us to better understand what the assumptions behind acculturation and the exclusion/inclusion of the Indigenous population are. On the other, since Rabasa revisited several times the topic of civilizing the uncivilized, it will be easier to compare his views on this topic to those upheld by the previous generations of Mexican liberals and by Bernardino de Sahagún.

I. From Doctors of the Souls to Engineers of Civilization: The Evolution of the Discursive Practices Regarding Indigenous Ignorance

Antidemocratic discourses that enable the exclusion of the average human being are not new. At least since Plato, epistemic credentials became one of the foremost excuses for excluding people from decision-making.[9] However, modernity produced a different type of epistemic-based exclusionary discourse, one that tried to reconcile apparent democratic ideals with the deliberate attempt to debar the average citizen from full-fledged political participation. For example, Hamilton and Madison combined a condescending discourse about the average human being with a justification of representative government[10]. Similarly, John Stuart Mill argued for tutoring the participation of certain strata of society despite writing one of the most popular arguments for representative institutions.[11]

In this chapter, I will analyze how a similar discourse developed in Mexico in the nineteenth century. This discourse aimed to exclude Indigenous people from participating in politics, while simultaneously extolling representative democracy. However, this discourse was not a complete novelty. It mirrored the arguments of the Spanish spiritual colonizers that invaded Abya Yala in the sixteenth century. In order to better understand the inner workings of this discourse, first I will briefly explain why it makes sense to reassess the strong separation between

[9] Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, trans. Allan David Bloom (375BC; repr., New York: Basic Books, 2016).
[10] James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers: The Gideon Edition* (1787–1788; repr., Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001).
[11] John Stuart Mill, "Considerations on Representative Government," in *Essays on Politics and Society*, ed. John M. Robson, vol. 18, 33 vols., Collected Works of John Stuart Mill (1861; repr., Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

secular and religious ideas. This theoretical approach will allow me to better explain why it makes sense to try to trace an analogy between the secular discourses of the Mexican liberals during the nineteenth century regarding indigenous traditions and the Christian discursive practices of the Spanish missionaries regarding Amerindian religions. Secondly, I will briefly describe how Mexican liberals portrayed Indigenous people and their role in society. Finally, I will point out some of the similarities between the demeaning discourse that the European missionaries used to undermine Amerindian traditions, and the infantilizing discourse deployed by the Mexican political elite to exclude Indigenous people from certain rights.

I.1 SECULARITY AND RELIGION: TWO IRRECONCILABLE ANTAGONISTS?

Secular institutions and values seem to be opposed to religion. Apparently, the evolution of secularity implies a rejection of religious practices. According to this interpretation, the evolution of modern societies implies an unbridgeable divide between secularity and religiosity. However, recent analyses of the development of some of the most representative Western secular institutions have underscored that they cannot be understood without pointing out their religious inspiration. Ideas such as autonomy and modern humanism cannot be satisfactorily understood without addressing their religious underpinnings.

For example, according to Jerome B. Schneewind, in order to understand how Kant invented the idea of autonomy, it is important to trace the intellectual debates within Christian tradition that influenced the development of moral thought.[12] Even though Kantian ethics is a paradigmatic example of a coherent and thorough secular philosophy, it would be impossible to

[12] Jerome B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

understand how it originated without taking into account that Kant was trying to offer a solution to the tensions that characterized Christian moral thought. Moreover, these religious debates would be hard to explain without acknowledging that moral philosophers had in mind the different challenges posed by religious wars.

Similarly, according to Frank Kelleter, even the way we debate is embedded in religious practices.[13] Kelleter has analyzed how communicative practices developed in the British North American colonies. During the formative years that would culminate with the American Revolution, a series of intellectual disputes took place throughout the colonies. The concurrence of different rational discourses produced new ways of thinking and communication. These concurring discourses contrasted and debated their own sets of beliefs. Kelleter holds that the American Enlightenment is characterized by its continuous endorsement of inquiry and its rejection of dogmatism. Therefore, one of the most long-lasting legacies of the American Enlightenment is not a fixed set of ideas, but the communicative practices it instituted.

But this crucial transformation of communicative practices in North America was not the calculated result of a secular agenda. According to Kelleter, the Great Awakening —the religious revival movement that started during the first decades of the 17th century— not only shaped the mental and cultural foundations of the American colonies; it also enabled the emergence of an unprecedented public sphere[14]. Kelleter argues that this transformation was initiated "by religious extremists who practiced a Protestant faith both radically individualized and radically reproducible, centered on the masses"[15]. Most of the concurring discourses that shaped

[13] Frank Kelleter, *Amerikanische Aufklärung Sprachen der Rationalität im Zeitalter der Revolution* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2002), https://d-nb.info/965224333/04.
[14] Frank Kelleter, "Great Awakening and Enlightenment," in *A Companion to American Cultural History: From the Colonial Period to the End of the 19th Century*, ed. Bernd Engler and Oliver Scheiding (Trier: WVT, 2009), 163–90.
[15] Kelleter, 166.

communicative practices had strong religious affiliations. Therefore, it was a religious event that inspired this momentous transformation. The modernization of public communication in the US could not be understood without accounting for the substantive changes that took place in the field of religious discourse and practice.

Of course, the influence of religion should not be reduced to merely shaping some of the central tenets and practices of secularity. Religion has enabled secularization itself. Specifically, researchers such as Saba Mahmood have underlined that Christian Protestantism has played a major role in forging our understanding of secularity.[16] According to Mahmood, the development of secularism and core values of Western modernity such as freedom of speech are not neutral, nor have they followed a natural evolutionary path. These ideas have been shaped by Western modernity and by the separation between subject and object. However, people in Western societies tend to forget the sociohistorical roots and the epistemological presuppositions of secularity; we frequently disregard the extent to which a very particular set of values and ideas influenced the contemporary configuration of the public sphere. In Mahmood words: "secularism has historically entailed the regulation and re-formation of religious beliefs, doctrines, and practices to yield a particular normative conception of religion (that is largely Protestant Christian in its contours)".[17] In other words, the historical process that has led to secularity has been underpinned by a set of epistemological assumptions that normalize certain religious practices while misrepresenting others. The way we currently inhabit the public sphere has been influenced by how certain Western religions understand reality and produce knowledge.

[16] Saba Mahmood, "Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 4 (2009): 836–62, https://doi.org/10.1086/599592.
[17] Mahmood, 858.

A similar analysis of the relationship between religion and secularism can be found in the latter work of Charles Taylor.[18] The Canadian researcher has focused on reinterpreting what secularization means and how this process has been enabled. The secularization process described by Taylor does not mean that religion is slowly but relentlessly decaying away; people are not inevitably becoming unbelievers. For Taylor, the conditions of belief have changed. While in non-secular societies believing in God is unchallenged and unproblematic, individuals in secular societies experience faith as just one option among others: "Belief in God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives".[19] However, if faith is just one of many options, what do the other options look like? According to Taylor, one of the distinguishing features of secular societies is the appearance of exclusive humanism as a widely available alternative to traditional faith.[20] This modern type of humanism implies that fullness can be found within human life. Moreover, human flourishing has become an end in itself. In other words, this self-sufficient humanism is not subordinated to ideals beyond this life, and transcendent goals are not necessary for acknowledging its importance.

But Taylor is not exclusively interested in offering a new definition of secularization. A central part of his analysis is describing the conditions that enabled this process. Taylor highlights that one of the driving forces that modified the conditions of belief and that produced exclusive humanism was orthodox Christianity. The earlier developments within this tradition are key for understanding secularization.[21] Therefore, Taylor does not assume that this process was set in motion by a group of unbelievers whose conscious objective was to undermine religiosity.

[18] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674044289.
[19] Taylor, 3.
[20] Taylor, 18.
[21] Taylor, 19.

Following Taylor's interpretation, if we want to understand our secular world, it is important to analyze its religious foundations.

All these examples show that claiming that there is a strong division between secularity and religiosity is historically unfounded. Secular ideas and institutions are intimately related to religious practices. In the following sections I will explore the extent to which a set of religious discursive practices might have provided the blueprint for the solution to the "Indian problem" formulated by the Mexican liberals during the second half of the nineteenth century.

I.2 THE LIBERAL PROJECT AND THE ACCULTURATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

In nineteenth-century Mexico, the increasing tensions between Indigenous communities and the westernized elite was one of the most predictable consequences of the liberal project. One of the foremost aims of Mexican liberalism was to create a society in which only individuals were the subjects of law. This view on how societies should be administered also implied the disappearance of Indigenous communities as legal subjects. Furthermore, according to Luis Gonzalez, the acculturation of indigenous peoples was a central element of the liberal project.[22] Indigenous traditions had become a hindrance for national unity. Indigenous languages and traditional property relations should disappear in order to fulfill the ideal of progress.

Therefore, we should not understand the disregard for Indigenous communities as an unintended collateral event. Mexican liberals had been trying to solve the Indigenous 'problem' for decades. The *ladino* elite became increasingly conscious that Indigenous communities obstructed the liberal project. For example, José María Luis Mora, one of the most influential

[22] Luis González, "El Liberalismo Triunfante," in *Historia General de México*, ed. Daniel Cosío Villegas, 4th ed., Volumen II (1976; repr., El Colegio de Mexico, 1994), 897–1016.

ideologues within the liberal camp, advocated for suppressing the differentiated legal status of indigenous people at least since 1824.[23] If one assumed that this legal equalization amounted to a strong commitment to the dignity of Indigenous people, one would be downright mistaken. Mora thought that "in their actual state, and until they go through considerable changes, [Indigenous people] will not be able to achieve the same level of enlightenment, civilization, and culture of Europeans; neither will they be able to stand on equal footing to them in a society where both the former and the latter take part".[24] He referred to Indigenous people as the "base and vile remains of the Mexican ancient population".[25] Moreover, he argued that they were only capable of "bloody revolutions" and "irreconcilable hate".[26] Accordingly, he regarded them as a threat to the stability of the social structure.

Certainly, Mora was not alone in this grim racist assessment of Indigenous communities. From the perspective of the westernized elite, Indigenous people were an undisciplined element that obstructed progress. Porfirio Diaz, the infamous dictator that was ousted by the Mexican Revolution, was an ardent believer in the need to subdue the Indigenous population. Not only did his government brutally suppress the expressions of Mayan discontent during the last phase of the so-called *Guerra de Castas*; he also supported the idea that the only good Indian is the disciplined and hardworking one: "We will not find peace until we see every Indian with his pole in hand, behind his yoke of oxen, and plowing his land".[27]

[23] Carlos Montemayor, *Los pueblos indios de México* (México: Debolsillo, 2008), 67.
[24] Cited in Montemayor, 68.
[25] Cited in Montemayor, 68.
[26] Cited in Montemayor, 69.
[27] Cited in González, "El Liberalismo Triunfante," 964. This is probably one of the most important differences between Mexican liberalism and other colonial projects. For example, while US settlers such as Philip Henry Sheridan fantasized with exterminating Native Americans, Mexican liberals dreamed of whitening the Mexican Amerindians. In the end, the Mexican political elite had to come to terms with the fact that they could not survive as a nation without exploiting the indigenous population. For an account of how the infamous American proverb disseminated, see Wolfgang Mieder, "'The Only Good Indian Is a Dead Indian': History and Meaning of a

In fact, one of the main reasons why the westernized elite upheld such contemptuous opinions about Indigenous people was that the latter refused to comply with the labor conditions demanded by progress. One of the best-reputed members of the westernized aristocracy suggested that a hundred thousand European immigrants were worth more than half a million indigenous Mexicans.[28] This is an instance of the landed elite's frustration with the unsatisfactory results of commercial agriculture during the last half of the nineteenth century. The elite did not blame the geographic conditions for the meager output of commercial agriculture; they did not accept that their subpar management skills and their abusive labor practices also contributed to low productivity rates; moreover, they did not question the legitimacy of their concept of progress. Instead, they decided that Indigenous people and their culture was to blame. Accordingly, the working ethos of European immigrants was to be preferred over Indigenous people and their non-lucrative traditions. However, since the number of Europeans willing to immigrate to Mexico was so low, only one option remained: disciplining the Indigenous population became a central part of the liberal project.

Discipline was to be instilled both by violent means (*i.e.*, by subduing outbursts of non-compliance) and by non-violent means such as education. Therefore, the education project of the liberals relied heavily on homogenization. This was a period when positivistic education reforms were carried out across the country. Alphabetization in Spanish became a central element in the acculturation of Indigenous people. And although Spanish was certainly the lingua franca in a country as diverse as Mexico, the new education project did not seek to provide indigenous communities with the necessary means to adapt to new existential conditions; its objective was

Proverbial Stereotype," *The Journal of American Folklore* 106, no. 419 (1993): 38–60, https://doi.org/10.2307/541345.

[28] González, "El Liberalismo Triunfante," 966.

to uproot the indigenous traditions and languages.[29] This process only produced mixed results, but there is no doubt that it was driven by the pursuit of cultural homogeneity.

I.3 Religious Truth and Evangelization: a Blueprint for the Liberal Tutoring of Uncivilized People

Despite their avowed secular commitment, the approach of the Mexican liberals to the "Indian problem" is not completely new. The European missionaries that arrived in New Spain in the sixteenth century had already deployed a very similar discourse to decimate and subordinate Indigenous cultures. One of the most interesting examples of these discursive practices was provided by Bernardino de Sahagún (1499-1590) in his *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España* (General History of the things of New Spain). In this section, by way of a close reading of Fray Bernardino's *History*, I will analyze the elements of his religious discourse that may have been iterated by the Mexican liberals under a secular guise in order to expand and deepen the colonization of Indigenous peoples.

Sahagún was a Franciscan friar who arrived in New Spain in 1529 and stayed there until his death in 1590. Like many other missionaries, Fray Bernardino became fluent in Nahuatl, but he was certainly not the average colonizer. Although he originally traveled to Abya Yala to evangelize its indigenous population, he zealously documented precolonial texts and other native testimonies. One of the most important products of his vigorous research was one of the most comprehensive accounts of Nahua culture. The texts collected by Sahugún described very

[29] González, 912,923.

different Nahua traditions, ranging from religious prayers to paternal advice. This is one of the reasons why Miguel León-Portilla described him as the first anthropologist.[30]

One of the texts that Fray Bernardino produced as a result of his careful research was *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, also known as the *Florentine Codex*.[31] This massive text could be described as an exhaustive encyclopedia of Nahua traditions and language written by an attentive European observer with the assistance of a group of Amerindian collaborators and informants. Although it was not exceptional to write 'histories' of the 'New World', Sahagún's text is certainly unique because of its contents and methodology. While other colonizers actively and systematically destroyed any kind of vestige of the precolonial Amerindian religions, Sahagún carefully registered a vast collection of pre-Columbian discourses (v.gr., prayers, exhortations, and metaphors). Sahagún's text was based on the testimonies provided by Nahua elders in Tlatelolco and Tepepulco. Fray Bernardino directly interviewed his indigenous informants, and he collected information regarding their religious cosmology, history, language, and traditions. The Franciscan friar methodically confronted the information provided by his different sources.[32]

Nevertheless, this detailed description of Amerindian culture is not the product of a disinterested attempt to document reality. Sahagún was convinced that understanding indigenous idolatry was an important precondition for successful evangelization. In the prologue of his

[30] Miguel León-Portilla, *Bernardino de Sahagun, First Anthropologist*, trans. Mauricio J. Mixco (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002); Miguel León-Portilla, "Fray Bernardino de Sahagún," in *Obras de Miguel León-Portilla: Biografías*, vol. 4, 13 vols. (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México; El Colegio Nacional, 2009), 143–62.

[31] Another important product of Sahagún's research is the manuscript called *Primeros Memoriales*. Fray Bernardino wrote this text before his *History*, but its subject and methodology are very similar to those of his magnum opus. For a brief description of *Primeros Memoriales*, see León-Portilla, "Fray Bernardino de Sahagún," 152–53.

[32] Manuel Barbero Richart, "Los Códices Etnográficos. El" Códice Florentino"," *Estudios de Historia Social y Económica de América*, no. 14 (1997): 349–79; José Rubén Romero Galván, "Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España," *Arqueología Mexicana* 6, no. 36 (1999): 14–21.

magnum opus, he used a very illustrative metaphor to justify such a comprehensive study of local traditions:

> Doctors cannot correctly apply medicines to patients without first knowing from what humor or from what cause the disease proceeds. Thus, a good doctor should be well-informed in the knowledge of medicines and diseases, in order to suitably apply the opposite medicine to each disease. And because preachers and confessors are doctors of the souls, to cure spiritual illnesses it is convenient that they have experience of spiritual medicines and illnesses.[33]

In order to cure the Indigenous population from their idolatrous beliefs, de Sahugún recommended a fine-tuned gaze able to identify the sinful actions of Indigenous people. Whoever ignores the Amerindian traditions might be unable to identify the multifaceted manifestations of idolatry.[34] Thus, the detailed knowledge of otherness became a prerequisite for its spiritual colonization. A deeper and more thorough acculturation could only be accomplished by means of carefully studying Indigenous cultures. This early anthropological research already presents a feature that would iterate itself during the next centuries: Knowledge of the colonized Other became a central part of a deliberate colonizing strategy.[35]

Nevertheless, my objective here is not to analyze how the colonizing gaze transformed otherness into an object of study. If Bernardino de Sahagún's *History* is important for my own research, it is because it (re)produced a prototypical discourse for tutoring Amerindians. This

[33] Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, vol. 1 (1547–1569; repr., Mexico: Pedro Robredo, 1938), 5.
[34] Sahagún, 1:5–6. In a time when the Cocoliztli epidemic literally killed millions of Amerindians, Sahagún wrote that the indigenous population was in dire need of a remedy against idolatry and superstitious beliefs.
[35] Fray Bernadino was particularly concerned with those manifestations of Catholic piety that might have disguised the real intentions of the indigenous population. He was aware that in many regions, during certain Christian festivities, it was not the Catholic saints who were being praised, but the precolonial deities. He described this concealment as a "Satanic invention" because it conflated true faith and idolatry. Uncovering this seemingly innocuous inversion of the Catholic faith required not only willingness to travel across the countryside, but also a distrustful and well-trained Western eye. Sahagún's research aimed to eradicate these dogged manifestations of Amerindian culture. Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, vol. 3 (1547–1569; repr., Mexico: Pedro Robredo, 1938), 209–302.

blueprint for the conditional inclusion of Indigenous people in the colonial society was later iterated by the liberal intelligentsia.

There are three themes in Sahagun's history that are very important for understanding how the missionaries planned to simultaneously exclude and include the Amerindians in colonial society. The first element I want to highlight is *native ignorance*. Sahagún begins the second book of this text by creating a cleavage between believers and non-believers:

> You, the inhabitants of this New Spain […] and all the other Indians, of these Western Indies, know that you have all lived in great darkness of infidelity and idolatry, in which your ancestors left you [...] So now listen carefully, and understand mine with diligence, which our Lord has done for you, by his clemency alone, in which he has sent you the light of Catholic faith, so that you may know , that he alone is true God, Creator, and Redeemer, who alone governs the whole world; and know that the errors in which you have lived all the past time have blinded you and deceived you; and so that you understand the light that has come to you, it is convenient that you believe and with all your will receive what is written here, which are words of God, so that you escape from the hands of the devil in which you have lived until now, and go to reign with God in heaven.[36]

By creating this cleavage, Sahagún not only sets apart those who are knowledgeable about the Christian truth and those who are not. Darkness and light, Indigenous error and Catholic faith are not merely differences; they are hierarchized attributes that establish an authority based on epistemological and theological grounds. Thus, by portraying the differences between Amerindians and Europeans as a hierarchizing cleavage, Sahagún creates a discourse that legitimates the evangelical (and colonizing) mission of the Europeans. Moreover, this discourse excludes the Indigenous people from fully taking part in the Christian community due to the ignorance in which they are supposed to live in. But the last part of this quote also shows that this is not a categorical exclusion. Indigenous people can mend their ways and be reconciled with true religion as long as they accept to submit to European tutelage.

[36] Sahagún, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, 1938, 1:53. The emphasis is mine.

This leads us to the second theme I want to highlight: the *Indigenous potential*. Although, Sahagún excludes the Amerindians from the Truth by depicting their religions as infidelity and idolatry, the Franciscan missionary does not advocate for permanently excluding Indigenous people from a Christian life. Nor does he argue that they are naturally and unavoidably incapable of mending their idolatrous ways. Quite the contrary: "We now see by experience that they are skilled in all mechanical arts, and exercise them; they are also apt to learn all the liberal arts, and holy Theology, as experience has shown in those who have been taught in these sciences [...] For they are no less skilled at our Christianity *as long as they are duly cultivated in it*."[37] According to Sahagún, Amerindians are capable of becoming true Christians. But in order to be included in the righteous path, they must relinquish their idolatrous traditions. Becoming submissive and be willing to be cultivated are the conditions that Indigenous people must fulfill in order to be accepted in the Christian community.

Throughout Sahagún's *History,* Amerindian religion is described as idolatry. Local gods and deities are ceaselessly described as devils and necromants. And this is not surprising since spurning religious dissenters was a common trend among Christian missionaries during the sixteenth century. However, Sahagún's assessment of the Aztec religion is more nuanced than it might seem at first. He does acknowledge that certain elements of the Amerindian religion offer a glimpse of a potentially healthy natural theology.[38] For example, while describing the cult of Tezcatlipoca, Sahagún highlights certain attributes of this god (*v.gr*., being all-seeing and merciful) that are not opposed to those of the Christian god. Sahagún also seemed to be positively inclined towards the submissiveness of Amerindians to their gods and towards their strong piety.

[37] Sahagún, 1:10.
[38] Luis Villoro, *Los grandes momentos del indigenismo en México* (1950; repr., Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Economica, 2022), 78.

Thus, Sahagún's assessment of the Amerindian religion repeats the leitmotiv of this work: Indigenous peoples in New Spain are certainly ignorant and misguided, but they have the potential to follow the right path and become good Christians.

However, there is one Aztec god who receives more attention than the rest: Huitzilopochtli.[39] In this case, Sahagún judgment is significantly harsher: "The ancient Mexicans adored and had as their god a man named Huitzilopochtli, a necromancer, friend of devils, enemy of men, ugly, frightening, cruel, unruly, inventor of wars and enmities, cause of many deaths and riots and unrest."[40] Sahagún seemed to be particularly ill-disposed to an unruly god that caused unrest. This negative assessment is related to the third theme I want to highlight: the *sin of rebelliousness*. If there was something about Indigenous religions that the Franciscan missionary found particularly condemnable, it was those elements that led the Amerindians to become restless. While submissiveness can be reshaped and cultivated in order to rear good Catholics, unruliness should be thoroughly expunged from the potential Christians.

Here we find again the crux of Sahagún's approach to otherness. His anthropology *avant la lettre*, his attempt to systematically document and analyze Nahua culture, was subordinated to a higher end: the survival of the colonial project. The successful colonization of souls demands the selection and cultivation of those personal traits that are amenable to the new status quo.

[39] While Huitzilopochtli was mentioned in Sahagún's *History* more than 200 times, Quetzalcóatl was only mentioned around 150, and Tezcatlipoca less than 100. Huitzilopochtli was admittedly the most important god for the Aztecs, so this numbers should not be too surprising. However, while the rest of the main gods of the Aztec pantheon were described as necromantic, demons, deceivers, etc., Huitzilopochtli alone is characterized as unruly. If Sahagún wrote his *History* with the stated purpose of identifying and uprooting those traditions that constituted symptoms of the grievous sin of idolatry, we should not regard his meticulous attention to the Huitzilopochtli cult as merely a commitment towards impartial description.

[40] Sahagún, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, 1938, 1:66.

Simultaneously, the deft doctor of the soul should identify and eliminate those mannerisms that could be at odds with due obedience.[41]

I.4 SAHAGÚN DISCOURSE AND ITS LEGACY

Sahagún and his *Historia* are important points of reference for understanding how Amerindians were assimilated into the European worldview. But Sahagún's research was neither the only attempt to make sense of the role Amerindians played in the universe, nor the undisputed prototype for every future attempt to engage with Indigenous communities. Needless to say, some of the most extremist supporters of colonialism did not even acknowledge that Amerindians were humans. This group recycled the Aristotelian idea of natural slavery and claimed that the inhabitants of Abya Yala were devoid of reason. By portraying Amerindians as irredeemable barbarians, these extremists claimed that waging war on the Indigenous population was justified for philosophical and religious reasons.[42]

But even among the missionaries who believed that Indigenous people were reasonable and susceptible to peaceful conversion, we find alternative solutions to the 'Indian problem '. It has been argued that the different religious orders implemented substantially different strategies

[41] Miguel León-Portilla argues that, although Sahagún was initially interested in identifying idolatrous individuals, he later learned to appreciate Nahua culture in itself. León-Portilla, "Fray Bernardino de Sahagún," 154. Even if this was true, the fact is that Fray Bernardino's *History* was inspired by the strong association between the will to know and the desire to domesticate otherness. More important for my own research is the fact that Sahagún, no matter what his real intentions were, (re)produced a certain discursive practice that enabled the infantilization and disciplining of the Amerindians.

[42] One of the best-known representatives of this position was Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda. For an analysis of his arguments, see Chang-Uk Byun, "The Valladolid Debate between Las Casas and Sepúlveda of 1550 on the Conquest and the Intellectual-Religious Capacity of American Indians," *Korea Presbyterian Journal of Theology* 42 (2011): 257–76; Daniel R. Brunstetter and Dana Zartner, "Just War against Barbarians: Revisiting the Valladolid Debates between Sepúlveda and Las Casas," *Political Studies* 59, no. 3 (2011): 733–52.

to interact with the Amerindians.[43] For example, José Acosta, a Spanish Jesuit who traveled to Abya Yala in 1572 offered an interesting example of an alternative approach. Acosta, similarly to Sahagún, was interested both in showing his contemporaries that the Amerindians were not doomed to a subservient condition, and in registering and understanding their culture. However, Acosta did not outright condemn Amerindian religiosity. Although he was certainly interested in Christian conversion, Acosta did not reject Amerindian beliefs as mere idolatry. By drawing parallels between Christian teachings and Indigenous religiosity, he assumed that the latter offered a bridge to his evangelizing mission.[44] While Sahagún wanted to uproot even the most insignificant remnants of idolatry, Acosta saw a moment of truth in the Indigenous relationship to divinity. Both of them developed new techniques to understand the Amerindians, but while the Franciscan implemented a highly instrumental approach and subordinated the knowledge about the Other to the colonial project, the Jesuit regarded this knowledge as a proof that the Europeans and the Amerindians inhabited the same spiritual universe.[45]

All these different approaches to the colonialized Other have been iterated during the last centuries. These approaches have been transformed and reinvented over and over again; they have inspired different discursive practices, and they have influenced subsequent depictions of the Amerindian peoples. Even today, some of their central elements are present in the way we engage with contemporary Indigenous communities. But it would be unwise to assume that there is a direct line that leads from Sahagún's proto-anthropological enterprise to more modern

[43] For example, cultural historians like Bolivar Echeverría have analyzed the peculiarities of the Jesuit approach to Otherness. Echeveria praised the Jesuits because they embodied a radically different way of inhabiting the world. Their baroque ethos did not lead to the domination and objectivation of Otherness, but to a mutual reconciliation and rediscovery between the Self and the Other. See *La modernidad de lo barroco*, 2nd ed. (1998; repr., Ciudad de México: Ediciones Era, 2000).

[44] John Jeffries Martin, *A Beautiful Ending: The Apocalyptic Imagination and the Making of the Modern World* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2022), 200–201.

[45] This does not mean that Acosta was exempt from the hybris of the White colonizer. His typology of civilizations and its hierarchical structure are telling about the Eurocentric elements in Acosta's worldview. See Martin, 203–4.

attempts to acculturate Amerindians. I do not claim that Sahagún's history directly influenced the Mexican liberals of the nineteenth century. As far as I know, the liberal intelligentsia never invoked his authority to advocate for its colonial project. However, some of the central tenets of Sahagún's discourse were reframed and became familiar statements to people who advocated for the acculturation of the Amerindians. Although I do not aim to reconstruct in detail the evolutionary process by means of which one discourse led to the other, I think it is important to understand that the liberal colonial project is not a purely secular invention. Therefore, the analysis I presented in this chapter must be understood as an attempt to identify *some* of the sources that *potentially* shaped the discursive practices deployed to advance the liberal colonial project in nineteenth-century Mexico

II. Everything but Huitzilopochtli: Mexican Liberals, Freedom of Religion, and the Limits of Colonialist Tolerance

> [E]n las alas del arcángel del cristianismo descendió la libertad al mundo.
> Guillermo Prieto, Speech delivered during the Constitutional Congress, July 30, 1856

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the suspicion about Amerindian traditions was still a major trend among the Mexican ruling class. Although the Mexican liberals and Sahagún are separated by roughly three centuries, the discursive practices they used to condition the inclusion of Indigenous people in their respective societies shared crucial elements. Not only did the Mexican liberals infantilize the Amerindian population; they also assumed that the only way in which Indigenous people could become full members of the westernized societies was by renouncing their own cultures, and by yielding to Western civilization. Moreover, they disclosed their fear about the ominous effects that would ensue if Indigenous traditions survived and flourished. These similarities prompt us to reassess the extent to which the Mexican liberals' secular discourses were exempt from any religious influence.

In this chapter, I will focus on how the religious freedom of Amerindian peoples challenged the tolerance of many Mexican liberals. I will pay close attention to how Amerindians were portrayed during the debates that led to the Constitution of 1857. Specifically, I will focus on the discussions about freedom of religion, and on the assumptions regarding Indigenous traditions that were presented during these debates. The relevance of the analogy between the discursive practices of missionaries like Sahagún and those of the Mexican liberals will hopefully become clearer after analyzing Emilio Rabasa's work (chapter III). Nevertheless, in this chapter

I will underscore some of the tensions that characterize liberal ideology. These tensions highlight the unswerving presence of the colonialist project.

II.1 Mexican Liberalism and Freedom of Religion: An Ambiguous Relationship

Although many Mexican liberals presented themselves as strong supporters of freedom of religion, Amerindian religious beliefs were a particularly thorny subject for the Mexican ladino elite. Even for radical Mexican liberals, tolerance of Amerindian religious practices was subject to numerous restrictions.

According to Jesús Reyes Heroles, one of the most prominent scholars of Mexican liberalism, "if there is something that characterizes enlightened liberalism in Mexico, it is its commitment to freedoms. Among them, freedom of conscience played a key role".[46] However, the consensus about this topic was frail, and even some of the most active and influential Mexican liberals supported considerable restrictions of religious freedom. Such is the case of José María Luis Mora. Although Mora rejected the possibility that the government imposed on its citizens a certain religion, he explicitly admitted that the government should be allowed to proscribe the public exercise of certain religions. Moreover, he argued that this proscription was sometimes convenient.[47]

But why did freedom of religion, a key element of the liberal creed in other countries during the nineteenth century, became such a controversial principle for the Mexican intelligentsia? Certainly, the sociohistorical conditions that enabled or hindered freedom of

[46] Jesús Reyes Heroles, *El liberalismo mexicano*, vol. 3 (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1957), 267.
[47] José María Luis Mora, *Catecismo Político de La Federación Mexicana*, Ronda de Clásicos Mexicanos (1831; repr., Mexico: J. Mortiz : Editorial Planeta, 2002), 22.

religion in Europe were not present in Mexican soil. For instance, religion never became a crucial element of the princes' legitimacy, nor did it become a central contentious issue among the competing forces of the Empire, the papacy, the kings, and local feudal lords.

A significant element for understanding the importance of this subject is provided by analyzing which religions where to be proscribed and which religions could be tolerated. *Pace* Reyes Heroles, it would be a mistake to believe that freedom of religion was intrinsically valuable for the Mexican liberals during of nineteenth century. This right was consistently subordinated to other considerations. A clear example of the subsidiary role that freedom of religion played in liberal ideology can be identified in the debates concerning the colonization of the territories that remained 'unpopulated'. An important document to understand the relationship between colonization and freedom of religion is a text addressed by José María Lafragua (1813-1875) to the Mexican Congress in 1846.[48]

This document is relevant because it records the point of view of a high-ranking officer of the Mexican government during a very tumultuous period of Mexican history. Lafragua may not have been the average liberal, but he was appointed for different government positions for more than thirty years.[49] In addition to serving as congressman, senator, and Supreme Court justice, this moderate liberal was entrusted with high-ranking positions in the federal government during successive administrations until the end of his life. It was during his appointment as

[48] José María Lafragua, *Memoria de la primera secretaría de estado y del despacho de relaciones interiores y esteriores de los Estados-Unidos Mexicanos, leída al soberano congreso constituyente en los días 14, 15 y 16 de diciembre de 1846 por el ministro del ramo C. José María Lafragua* (Mexico: Vicente G. Torres, 1847).

[49] Two relatively recent analyses of Lafragua's historiographical and institutional legacy are: Luis Olivera, "José María Lafragua," in *En Busca de Un Discurso Integrador de La Nación*, ed. Antonia Pi-Suñer Llorens, vol. 4, 4 vols., Historiografía Mexicana (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1996), 339–58; Raymundo García García, "José María Lafragua. Aportación institucional," in *Los abogados y la formación del estado mexicano*, ed. Elisa Speckman Guerra, Óscar Cruz Barney, and Héctor Fix Fierro (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas, 2013), 543–83.

Minister of Internal and Foreign Affairs (Secretario de relaciones interiores y exteriores) that Lafragua wrote the 1846 *Memoria*.

In this document, not only did Lafragua describe the different issues he had to address as a public officer; he also issued several policy recommendations ranging from public education and commerce to art academies and national museums. One of the topics addressed by Lafragua was colonization.[50] According to Lafragua, colonizing the Mexican "wasteland" was an "immensely important" matter and an "absolute and urgent necessity" that the Congress should promptly address. He claimed that neglecting European colonization was a "crime against humanity" and that it was a "sacred duty" to guarantee the success of the settlements.[51] If colonization was so important, it was because the territorial integrity and the economic development of the nation were at stake.[52]

For the Mexican political elite of the mid-nineteenth century, colonization necessarily implied the immigration of Europeans. Lafragua and his contemporaries assumed that one of the most important obstacles for European immigration was religious intolerance.[53] Accordingly, if colonization of the 'deserted areas' of Mexican territory was to succeed, freedom of religion was to be established.[54] But abolishing religious intolerance as an incentive for European immigration

[50] Lafragua, *Memoria*, 78–87.
[51] Lafragua, 80.
[52] The ongoing Mexican–American War (1846-1848) was certainly one of the factors that stirred Lafragua's concern for territorial integrity. But it was not the only one. He argued that colonization would put an end to "barbarian" incursions. Lafragua, 83, 86.
[53] Lafragua, 86. Although abolishing religious intolerance was one of the most important factors for encouraging European immigration, Lafragua considered other incentives for encouraging colonization. In the *Memoria* of 1846, the Minister of Internal and Foreign Affairs lists the different incentives that had been implemented as part of Mexican immigration policy.
[54] In 1846, religious intolerance was increasingly becoming a hotly debated issue. Since Mexico achieved its independence in 1821, Catholicism had been constitutionally protected and sanctioned. Freedom of religion in Mexico was achieved through a process that took place over a number of decades. Although the promulgation of the Constitution of 1857 was certainly a momentous event, no single piece of legislation or administrative act led by itself to religious freedom. For a summary of the ebb and flow of freedom of religion in Mexico, see Manuel Andreu Gálvez, "La Libertad Religiosa En La Historia de Nueva España y México: Época Colonial y Periodo Independiente Hasta Las Grandes Reformas de 1992," *Anuario de Historia Del Derecho Español* 85 (2015): 549–86; Carlos Ruz

did not mean that Lafragua was unconditionally endorsing freedom of religion for everyone. The liberal Minister of Internal and Foreign Affairs introduced a very important proviso:

> Although religious intolerance has not been the main hindrance of colonization, it has nonetheless had a fairly effective influence on its scant progress. The undersigned recognizes everyone's right to worship God according to their own conscience; and he believes for the same reason, that although *it might not be prudent today to establish tolerance for all the peoples of the nation, it is necessary to do so for the new settlements*.[55]

These last paragraph highlights one of the many tensions that characterized nineteenth-century Mexican liberalism. On the one hand, Mexican liberals rejected religious intolerance; on the other, these same liberals admitted that prudence recommended a certain amount of religious intolerance.

The close reading of Lafragua's argument has so far offered us a better picture of how Mexican liberals envisaged the actual implementation of freedom of religion, a crucial part of their ideology. There are two implications of this argument that are worth noting: First, it is clear that freedom of religion was a hypothetical imperative. Not only was it subordinated to other priorities (v.gr., economic development, territorial integrity, and colonization); it also played a minor role in Lafragua's policy recommendations. It is symptomatic of freedom of religion's subsidiary importance that it is not even included in the table of contents of his 1846 *Memoria*.[56] Secondly, freedom of religion was not meant to be a universal right. Only the new settlements (i.e., European settlements) should be free to practice their own religion.

Saldívar, "Reflexiones sobre la libertad religiosa en México y la neutralidad legislativa," *Derecho, Estado y Religión* 5 (2019): 57–88. Reyes Heroles offers a comprehensive study of the debates concerning civil rights, especially the ones that deal with freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. Although his analysis goes into great detail, he only covers the period that starts with the first years after the Independence War and ends with the aftermath of the Constitution of 1857. Reyes Heroles, *El liberalismo mexicano*, 3:257–326.

[55] Lafragua, *Memoria*, 86. The emphasis is mine.

[56] In contrast, topics such as freedom of the press, public health, and even bullfights are explicitly mentioned in the table of contents.

Such an explicit limitation of this paramount element of the liberal creed begs the question: What are the reasons that led liberals like Lafragua and Mora to justify religious intolerance? What were the conditions under which proscribing certain religious beliefs became *convenient*? Who are those peoples that should be excluded from religious freedom and why?

II.2 The Constitutional Congress of 1856-1857 and Religious Intolerance: The Racialized Underpinnings of the Debate on Freedom of Religion

The 1846 *Memoria* does not provide enough information to answer these questions. However, analyzing the constitutional debates of 1856-1857 might give us a clue of why an important sector of the ruling elite seemed so cautious about fully embracing freedom of religion. Two key documents for analyzing these debates are the *History of the Extraordinary Constitutional Congress* and the *Chronicle of the Extraordinary Constitutional Congress* edited by Francisco Zarco.[57] These documents, along with the official records of this Congress, are the best sources for reconstructing the different discourses that led to the Constitution of 1857. These discourses were not esoteric conversations exclusively aimed at influencing a handful of lawmakers; they tried to sway public opinion in favor of their causes. As such, the influence of these discourses extended way beyond the walls of the parliamentary building; they addressed certain themes that were familiar to public opinion, and that could prompt the political class to react in certain ways. The fact that Francisco Zarco originally published the proceedings of the Constitutional Congress in a Mexican newspaper the day after each session took place is revealing of the extent to which these discourses are representative of the ideology of the Mexican political class in the mid-

[57] Francisco Zarco, *Historia del Congreso Extraordinario Constituyente* (1856–1857; repr., Mexico: El Colegio de Mexico, 1956); Francisco Zarco, *Crónica del Congreso Extraordinario Constituyente (1856-1857)* (1856–1857; repr., Mexico: El Colegio de Mexico, 1957).

nineteenth century. In the rest of this chapter, I will quote from the Zarco's *History*, since some of the most powerful arguments regarding freedom of religion were transcribed *in extenso* by Zarco in this document.[58] However, I will refer to the *Chronicles* whenever this document offers details that are worth noting.

In the Constitutional Congress of 1856-1857, one of the most intractable controversies related to freedom of religion concerned whether or not to explicitly acknowledge this right in the constitutional text.[59] While the most committed supporters of freedom of religion supported acknowledging this right directly in the constitution, their adversaries suggested a more moderate approach.

Originally, this right was supposed to be enshrined in Article 15. This article read as follows: "No law or order will be issued in the Republic that prohibits or hinders the exercise of any religion. But given that the Roman Catholic and Apostolic has been the exclusive religion of the Mexican people, the Congress of the Union will strive, by means of fair and prudent laws, to protect it as long as the interests of the people and the rights of national sovereignty are not harmed."[60] Although the wording of the proposed article might seem mild and harmless for the twenty-first-century observer, it sparked major controversy. It is important to keep in mind that

[58] As Catalina Sierra mentions, not always does the *History* provide a more complete account of the constitutional debates. In several instances the *Chronicle* may be a more informative source. The *Chronicle* was published first in a Mexican newspaper (*El Siglo XIX*), while the *History* was published later after Zarco edited and completed his personal notes. Although some of the debates can only be found verbatim and at full length in the *History*, the *Chronicle* included Zarco´s own commentaries. Moreover, in his *Chronicle* Zarco included circumstantial information that was left out from the *History*. For a more detailed explanation of the differences between the *History* and the *Chronicle*, see Catalina Sierra Casasús, "Estudio preliminar," in *Crónica del Congreso Extraordinario Constituyente (1856-1857)*, by Francisco Zarco (1856–1857; repr., Mexico: El Colegio de Mexico, 1957), x–xxvi.

[59] For a recent analysis of how religious freedom shaped the Constitution of 1857, see José Luis Soberanes Fernández, "La libertad religiosa y la Constitución de 1857," in *Derechos y libertades entre Cartas Magnas y océanos: experiencias constitucionales en México y España (1808-2018)*, ed. José Luis Soberanes Fernández (Mexico: Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas, 2021), 157–86. This text is an example of how overlooked racialized arguments in scholar literature about this topic are. Soberanes briefly analyses the interventions of all the representatives that took part in the debate concerning Article 15, but he does not pay any attention to the racial dimension of the discussion.

[60] Cited in Zarco, *Historia*, 331.

non-Catholic religions had been proscribed in Mexico since the colonial period. Even this cautious step towards religious freedom was firmly rebuked by the moderates. In the end, the proposal to explicitly enshrine freedom of religion in the constitutional text was rejected by 65 votes to 44.[61]

Different reasons were invoked in order to reject or accept the proposed article.[62] The debate did not pay much attention to theoretical arguments, although several of the participants were familiar with what Western theorists had to say about freedom of religion. Theological arguments played a minor role. Most of the participants preferred to base their interventions on practical considerations.

The detractors of Article 15 claimed that explicitly recognizing freedom of religion could produce negative consequences. Although many of them supported freedom of conscience, not all of them supported public worship of non-Catholic religions. For some of them, the positive effects of Catholicism would be diminished if freedom of religion was consecrated in the new Constitution. Some of them complained that freedom of religion would dissolve social unity, while some others considered that Mexico was already tolerant enough and that the proposed article was irrelevant. One popular solution was to delegate to the states the responsibility to decide on religious freedom. Other participants claimed that Mexican society was not ready yet for religious freedom; they acknowledged the importance of this right, but considered that the judicious solution was to delegate to future generations the responsibility of including it in the constitution. Still for some others, the best option was simply to avoid explicitly referring to

[61] Although the radical liberals were defeated in 1856 and the Constitutional Congress rejected their proposal, freedom of religion would be explicitly included in the 1857 Constitution a few years later.

[62] The proposed article was discussed by the Constitutional Congress from July 29, 1856, to August 5. The mere fact that the debate took place over six sessions (there was no session on August 2nd because of lack of quorum, and August 3rd was a Sunday, so no session was scheduled) is telling about how consequential this article seemed to be for the Mexican political elite. The following paragraphs summarize the debates that took place between these dates. The discussion can be found in Zarco, *Historia*, 548–690; Zarco, *Crónica*, 319–437.

religious freedom or religious intolerance in the constitutional text. This calculated omission was not inconsequential, since religious intolerance had been a ubiquitous feature of Mexican legal history.

On the side of the supporters of Article 15, some participants argued that religious unity was a lie, and therefore it could not be undermined by the constitutional project. Some others claimed that the evolution of society inevitably lead to the triumph of religious freedom. Some of them argued that, given that Catholicism was the true religion, it did not require any kind of protection. Another popular claim was that religious intolerance enabled the abuses of Catholic clerics. The supporters of Article 15 also claimed that delegating to the states the responsibility to legislate religious freedom could produce further dissent and even lead to civil war.

Nevertheless, one of the most influential and recurring arguments in favor of religious tolerance was European immigration. The arguments presented by Lafragua ten years before were iterated during the constitutional debates. The migration of Europeans was considered a key factor for accelerating the development of Mexican economy and for securing the frontiers. According to this line of reasoning, religious intolerance disincentivized non-Catholic Europeans from migrating to Mexico. Therefore, constitutionally authorizing freedom of religion was a very important precondition of the liberals' immigration and economic policies. This claim was so persuasive because everyone, even the moderates and many conservatives, seemed to take it for granted that European immigration was an undisputed advantage.

As could be expected, it was the enthusiasts of religious freedom who more frequently underscored its practical advantages regarding European immigration. However, their adversaries never questioned the desirability of encouraging European colonization.[63] This latter

[63] Vicente López was one of the few participants who offered a lukewarm support for European immigration. Lopez complained about the role that foreigners usually played in Mexican society; he argued that many of them behaved

party was skeptical about the purported practical benefits of freedom of religion, but not about the arrival of European settlers. The moderate liberals acknowledged the importance of attracting more European immigrants, but claimed that implicit tolerance was more than enough to achieve the stated goal. Although not everyone assumed that there was a causal relation between recognizing religious freedom and increasing the number of European settlers, they never challenged the extractivist and racist assumptions of the radical liberals. In short, the equation between a European ethos and true civilization was never disputed.

During the debates concerning Article 15, several congressmen delivered speeches under the assumption that European immigration was beneficial: Marcelino Castañeda, José María Mata, José Antonio Gamboa, Francisco Zarco, Rafael González Páez, Miguel Buenrostro, Juan N. Cerqueda, Juan Antonio de la Fuente, Francisco J. Villalobos, José María Lafragua, José María Mata, Pedro Ampudia, and Ezequiel Montes.[64] Admittedly, there were numerous ideological differences among these men. However, all of them took it for granted that European colonization would lead Mexico towards progress and civilization.

like oppressors. However, he never argued in favor of treating indigenous people as autonomous human beings, nor in favor of the Amerindian religions. Lopez supported Mexican unity under Catholicism. Similarly, Eligio Muñoz claimed that immigration might dissolve national unity. But this display of nationalism was imbued by anti-Indigenous racism. He characterized Amerindians as "hordes of savages" and "barbarians", Zarco, *Historia*, 620–21, 637–39. Another apparent outlier was Antonio Escudero. He downplayed the usefulness of European immigration, and he even defended the Indigenous population from the accusation of idolatry. However, his portrayal of Indigenous people was still condescending: Amerindians were an unfortunate and superstitious object of compassion that needed to be civilized. Zarco, 652, 655–56. Another interesting case is that of Ponciano Arriaga. Arriaga did not object European colonization, but he advocated instead for "Mexican colonization". Simultaneously, he complained about the exploitation and dispossession imposed on the Indigenous population by big landowners. He did not seem to believe that the wretched conditions in which many Amerindians lived was an effect of their uncivilized culture nor of their relentless naïveté; he pointed out that it was the socioeconomic condition that explained this inhumane state of affairs. However, Arriaga did not present these arguments during the debates regarding Article 15; he voiced these claims while debating the right to property on June 23, 1856. Zarco, 391–400. It is unclear what Arriaga's opinions on Indigenous religion were.

[64]For Castañeda, see p. 552 of Zarco, *Historia*; for Mata, pp. 560, 648–49; for Gamboa, pp. 562–65, 567, 660-3; for Zarco, pp. 574, 671, 674; for Páez, p. 579; for Buenrostro, p. 586; for Cerqueda , pp. 605-6; for De la Fuente, p. 613; for Villalobos, p. 618; for Lafragua, pp. 631-2; for Escudero, pp. 660-2; for Ampudia, p. 681; for Montes, p. 685. Although Ezequiel Montes was not a member of the Constitutional Congress, he participated in the debates due to his appointment as Minister of Justice, Ecclesiastical Affairs, Public Instruction, and Industry. As such, he represented the executive branch during the debates.

It was not exclusively economic considerations which inspired the purported benefits of immigration. Most of the men who advocated for clearer legal incentives for immigrants had in mind exclusively European individuals. Not Asians, not Africans, but Europeans. The arguments of the participants were embedded in a hierarchized racial imagery. José Antonio Gamboa, for example, did not merely advocate for European immigration. He desired to mix his blood with that of the Europeans, and even praised the Germans for being arguably the best settlers. At the same time, he referred to Amerindians as savages.[65] According to him, *métissage* between Europeans and Mexicans would produce a "strong, healthy, and powerful nation".[66] Gamboa goes on to say that, in order to prevent caste war, and to prevent the Indigenous race from engulfing his society, the white European settlers would provide a protective barrier.[67] Similarly, Francisco Zarco extols the effects of mixing the Mexican race with the "European races"; simultaneously, he campaigns for the colonization of the frontiers and warns against the violent savages that threaten both the Mexican population and territorial integrity.[68] In a similar vein, Juan N. Cerqueda praised the Scottish settlers and described them as the most honest and laborious farmers.[69] Francisco J. Villalobos believed that *métissage* would lead to the prosperity of Mexico and to social regeneration.[70] José María Mata not only lamented that religious intolerance had thwarted the immigrations of Germans; according to him, European immigration was the "most firm support of our nationality"…and the best defense against barbarians.[71]

[65] Zarco, 562–64.
[66] Zarco, 660.
[67] Zarco, 662.
[68] Zarco, 574, 671.
[69] Zarco, 605.
[70] Zarco, 618.
[71] Zarco, 648.

None of these men assumed that miscegenation between the ladinos and the Amerindians would produce similar effects. While *métissage* with Europeans was expected to improve the Mexican nation, miscegenation with the Amerindians would yield uncertain results at best. Their idea about Mexican nationality excluded and debased indigenous people; simultaneously, it uncritically adopted and reproduced a romanticized idea about Western civilization and its rewards. When we pay close attention to the racial undertones of these debates, a colonial trend becomes visible: whitening the Mexican population was an obsession for nineteenth-century Mexican liberals.

But it was perhaps Lafragua's intervention that more fully revealed the tensions within the liberal project. Lafragua's speech is key for understanding why the Mexican political elite was afraid of categorically endorsing religious freedom. It is telling about the ambiguities of the liberal project that a man who in 1846 advocated for freedom of religion, in 1856 was speaking out against a constitutional project that finally acknowledged this same right. Moreover, the reactions to his discourse are also relevant for understanding the extent to which the other members of the political class shared similar assumptions and preconceptions about the Indigenous threat.

It was on August 1, 1856, that Lafragua took the floor to explain why he opposed Article 15 of the constitutional project.[72] Lafragua intervened in the constitutional debates as one of the representatives of the state of Puebla, but at that time he was also serving as Minister of Interior (Ministro de Gobernación). He started his intervention by drawing the distinction between freedom of conscience and freedom of religion: while the former is an individual faculty and an

[72] Lafragua's intervention regarding freedom of religion can be found in Zarco, 625–34; Zarco, *Crónica*, 386–89.

unassailable temple, the latter has external consequences.[73] He claimed the latter does not follow from the former, and that external religious worship should be limited according to public interest.[74] Thus, Lafragua defended freedom of conscience, but he rejected the proposed article.

Once this starting point had been stated, it is not surprising that the rest of the Minister of Interior's speech paid close attention to the practical consequences of freedom of religion. According to him, 5 million indigenous people and one and a half million women were so naïve that they might be unable or unwilling to understand what the proposed Article 15 meant. Swayed by the malicious influence of the enemies of reformation, these ingenious people might conflate freedom of religion with indifference towards religion.[75] Lafragua also claimed that Mexican society was not mature enough to fully implement religious freedom, and he warned about the negative consequences of ignorance. As stated by Lafragua, social unrest would be around the corner once freedom of religion had been sanctioned. European immigrants might be assaulted and even lynched by the ignorant inhabitants of rural areas once they publicly practiced their non-Catholic faiths. Even more, since the government was responsible for enforcing the law, and given that the victims of religious intolerance might sue the responsible authorities, the riots enabled by freedom of religion would also produce negative consequences for the treasury.

Although this argument already suggests that the rural inhabitants are proverbially ignorant, and although Lafragua had already hinted that not every people is equally mature to enjoy all the benefits of the liberal project, his next argument is even more telling about what he had in mind when he thought about limiting freedom of religion. Lafragua argued that if a Lutheran temple, a synagogue, or a pagoda could be built on Mexican territory, it would also be

[73] Zarco describes the arguments presented by Lafragua as "too weak". Zarco, *Crónica*, 386. Reyes Heroles analyzed Lafragua's intervention in Reyes Heroles, *El liberalismo mexicano*, 3:306–7.
[74] This is the same argument Mora had presented 25 years before.
[75] José María Lafragua described atheism as the "worst of crimes" and as "the biggest absurd". Zarco, *Historia*, 628.

possible to reestablish the cult of Huitzilopochtli and to erect a teocalli (i.e., an Aztec temple) in Santiago Tlatelolco (i.e., one of the most important cities built by the Nahua people before the colonial period). He reacted with utter horror at this last scenario. He described as a "horrible picture" the mere thought of "reestablishing the religions of ancient Mexicans". [76]

Lafragua pointed out that "the enemies of progress" could make use of freedom of religion to fool indigenous people.

> [The enemies of reforms and the chiefs of the indigenous peoples] will undoubtedly exploit [the Indians'] credulity, fanaticism, and their feeling of origin, so to make them believe, not that religious tolerance has been instituted for reasons of high politics, but rather that their cult has been returned to them. This belief, guised in the clothing of superstition and adorned by interest, will produce an ill-fated reasoning; and, from induction to induction, the Indians, who believe that their cult has been returned to them, will want their property returned to them, and they will come to fancy the throne of Guatimotzin [i.e., Cuauhtémoc, the last Aztec emperor].[77]

Here too, Indigenous people (and women) are unswervingly represented as credulous and fanatic. Their scant understanding does not allow them to make sense of high politics. They have so little agency that they cannot even mobilize by themselves. They are always the potential dupes of unscrupulous individuals. Indigenous people are not completely deprived from reason, but their reasoning seems only able to go backwards in time. Nevertheless, this quote is not relevant because of its hackneyed bigotry. What is more interesting here is the underlying threat that seems to haunt the Mexican political elite. If everyone is allowed to believe whatever they want, the discipline process that had been enforced for more than three centuries could go awry.

[76] Zarco, 630.

[77] Zarco, 630. According to the *Chronicle*, Lafragua said that the Amerindians "would claim back their *lands*" (Zarco, *Crónica*, 388) instead of "wanting their *property* returned to them". This nuance is not irrelevant. The earlier version highlights more clearly a very real and persistent problem: the dispossession of Amerindian land operated for centuries by the European colonizers and their descendants. Land dispossession and the threat of an Indigenous revolt would be exacerbated by the agrarian reform implemented by the liberals during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Lafragua continued his intervention by pointing out that freedom of religion would lead to a caste war.[78] He explicitly mentioned that the uprising of Indigenous communities would become an imminent threat once these communities were allowed to freely practice their own religion. He underscored that this was a real and severe danger by mentioning the ongoing Caste war in Yucatan and other contemporary Indigenous uprisings. Lafragua closed this section of his speech by noting that "the Indigenous class is restless" and that a "really frightful anarchy" might engulf them.[79]

Now it is easier to understand why religious intolerance became such a contentious topic, even for those members of the political elite who were supposed to be more committed to the liberal creed. Lafragua's discourse reminds us that this debate is not exclusively about religion or the benefits of civilization. Mexican liberals where not only concerned with universalistic values or with social 'progress'. This debate explains in more detail what was so frightening about Amerindian religions, and why many liberals could not accept the full consequences of freedom of religion. If Amerindian traditions were so appalling, it was because they were associated to a threat towards the status quo that enabled the cultural and material hegemony of the Mexican elite. If limiting freedom of religion could be *convenient* in certain instances, it was because the westernized Mexican elite knew very well that their liberal (and colonial) project depended on the acculturation and whitening of Indigenous people. The racist and classist

[78] Analyzing how the Caste War that exploded in Yucatan in 1847 influenced Lafragua's changing views on freedom of religion should be addressed in future research.

[79] Zarco, *Historia*, 630. Lafragua was not the only member of the Constitutional Congress that explicitly associated Indigenous religions and caste war. Manuel María Vargas prepared a speech were he portrayed similar threats. Vargas was convinced that freedom of religion would encourage the Indigenous population to embrace their old gods and rebel. Amerindians would "retrograde to the sixteenth century", "flood with teocallis our fields", and perform their "barbaric sacrifices". According to him, this scenario might have been remote, but not illusory. Vargas did not deliver his speech because the debate on religious freedom had already been too long, and because most of his arguments had been presented by other participants during the previous sessions. For the complete text of Vargas's undelivered speech, see Zarco, 687–90.

undertones of these discourses remind us that in Mexico the liberal project was also a colonial one.

Admittedly, even though Lafragua was appointed to one of the highest-ranking government positions, his opinion did not represent the whole liberal camp. But although other participants criticized and rejected some of his claims, no one complained about the Minister of Interior's bigotry. Not even the most devoted defenders of religious freedom admitted that Amerindians should also be allowed to exercise their non-Western religions. Juan de Dios Arias, the representative who spoke right after Lafragua, and who directly addressed the arguments of the Minister of Interior, argued that the Christian religion was not at risk. He advocated for tolerating the religions of the Europeans, but he did not mention a single word about the religions of the Amerindians.[80] Similarly, when Francisco Zarco took the floor to advocate for Article 15, he had in mind the religions of the European settlers. When Zarco engaged in detail with the Minister's claims, he downplayed the threat of indigenous revolt. Zarco pointed out that even though Indigenous people did not have a desirable degree of enlightenment, they were not able to go back to their old religions.[81] In short, Amerindian traditions were not always explicitly targeted by Mexican liberals, but they were most certainly not supposed to thrive under the liberal project. Moreover, Indigenous naïveté and lack of autonomy was always taken for granted. By analyzing the proceedings of the Constitutional Congress, it becomes clear that when Amerindian religions were not being condemned, they became a taboo topic that the liberal intelligentsia consistently avoided.

[80] Zarco, *Historia*, 634–35.
[81] Zarco, 676–77. At least in Zarco's *History* and in his *Chronicle*, no one seemed to have advocated for Indigenous religions or their cultures. Even worse, no one even seemed to notice that they too had agency.

A clear picture comes out of the analysis of the constitutional debates of 1856-1857: Amerindian religiosity was associated both with backwardness and conflict. Similarly to Sahagún, Mexican liberals depicted the indigenous population as ignorant and gullible. They did not fully exclude indigenous people from the newly born Mexican society, but they insisted that Indigenous Mexicans should first be properly civilized. The acculturation of the Amerindians and their whitening was a condition for their effective inclusion. Moreover, Mexican liberals explicitly disapproved those indigenous traditions that could lead to overturning the status quo from which the ladino political elite benefited from.

III. Whitening the Colonial Other: Emilio Rabasa and the Acculturation of Indigenous People

In this chapter I analyze how the liberal project envisioned the participation of indigenous people in Mexican society through the lens of Emilio Rabasa's work. His oeuvre is not only interesting because it addresses directly the 'Indian problem', but also because of its coherence and its keen discernment of the challenges the liberal project faced at the turn of the nineteenth century. Moreover, he was an active member of the political elite who held key positions in the Mexican government. The analysis of Rabasa also offers a clear example of how the conditions of possibility of the liberal project enabled a certain portrait of indigenous people. Rabasa's solution to the 'Indian problem' was not the rational conclusion that any principled individual would reach once they analyzed the different parts of the question; it is a situated reaction of a member of the Mexican political elite to one of the enduring conditions that threatened the hegemony of their westernized worldview. Thus, Rabasa's ideas are not merely the product of the natural evolution of liberal ideas; they were enabled by the many sociopolitical challenges that the Mexican intelligentsia experienced during most of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century.

III.1 Indigenous communities in Chiapas during the second half of the nineteenth century

To better understand Emilio Rabasa's discourse, first it is necessary to briefly describe its conditions of possibility. Therefore, in this section I will focus on the socioeconomic conditions that lead to a tense relationship between the indigenous communities in the state of Chiapas and the ladino elite.

Chiapas had been a fertile ground for indigenous uprisings since the colonial period. The tensions between the Indigenous peoples and the westernized elite did not subside with the independence from Spain. For instance, the so-called Tzotzil Rebellion erupted in 1869. The conditions that led to this rebellion were very heterogeneous. Most certainly, the agrarian reform implemented by liberal governments was a major force that had been looming in the background for several years.[82] However, the encroaching over communal autonomy by the ladino elite was also a relevant intervening factor. Not only did the Church and the conservative groups reject indigenous religions; the Mexican liberals actively and unilaterally promoted the incorporation of Indigenous communities to modern agrarian society [83].

In the economic realm, the *Leyes de Reforma*, inspired by nineteenth century European liberalism, provided the legal and institutional framework for this agrarian reform. This set of laws, drafted during a convulsive period of Mexican history (1855-1863), aimed to modernize Mexican society. Although they are customarily presented as the legal underpinnings that produced the separation of the State and the Church, their effects should not be reduced to the consolidation of secular politics in Mexico. One of these laws was particularly detrimental for the livelihood of Mexican Indigenous communities: the so-called *Ley Lerdo*. This law mandated that the landed property from both civil and ecclesiastical corporations should be incorporated to the real estate market and individually owned. According to this law, only individuals were allowed to own real estate. Given that Indigenous communities were in no way exempt from this law, they too were supposed to transition from a system of communal ownership to a system of individual ownership.

[82] Víctor Manuel Esponda Jimeno, "Las Sublevaciones Indígenas En Chiapas a Través de Algunas Fuentes," in *Anuario Instituto Chiapaneco de Cultura, Departamento de Patrimonio Cultural e Investigación* (Gobierno del Estado de Chiapas, Instituto Chiapaneco de Cultura, 1991), 157–75; Vladimir González Roblero, *Novela, Historia y Memoria Del Levantamiento Tzotzil de 1869* (Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, 2015).
[83] Neil Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion: The Struggle for Land and Democracy* (Duke University Press, 1998), 46–48.

Although the *Ley Lerdo* was adopted in 1856, it was in 1861 when it began to be implemented in Chiapas.[84]

This reform provided the legal underpinnings of the demarcation of vacant lands. Although demarcation's original purpose was to clearly distinguish between vacant lands and legitimate real estate property, and, thus, to allow the government to promote a dynamic real estate market, the technical and bureaucratic complexities of this activity, the substantive profits that were at stake, as well as the lack of regulation; all these conditions enabled numerous abuses and conflicts.[85] The transition to individual landed property not only was at odds with indigenous traditional means of subsistence; it also made it easier for different actors to abuse the brand-new individual owners: the fragmented lands of indigenous communities were constantly harassed by tax collectors and wealthy landowners.

However, legalizing the fragmentation of indigenous lands was not the only factor that threatened the way of living of these communities.[86] Benjamin has described some of the major socioeconomic trends that emerged during the last half of the nineteenth century. Not only did the rate of economic growth accelerate substantively; foreign investments penetrated in the state; the population experienced a rapid expansion during the last few decades of the century; private landholding and commercial agriculture multiplied exponentially; indentured servitude became an increasingly pressing problem. Moreover, the different factions of the local elite became power players that benefited heavily from the status quo.[87] Even if these conditions did not automatically lead to the dispossession of indigenous communities, they

[84] Esponda Jimeno, "Las Sublevaciones Indígenas En Chiapas a Través de Algunas Fuentes."
[85] Justus Fenner, *La llegada al Sur: la controvertida historia de los deslindes de terrenos baldíos en Chiapas México, en su contexto internacional y nacional, 1881-1917*, Nueva historiografía de Chiapas y Centroamérica (México: CIMSUR, 2015), 271–72. An important precision is due. According to Fenner, not all the actors involved in the demarcation process pursued the same goal and not all of them were equally involved in abuses. For example, Fenner argues that the demarcation companies were not really interested in the dispossession of Indigenous communities because that would not have been a profitable strategy.
[86] Thomas Benjamin, *A Rich Land, a Poor People: Politics and Society in Modern Chiapas* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 25–29.
[87] Benjamin, 29–30.

certainly limited their expansion, and made them increasingly vulnerable to the abuses of ladino landowners. Therefore, the new socioeconomic conditions endorsed by the liberal elite were at odds with the traditional way of life of Indigenous peoples in Chiapas (and in the rest of the country).

III.2 Rabasa as a Distinguished and Multifaceted Mexican Liberal

It was probably Emilio Rabasa (1856-1930) who most explicitly dealt with the tensions between a racist discourse and purported democratic ideals. Arguing for the exclusion of a certain group while at the same time nominally declaring one's inclusionary commitments is certainly not an easy feat. Therefore, analyzing Rabasa's argument will shed some light on how elitist and racist discourses can be compatibilized with liberal ideals and representative government.

Rabasa is a relevant political thinker in his own right. He has exercised a long-lasting influence over Mexican legal thought. For more than a century, he has been characterized as one of the most important Mexican constitutionalists.[88] For example, Manuel González Ramírez described Rabasa as "the most profound thinker of Mexican constitutional law"[89]. Rabasa's ideas are particularly important for understanding the process that led to the Mexican Constitution of 1917.[90] At least since Daniel Cosío Villegas published his study

[88] José Antonio Aguilar Rivera, "Presentación," in *El Derecho de Propiedad y La Constitución Mexicana de 1917*, by Emilio Rabasa, ed. José Antonio Aguilar Rivera (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Economica, 2017), 13; Emilio Rabasa, *La Guerra de Tres Años*, Escuchar Con Los Ojos (1891; repr., México: Siglo XXI, 2007), 62; Irasema A. Villanueva, "El contexto jurídico de Emilio Rabasa," in *Chiapas en el Congreso Constituyente 1916-1917*, ed. María Elena Tovar González (Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de las Revoluciones de México ; Secretaría de Cultura, 2018), 48–53; Charles A. Hale, "The Civil Law Tradition and Constitutionalism in Twentieth-Century Mexico: The Legacy of Emilio Rabasa," *Law and History Review* 18, no. 2 (July 2000): 257–80, https://doi.org/10.2307/744296; Charles A. Hale, *Emilio Rabasa y la supervivencia del liberalismo porfiriano*, trans. Antonio Saborit (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2011), 21–23.

[89] Manuel González Ramírez, "Prólogo," in *Retratos y Estudios: Emilio Rabasa*, by Emilio Rabasa, ed. Manuel González Ramírez, Tercera edición, Biblioteca Del Estudiante Universitario 59 (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Coordinación de Humanidades : Museo de las Constituciones México, 2011), vi.

[90] Hale, *Emilio Rabasa y la supervivencia del liberalismo porfiriano*, 17.

about the Constitution of 1857, scholars have underscored that Rabasa's critique of the institutional framework bequeathed by the Constitutional Congress of 1856-1857 was instrumental for reshaping how Mexican constitutionalists understood political institutions.[91]

Rabasa's prominence is not exclusively the result of his research in the field of legal studies. His activities as a public figure and as a private law practitioner also exercised an important role in the development of Mexican legal thought: In addition to being appointed to the Mexican Senate (1894-1913), he served as Governor of the state of Chiapas from 1891 to 1894. Moreover, as founder and professor of one of the most prestigious (and elitist) law schools in Mexico (Escuela Libre de Derecho), he influenced several generations of lawyers and law scholars. Similarly, his influence on Mexican literature has not gone unnoticed. He has been described as "the author of one of the most relevant narrative sagas of national literature".[92] Furthermore, Rabasa is an important point of reference for understanding the evolution of political ideas in Mexico.

However, it is because of his liberal convictions that Rabasa is relevant for this thesis. Not only was Rabasa part of the liberal intelligentsia that ruled Mexico at the turn of the century. His work has also been described as "the culmination of the liberal political thought" in Mexico.[93] Manuel Gonzalez Ramírez has argued that Mexican liberalism peeked in the works of Rabasa because of their internal consistency. Similarly, for Charles Hale, Rabasa represents the continuation of Mexican liberalism.[94] Hale was interested in understanding the evolution of Mexican liberalism, since the early years of the Republic until the first decades

[91] Daniel Cosío Villegas, *La Constitución de 1857 y sus críticos* (1957; repr., Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Economica, 2014). Two recent analysis of the development of the narrative that placed Rabasa as a key ideologue of the Constitution of 1917 can be found in Hale, *Emilio Rabasa y la supervivencia del liberalismo porfiriano*, 242–52; Valente Molina Pérez, "La configuración del discurso histórico sobre Emilio Rabasa Estebanell como ideólogo de la Constitución Política de 1917," *Pueblos y Fronteras digital* 16, no. 28 (2021): 7.
[92] Rabasa, *La Guerra de Tres Años*, XIII.
[93] González Ramírez, "Prólogo," xxiv.
[94] Hale, *Emilio Rabasa y la supervivencia del liberalismo porfiriano*.

after the Revolution.[95] He was aware that Mexican liberalism was not monolithic, and that it experienced substantial transformations during the nineteenth century. In order to understand the trajectory of liberal ideas in Mexico, Hale underscored that Rabasa was a central figure among the Mexican liberal intelligentsia. Hale argued that Rabasa's ideas are key for tracing the survival of liberal ideas between the last decades of the Porfiriato and the postrevolutionary regime.[96] Specifically, Rabasa was the heir of positivism and historical constitutionalism, the two main ideological pillars of Mexican liberalism during the late nineteenth century.[97] Therefore, in this chapter I analyze Rabasa's political thought because he embodies a key stage in the development of Mexican liberalism.

But what is the best way to approach Emilio Rabasa's worldview? The legacy of Rabasa has been usually assessed from a legal perspective. Another popular approach, although not as widespread as the first one, is to study those texts where he directly engaged with political issues. It is from this perspective that Rabasa's support for the liberal project becomes clearer. Furthermore, by analyzing his political ideas the tensions of the liberal project become more visible. Another possible approach, although an almost unexplored one, is to study Rabasa's political ideas by means of a close reading of his novels.[98] In the following pages, although I will pay some attention to Rabasa's legal writings, I will focus both on the novelistic and the political dimensions of his works. This approach will be particularly useful for understanding Rabasa's ideas about civilization, political participation, indigenous people, and acculturation.

[95] Charles A. Hale, *Transformation of Liberalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexico*, Princeton Legacy Library (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Charles A. Hale, *Mexican Liberalism in the Age of Mora, 1821-1853* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).
[96] Hale, *Emilio Rabasa y la supervivencia del liberalismo porfiriano*, 18.
[97] Hale, 302–3.
[98] Some of the few exceptions to this trend are: Carmen Ramos Escandón, "Emilio Rabasa: Su Obra Literaria Como Expresión Política," in *Los Intelectuales y El Poder En México. Memorias de La VI Conferencia de Historiadores Mexicanos y Estadounidenses*, ed. Roderic A. Camp, Charles A. Hale, and Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, 1st ed., vol. 75 (Mexico: El Colegio de Mexico, 1991), 665–80; Leonardo Martínez Carrizales, "Emilio Rabasa, narrador. La emergencia del 'pueblo' en la representación narrativa del orden social de México," *Literatura Mexicana* 29, no. 1 (2018): 37–69, https://doi.org/10.19130/iifl.litmex.29.1.2018.1060.

III.3 RABASA AS A REALIST NOVELIST: HIS ELITIST DEPICTION OF THE UNCIVILIZED SOCIETY

In this section I will focus on how Rabasa's novels represented Mexican politics. Therefore, I will pay close attention to those sections of his fictional works that disclose how he experienced the issues of his time. I am particularly interested in highlighting Rabasa's view on political participation and the standards of civilization.

Rabasa wrote five novels in his early years as an intellectual: *La bola* (1887), *La gran ciencia* (1887), *El cuarto poder* (1888), *Moneda falsa* (1888), and *La guerra de tres años* (1891). While the first four can be described as a tetralogy in which we find a similar cast of characters and an overarching plot, the latter novel is thematically related to the former, but presents a different fictional universe. All of them deal with social issues that affected the nineteenth-century Mexican society. This is one of the reasons why Rabasa has been described as one of the first Realist writers in the Mexican world of letters.[99] However, we must not be misled into thinking that Rabasa offers an impartial nor a comprehensive assessment of Mexican society. Although he uses realist literary techniques to portray his own society, his is a situated approach that privileges the existential conditions of the Mexican political class. Therefore, the situations he depicts are those deemed problematic by the Mexican intelligentsia of the late nineteenth century.

For example, in *El Cuarto Poder* and in *Moneda falsa*, Rabasa offers a scathing portrayal of Mexican journalism. Not only does he suggest that the average journalist is a mediocre individual with no significant talent and little to no knowledge about the topics he

[99] Emilio Rabasa, *Retratos y Estudios: Emilio Rabasa*, ed. Manuel González Ramírez, Tercera edición, Biblioteca Del Estudiante Universitario 59 (México, D.F: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Coordinación de Humanidades : Museo de las Constituciones México, 2011), vi.

writes about.[100] He also insinuates that journalists are mercenaries, and that the only reason why journalism is a profitable activity is because newspapers systematically engage in *quid pro quo* with government officials in which bribes are exchanged for laudatory articles or bland criticism.[101] Moreover, he suggests that anti-establishment criticism is driven by individual frustration and personal animosities.[102]

Nevertheless, it is perhaps *La bola* which offers a clearer glance into Rabasa's views on popular political participation and the meaning of civilization. This book was published in 1887, four years before Rabasa began his tenure as Governor of Chiapas. Although Rabasa was the son of European immigrants, he was born and raised in Chiapas, arguably the Mexican state that had remained more isolated from Western civilization.[103] And since rural rebellions were not unknown in his birthplace, it is not surprising that he developed a strong interest in depicting the effects that the lack of Western culture may produce in society.

La bola[104] takes place in a fictional Mexican village, San Martin de la Piedra. It tells the story of Juan Quiñones, a young and promising intellectual who unwillingly takes part in a rural revolt headed by Mateo Cabezudo, a local cacique. Although this revolt is not inspired by high principles nor does it have a clear purpose, it tears San Martin de la Piedra asunder. Out of personal animosities, Cabezudo and the official authorities engage in a senseless armed

[100] Emilio Rabasa, *El Cuarto Poder / Moneda Falsa*, ed. Antonio Acevedo Escobedo, Colección de Escritores Mexicanos 51 (1888; repr., México: Porrúa, 1948), 22–24, 27–28.
[101] Rabasa, 181, 263–64, 302,312.
[102] Rabasa, 94,147-8, 169–70, 196, 238.
[103] To get a sense of the isolation of Chiapas during the second half of the nineteenth century, it makes sense to consider the many obstacles that travelers had to face in order to reach the state. According to Hale, *Emilio Rabasa y la supervivencia del liberalismo porfiriano*, 58, in the early 1880's travelling from the city of Oaxaca to San Cristobal de las Casas (the former capital of Chiapas) took over two weeks. Part of the distance had to be covered by riding a mule. Nowadays, the same distance can be covered by car in less than 9 hours.
[104] There is no conventional way to translate 'la bola' to English. This expression was in use in Mexico specially during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. The concept refers to an amorphous and disordered group of people that create chaos. The expression may refer exclusively to a tumultuous gathering, but it can also suggest an anarchic mobilization that yields political havoc. Usually, people who take part in 'la bola' are lowlifes or mutinous individuals. A pejorative connotation is part and parcel of this expression. For purposes of this thesis, I will translate 'la bola' as *the rabble*. Although I feel this translation is far from being perfect, I cannot find a more suitable option. For more about this expression, see Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española, "bola," in *Diccionario de americanismos*, 2010, https://www.asale.org/damer/bola.

conflict. In the end, the only winners of this petty revolt are either the most opportunistic individuals or those lacking a moral compass. The few reasonable or honorable inhabitants of San Martin de la Piedra get the worst part out of the revolt: while Remedios, the niece of Cabezudo and Juan's beloved, gets injured during the confrontations, Juan's mother becomes ill after her unfair imprisonment and tragically dies; Juan himself is barred from marrying Remedios, and thus is unable to fulfill the last wishes of his dead mother.

La bola depicts how politics in isolated villages works. The de facto leader of the village, Mateo Cabezudo, owes his privileged position not to merit, but to a dubious military success and to a system that rewards bravados instead of true talent.[105] Although he is not a bad man, his moral discernment is described as "blunt". Close to him we find the smug public speaker, Severo, who delivers verbose and unsubstantial speeches. Despite his lack of genuine intelligence and his cliched discourses, his popularity remains unmatched.[106] Severo is the embodiment of how the capacity to deliver nonsensical discourses can overpower true talent and proper education.

In addition to representing the typical rural politicians, this novel also describes a problem that recurrently ravaged Mexican villages: their never-ending conflicts. However, the social conflict depicted by Rabasa has a very peculiar source. In *La bola*, conflict is not rooted in the socioeconomic or cultural conditions of San Martín de la Piedra. It is not a manifestation of class struggle nor the result of racial oppression or religious intolerance. In this remote Mexican village, conflict is actually produced by the clash of rival egos. It is selfishness that shapes the rest of the social cleavages and not the other way around. In this unsophisticated and isolated locality there is no politics. Political discourses and manifestos are just glib pretexts for covering up the real reason that spawn the rabble.[107]

[105] Emilio Rabasa, *La bola / La gran ciencia*, ed. Antonio Acevedo Escobedo, 2ª ed (1887; repr., México: Porrúa, 1966), 12–13.
[106] Rabasa, 16–17.
[107] Rabasa, 18–20.

Nevertheless, if conflict spreads like wildfire, this is not exclusively due to selfish feuds. Ordinary villagers are instrumental in spawning the rabble by gossiping about disorder and gloating in the potential chaos: "In this country, [popular] opinions are always in favor of disorder, no matter where it might hit, and with disregard for due investigation".[108] In the end, the inhabitants of San Martin de la Piedra cannot help but be dragged by events that they do not understand and cannot control.

The aftermath of this process is the spawning of the rabble. The rebellious rabble is by no means a revolution; it is a poisonous fruit cultivated by ignorance that only takes root in "Latin American soil". According to Rabasa:

> [I]f revolution, as an inescapable law, is known throughout the world, *the rabble can only spread, like yellow fever, under certain latitudes*. Revolution is embedded in an idea, it moves nations, modifies institutions, and needs citizens. The rabble does not require principles, nor does it ever have them; *it is born and dies in a lesser material and moral space*, and it needs ignoramuses. In a few words: The revolution is the daughter of world progress and an inescapable law of humanity; *the rabble is the daughter of ignorance and the inevitable punishment of backward peoples*.[109]

This quote highlights three important characteristics of Rabasa's thought: knowledge-guided action as a criterion for distinguishing between genuine political participation and mere rabble rousing; the correspondence between progress and certain kinds of political engagement; and the geographic division of principled political action. First, authentic political participation is only found wherever it is guided by morality and knowledge. There is no true citizenship among ignorant peoples. Second, it should be noted that Rabasa was not the average conservative-minded individual; he believed in social change. But genuine change, the kind of change that leads a people forward, can only take place once certain conditions are fulfilled. Progress is regulated by certain laws; political events that disregard these laws do not lead to

[108] Rabasa, 18.
[109] Rabasa, 167–68. The emphasis is mine.

the improvement of social institutions.[110] Moreover, underdevelopment is not merely an economic condition, but also a moral one.

In *La bola*, Rabasa did not provide a clear criterion for identifying veritable knowledge or true morality. However, his geographic division of principled political action offers a clue about what he had in mind when he was thinking about true citizenship —and this is the third relevant characteristic of Rabasa's political thought in *La bola*. The contrast drawn by Rabasa between revolutionary action and rabble rousing does not only differentiate two different forms of social mobilization; it also situates each of these forms in a particular geographical space. While the West has bequeathed true revolution to the world, non-Western nations are haunted by an endemic disease that breeds anarchic commotions. The reason why it is impossible to produce genuine revolutions in Latin America is because the natives of these lands lack principles and true knowledge. Thus, achieving progress implies assimilating Western political values.

But we must not assume that Rabasa suggests that Latin America is condemned to be eternally assailed by the sterile convulsions of unruly participation. The problem for him is not Latin America per se, but its relative distance from Western culture. Accordingly, whenever this distance increases, the degree of backwardness becomes more acute. For Rabasa, the rural-urban cleavage is key to understanding cultural underdevelopment. He situated this novel in a fictional locality in rural Mexico because it embodies the consequences of limiting the positive effects of Western civilization. Rabasa described San Martin de la Piedra as a stereotypical Mexican village[111], and he knew that most of his readers would

[110] Of course, these opinions are symptomatic of Rabasa's positivist commitments. A classical analysis of how positivist ideas influenced the Mexican intelligentsia is Leopoldo Zea, *El positivismo en Mexico: nacimiento, apogeo y decadencia*, 4. reimpr (1945; repr., México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1984). A more recent analysis of the influence of positivism on Mexican liberalism is Hale, *Transformation of Liberalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexico*. A critical assessment of the relationship between Mexican liberalism and Spencerian ideas is Natalia Priego, "Porfirio Díaz, Positivism and 'The Scientists': A Reconsideration of the Myth," *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 18, no. 2 (December 1, 2012): 135–50, https://doi.org/10.1080/13260219.2012.740825.

[111] Rabasa, *La bola / La gran ciencia*, 42.

associate remote villages to the survival of non-Western traditions. San Martin de la Piedra is such a typical village because it is inhabited by an unscrupulous, brutal, and authoritarian political leadership and by a credulous but unruly population. It is driven by the same passions that people like Rabasa had in mind when they thought about the Mexican rural inhabitants. The following quote underscores the association between lack of civilization and remoteness:

> Vile rabble, yes! It is dragged by as many passions as ringleaders and soldiers constitute it. For one, it is despicable revenge; for the other, a petty ambition; for that other, it is the desire to stand out; for this, the desire to overcome an enemy. And there is not a single common thought, not a single principle that leads the minds. *Its stage is the inaccessible corner of a remote district* […] the people, when this venerated monster to which they give life reappears, run after him, shouting enthusiastically and madly: Rabble! Rabble![112]

The rabble is not a carefully conceived product, but a shapeless mixture in which the lowest passions replace principles. It is not a conscious march forward, but a mad rush towards self-destruction. But in addition to underscoring that the rabble's political action is merely driven by base instincts and selfishness, this paragraph shows that the rabble is bred in small rural villages. Thus, the place that Rabasa chose as the breeding ground for the rabble is symptomatic of his intentions: petty quarrels are always spawned in remote villages, where Western culture has not yet produced its civilizing effects.

If pointless quarrels appear more frequently where Western civilization is less present, it should not be surprising that those peoples that are more isolated from Western culture are also the more prone to participate in the rabble. Rabasa underscores this implication of his worldview by means of the character of Pedro Martín.[113] This character is the only Indigenous individual that appears in Rabasa's tetralogy.[114] Although he is part of the first supporters of

[112] Rabasa, 168. The emphasis is mine.
[113] Pedro Martín may be the only Indigenous character in this novel, but his name reveals that he is also the stereotypical inhabitant of the stereotypical isolated village.
[114] *La bola* is the only book of the tetralogy that takes place in a remote village. While *La gran ciencia* takes place in a provincial capital city, *El cuarto poder* and *Moneda falsa* take place in Mexico City. The fact that all these different locations are afflicted by political vices suggests that 'cultural underdevelopment' is a widespread disease in Mexico. However, all these locations suffer from different maladies. In Rabasa's worldview, while

Mateo Cabezudo, he does not play a major role in the revolt. He joins the rabble, but he is not an effective nor a natural-born leader (unlike Juan, whose non-Indigenous personality allows him to lead the rebels to a victorious outcome). The portray of Indigenous people offered by Rabasa in *La bola* is very similar to the one presented by the liberal intelligentsia almost thirty years earlier: Indigenous people can be quarrelsome, but they are also naïve; they are driven into rural uprisings because they can be easily manipulated by unscrupulous individuals, but they do not have enough agency to rebel autonomously.

These elements show that Rabasa did not simply have in mind a contrast between principled and unprincipled political action; nor is he simply trying to present a contrast between the city and the countryside. His depiction is also a racialized one. Underneath the many contrasts deployed in *La bola*, the category of race is key for making sense of the dichotomy between civilized and uncivilized. However, the racialization of civilization is not exclusive of Rabasa's novels; it is not a mere literary trope deployed exclusively for novelistic purposes. This characterization of Indigenous people will reappear in his historical and political works, and it is key for understanding the sociopolitical project of the Mexican liberals during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century. Before I analyze how Indigenous people are characterized in Rabasa's non-fictional works, I will analyze how he deployed epistemological qualifications as a criterion for excluding and including certain groups of the Mexican population from political participation.

III.4 Rabasa as a Political Thinker: his critique of Mexican institutions

strategic deceit, debauched self-indulgence, and wide-spread corruption are evils endemic to big cities, the anarchic rabble is a chronical illness that only ails isolated villages.

A key text for understanding Emilio Rabasa's political thought is his 1912 book *La constitución y la dictadura* (The Constitution and dictatorship). In this text, Rabasa argues that the Constitution of 1857 made dictatorship unavoidable. Given the many legal limitations that constrained the Executive Branch, it was all but inevitable that the President exercised *de facto* powers in order to guarantee governability. Despite the good intentions of the participants of the Constitutional Congress of 1856-1857, the written constitution was too abstract to adapt to the challenges of Mexican reality, and it enabled an unbalanced relationship between the government branches. Thus, the sociopolitical reality demanded a series of constitutional reforms in order to reestablish a harmonious and functional relationship between government branches. The publication of *La constitución y la dictadura* took place in a very consequential year. Although Porfirio Diaz's dictatorship had finally crumbled down under the pressure of armed rebellion, the viability of the new government was in question. In such a tumultuous time, when the old regime had not fully disappeared and when the new regime had not yet taken root, it was doubtful that Mexican society could solve its many problems without profound constitutional reforms.

In his analysis of why the Mexican Constitution of 1857 failed, Rabasa highlighted the inapplicability of the idea of equality. One of the great flaws of the drafters of the constitution was their naivety regarding the Mexican people. By allowing indiscriminate popular participation, the group in charge of drafting the 1857 Constitution imperiled social development. For Rabasa, the law must be based on the "conditions of the social state of affairs".[115] In Mexico, the social state of affairs was characterized by widespread ineptitude. Moreover, incompetence elicits disorder, since it contravenes the popular will: "For there to be the will of the people [...] it is necessary that each citizen has a will, and having a will is

[115] Emilio Rabasa, *La constitución y la dictadura: estudio sobre la organización política de México*, Cien de México (1912; repr., México: CONACULTA, 2002), 87.

impossible without the knowledge of the matter that has to direct it".[116] Being enfranchised is not a sufficient condition for understanding what the nation needs. For Rabasa, intellectual proficiency should be one of the requirements for participation. Unrestricted participation favors the appearance of "disturbing elements, that is, elements that hinder the genuine expression of the conscious will in popular elections"[117]. Therefore, the law must ensure that boorish people refrain from interfering in politics.

Rabasa argued for conceding the opportunity to vote exclusively to individuals who were qualified in discerning the public's interest.[118] For him, voting is not a right, but a function that requires certain competences in order to be aptly exercised. According to this reasoning, voting should be general, but not universal. Rabasa justified the exclusion of unwitting individuals by highlighting the social consequences of individual decisions: "Voting does not exclusively affect the individual citizen; it affects the fate of the whole social body. Only an incomprehensible deviation from good judgment and common sense could have placed the right of each man above the interests of the nation".[119] Those who vote without fully understanding the complexities of politics not only put themselves at risk; they can also jeopardize the survival of the nation.

According to Rabasa's estimates, the participation of at least 70% of the population should be checked. In particular, the statesman censured illiterate people for lacking the basic knowledge required for political participation. However, Rabasa implicitly rebuked indigenous communities for failing to submit to the canons of positivist progress. His description of the illiterate renegades is telling about his underlying intentions:

> [People who are to be disenfranchised are] men who are, because of their ignorance, as unfit to vote as madmen and idiots; men who have not entered the community of conscious life; for whom there is no time; who have not felt any evolution, due or not

[116] Rabasa, 147.
[117] Rabasa, 146.
[118] Rabasa, 146.
[119] Rabasa, 146.

> to the government; among which there are entire peoples who, ignorant of the national language, have not even yet come into contact with the civilized world, and who have as much notion of a national government today as they did in the sixteenth century of the privileges of the crown.[120]

The equation 'uncivilized = non-Spanish speaker = unfit to vote' is symptomatic of the intimate association between aptness and Rabasa's own sociocultural position.

Nevertheless, the legal requirements advocated by Rabasa are not exclusively designed to marginalize the unqualified. We can only fully understand the function of these requirements by addressing their pedagogical dimension. By establishing literacy as a precondition for political participation, Rabasa aims to make it easier for the westernized elite to exercise its disciplinary powers. According to Rabasa, literacy will allow political parties to better indoctrinate the new citizens.[121] Instructing the constituents by means of partisan publications is only possible once individuals have learned how to read.

Thus, inferior epistemological qualifications do not categorically exclude indigenous people from political participation. Complying with a disciplinary process is a prerequisite for participating in decision-making. This gradual admission into the realm of politics mirrors Rabasa's teleological theory of political succession. Rabasa argues that the succession of rulers is determined by historical laws. According to him, the evolutionary movement of societies can be divided into three different stages: forceful usurpation of authority; designation of authorities by law, and popular election of authorities.[122] These stages are not only qualitatively different, but they are also part of a teleological process: while violent succession is associated to primitiveness and lack of harmony, succession by election is described as advantageous and balanced. In this sense, while recurring rebellions are a

[120] Rabasa, 150.
[121] Rabasa, 148. However, Rabasa did not always believe that education or literacy were in and by themselves sufficient for solving the 'Indian problem'. As I will explain bellow, at least since 1920, Rabasa claimed that a more sophisticated and deeper disciplinary process was necessary for addressing this problem.
[122] Rabasa, 150–51.

symptom of backwardness, the European representative governments are regarded as the pinnacle of political perfection.[123] Moreover, the transition from one stage to another cannot be produced by decree; it requires the previous formation of a certain political culture.

Two conclusions could be derived from this line of reasoning: one the one hand, given that Latin-American nations have not gradually developed these cultural features, it is reasonable to expect that their societies are doomed to experience a democratic deficit. On the other hand, given that the evolution of political succession is determined by historical laws, Latin-American societies must adjust their political cultures to the European model in order to build successful democracies. Thus, both from an individual and from a societal perspective, Rabasa subordinates political proficiency to Western standards. Participating in decision-making is possible for everyone… as long as they accept to submit to the liberal standards of civilization.

It should be clear by now that Rabasa was not only a steadfast advocate of Western institutions and values, but that he also strongly believed that Western civilization was the inexorable result of social evolution. However, besides a few indirect references to the 'Indian problem', Rabasa has not explicitly offered his views on the role that the indigenous population played and should play in Mexican society. Rabasa presents more explicitly his opinion on indigenous people in a book called *La evolución histórica de México* [The historical evolution of Mexico] (1920).

In this text Rabasa describes the historical evolution of Mexico in order to better understand its present condition. One of the main objectives of Rabasa's historical interpretation was underscoring Mexico's potential for becoming a full member of Western civilization. He acknowledged the ubiquitous presence of violence during the first decades of Mexico 's recent history, but he also emphasized that his country was slowly but steadily

[123] Rabasa, 152–54.

becoming a more stable and civilized polity. According to him, the peace achieved during the old regime was symptomatic of Mexico's evolution towards progress. Political stability, economic development, and strong institutions were incontrovertible proofs that Mexico was not condemned to an inferior status among the rest of the nations.

An important part of this book is its third section, where Rabasa analyzed the so called 'national problems'. Rabasa was aware that exterior observers highlighted these problems in order to both criticize Diaz's government and draw attention to Mexico's unavoidable inferiority. Accordingly, Rabasa set himself to analyze these problems so to disprove the purported "racial incapacity" and "incurable perversity" that doomed Mexico to an uncivilized condition.[124] Three are the major 'problems' that Rabasa tried to debunk: education, land and its unfair distribution, and, of course, the indigenous population.

In the rest of this section, I will analyze how Rabasa portrayed indigenous people and how he envisioned their inclusion into Mexican society. Intuitively, some of the ideas defended by Rabasa may seem innocuous and even conducive to the well-being of the indigenous population. For example, Rabasa advocated for equality before the law. He explicitly contrasted the Mexican model of inclusion (and acculturation) to the exclusionary model implemented in the US. He argued that exterminating Native Americans and confining them in reservations was both morally condemnable and a solution that could not be materially applied in Mexico.[125] According to Rabasa, equality before the law was one of the necessary conditions for successfully including the indigenous population in Mexican society. How can such an advocate of equality before the law be suspicious of endorsing a colonial project or racist stereotypes?

[124] Emilio Rabasa, *La Evolución Histórica de México* (México: Librería de la Vda. de Ch. Bouret, 1920), 237.
[125] Rabasa, 250–61.

First, it is important to point out that Rabasa characterized Mexican indigenous population as a dead weight. According to Rabasa, the role that the indigenous people had played so far in Mexico's development was a negative one:

> Three million Indians, morally and intellectually inferior to the Indians of Moctezuma, without personality or notion of it, without a common idea or feeling that linked them with the conscious part of the population, were the legacy that the nation received from the death colonial period […] [The non-indigenous half of the population] received the enormous weight of the other unconscious, primitive half [i.e., the indigenous population], which, because it was a temptation for evil, was contrary as a force and negative as a quantity.[126]

Not only did the Amerindians contribute naught to the wellbeing of the nation; according to Rabasa's assessment, they were a burdensome load that the westernized population had to carry. This small quote already contains the main elements of Rabasa's analysis. First, it suggests that the precarious condition of the Indigenous people is part of the colonial legacy. Second, it highlights that the reason why the indigenous population is a dead weight for Mexico's progress is its intellectual inferiority. Nevertheless, as I will explain below, this inferiority is not supposed to be embedded in the racial features of the Amerindians, but in their culture. Finally, this inferiority is closely related to being isolated from the 'conscious' part of Mexican society.

The first claim seems paradoxical. By complaining about the legacy of the colonial period, and by holding this period responsible for the negative effects inflicted on the Amerindian population, Rabasa might seem to place himself on the anti-colonial field. Rabasa

[126] Rabasa, 241–42. It must be noted that not all the Amerindian peoples experienced the same conditions inflected by the European colonizers on the Aztecs. Some of them were only subdued once Mexico had achieved its independence, and the acculturation process did not work uniformly across the Mexican territory. Therefore, by painting this grim portrait of the indigenous people and their cultures, Rabasa was not only offering a demeaning depiction of cultures that were far from being dead or thoroughly annihilated; he was also whitewashing the violence that the Mexican ladino elite inflicted on these communities. The Caste War in the Yucatán peninsula and the Yaqui Wars in the northeastern part of the territory are the best-known examples where the Mexican State directly and violently tried to subdue indigenous communities.

even reproached the European conquerors for annihilating the indigenous elite.[127] How can Rabasa, a distinguished supporter of the liberal project and a member of the ladino elite that characterized Amerindians as a burden, offer an anti-colonial critique?

For Rabasa, the colonial period was partially responsible for the degradation of the indigenous population. But this corrupting effect is not explained because colonization is wrong per se. The colonial authorities, the settlers, and the European missionaries did not succeed in teaching Spanish to the Indigenous people nor in assimilating them to their own culture. They did not add "superior notions" to subjection, and they failed in extirpating the Amerindians' "boorish theogony".[128] The Spanish colonizers and their "fanatical ardor" were unable to carry out a successful acculturation. Thus, Rabasa did not complain about cultural cleansing per se, but about this cleansing being ineffective.

Accordingly, the demeaning conditions under which the indigenous population had to live during the colonial period were not the most concerning effect of colonization. Rabasa claimed that isolation from Western culture was the most influential factor for explaining the dire conditions under which the indigenous population had to live: "What was even more disheartening for Indian people, even though it was calm and comfortable, was the situation of protective isolation that distanced them from interacting with the civilized man."[129] The Amerindians, due to the living conditions injudiciously produced by ineffective colonizers, found themselves in an inferior position; but the distressing woe that really impaired their potential was isolation from the 'civilized man'. Witnessing the collapse of their civilizations; being decimated by dispossession, forceful displacement, and sexual violence; being

[127] Rabasa, 239. It is telling that Rabasa censured the annihilation of the Indigenous elite. Apparently, only elites can produce knowledge and, once they are gone, backwardness is inevitable. Rabasa described the sacerdotal stratum of Mexican society as the depositary of Indigenous science, but he also described this science as "rudimentary".
[128] Rabasa, 109–10.
[129] Rabasa, 241.

annihilated *en masse* by war and disease; all of these sufferings were minor misfortunes for Rabasa when compared to the isolation from Western civilization.

Therefore, overcoming isolation is a necessary condition for transforming the dead weight into an active and helpful part of society. But what does it actually mean to overcome isolation? What does inclusion look like from the liberal perspective? As an advocate of the old regime, Rabasa rejected that the liberal project was a racist one. He was not unaware that indigenous people were underrepresented in the upper strata of society, but he did not conclude that exclusion was due to racial prejudice. According to him, merit (*i.e.*, social education) was the only requirement for achieving social mobility: "Social strata [...] are determined first and almost exclusively by education; fortune intervenes very little [...] race does not intervene at all. An Indian *with correct manners* enters the best circles with the same freedom as a White person [...] each individual occupies on the social scale the place that corresponds to him *according to his degree of social education*."[130] Therefore, the millions of Indigenous inhabitants that lived in precarious conditions did not have "correct manners" nor a sufficient degree of education. But what does this social education that Rabasa highlights as a criterion for social mobility and inclusion look like?

It would be a mistake to assume that Rabasa simply advocated for offering the Indigenous population more opportunities to access the education system. Rabasa did not assume that any kind of education was equally conducive to moral improvement, and he certainly would have opposed educating the Mexican population in the old Amerindian traditions. Moreover, Rabasa experienced an interesting transformation between 1912 and 1920. The Rabasa of 1920 no longer believed that literacy or formal education were effective means for successfully acculturating the Amerindian population. In fact, he criticized the idea that simply widening the reach of formal education would pull indigenous people out of their

[130] Rabasa, 32. The emphasis is mine.

backwardness.[131] If in 1912, when *La constitución y la dictadura* was published, he entreated the idea that literacy (in Spanish) might contribute to civilizing the ignorant, by 1920 he was skeptical about the actual results of this procedure.

According to the 1920 Rabasa, it was not enough to learn how to read and write. What really cured the native population form their 'illness' was the contact with White people. According to this umpteenth iteration of white saviorism, without the "intelligent leadership" of the rational part of society, the indigenous population "would be doomed to perpetual darkness".[132] Rabasa argued that literacy in itself was an incomplete solution because it did not detach Indigenous individuals from their cultural milieu. As long as the indigenous people remain in their social environment and reproduce their routine, they would remain "in their state of stupid automatism and surrounded by automata".[133] Isolated in their social milieu, Indigenous individuals could not understand what they read, and the notions of science would remain unintelligible and inapplicable to them. Therefore, in order to strip the Indigenous individual of her backward culture, it was necessary for her to come into contact, since her early childhood, with people of the superior class (*i.e.*, the Whites): "every Indian who ascended in social rank lived within the environment of the superior class since his childhood [...] In the cities of importance, the Indian *disappeared* by crossbreeding or by adaptation [...] It is life among the upper castes that *transforms the mentality* of the Indian, and only after they have acquired the new mentality is he able to take advantage of school instruction".[134] Therefore, the acculturation of the Amerindians is the condition that leads them to becoming civilized. In other words, the 'social education' that was a prerequisite for social mobility implied learning how not to behave as an Indigenous person. The 'correct manners' that lead

[131] Rabasa, 265.
[132] Rabasa, 265.
[133] Rabasa, 265.
[134] Rabasa, 269. The emphasis is mine. Rabasa would probably applaud the infamous Canadian policy that separated Indigenous children from their families and locked them up in Westernizing boarding schools.

to a full inclusion were those of the Westernized population. Being "alien to the cultured tradition and ideas" is both what best characterizes Indigenous people and the source of indigenous inferiority.[135] Thus, in order to be included in the ladino society, the Amerindian was supposed to renounce to her-*self*.

Rabasa was not only thinking from the perspective of a historian that registers a certain occurrence. He was not merely acting as a philanthropist interested in the wellbeing of the uncivilized other either. He was also thinking as a social engineer interested in systematizing and replicating the most efficient acculturation techniques: "This is how the conquest of a portion of the primitive race has been made […] [the effects of this process] *must serve as a revealing phenomenon; we should submit it to analysis, and then apply what is active in it, in a systematic way, with the intelligent intention that makes rational procedures effective, and with the help of social forces aimed at the end* [*i.e.* acculturation of the Amerindians]".[136] When Rabasa pondered the benefits of acculturating the Amerindians, he sought to "apply the means in their most effective way"; he aimed to produce certain reactions, "as doctors proceed to conquer a disease".[137] Amerindian traditions are not alternative ways of inhabiting the world, but dangerous ailments that must be kept under controlled, treated, and duly eradicated.

But this way of portraying acculturation not only implied portraying non-Western cultures as a disease. This metaphor also allows us to draw another important analogy with the missionary attempts to eradicate non-Christian traditions. Just as Sahagún aimed to become a doctor of the soul, Rabasa aimed to produce a social medicine that cured Mexican society from the Amerindian malady. Thus, registering the reaction of the social body to the liberal experimental treatment became a central part of his approach.

[135] Rabasa, 243.
[136] Rabasa, 270. The emphasis is mine.
[137] Rabasa, 264.

This scientific approach brings to the fore another important element of Rabasa's acculturation methodology. When he set out to find the most efficient way to cure the Amerindians of their ignorance, he introduced a criterion that had not been very meaningful before. While cultural cleansing was justified in the colonial period primarily by emphasizing its religious dimension, the *fin de siècle* acculturation derived its legitimacy from its efficiency. Instrumental considerations start playing an increasingly important role. It is not that means did not play an important role before, but for the individuals raised in a positivist milieu, the efficiency of the means becomes a paramount criterion for evaluating public policies. This contrast, however, should not be exaggerated. The fact that Sahagún was so keen on improving his evangelizing techniques, and on identifying even the most cryptic expressions of Indigenous religiosity, is proof that the shift towards an increasingly instrumental worldview was already developing in the sixteenth century.

Finally, the fact that Rabasa rejected reservations and outright extermination, while simultaneously embracing acculturation, is telling about another important feature of his portrayal of the indigenous population: the Amerindian potential for conversion. Like Sahagún in the sixteenth century, Rabasa believed that the Amerindians were susceptible of being 'civilized'. What distinguished Indigenous people from the 'rational' part of society, what placed them in an inferior position, was not their phenotypical characteristics. Rabasa was convinced that "caste is indifferent for aptitude".[138] By locating the source of their inferiority in their culture, Rabasa found a seemingly progressive solution to the 'Indian problem'. The Amerindians were *potential* members of a civilized society. But how can we harness the potential of Indigenous people? The key to understanding Rabasa solution is obviously acculturation, but this solution also establishes a hierarchical relationship and a very particular pedagogical approach:

[138] Rabasa, 269.

> The Indian, *as a material*, does not present difficult resistance for *the work that must be done on him*. The Indian is no worse than the White, as everyone who has taken a close look at them knows. Due to his state of primitive innocence, he is more *capable* than the Whites *of receiving a moral instruction* determined by education; his instincts are better than those of the Blacks, his understanding and ability to function far superior.[139]

Rabasa was certainly not exempt from the more traditional racism. In addition to his bigotry against Blacks, he entreated an idea of Indigenous people that resembled the trope of the noble savage. However, even more interesting than these hackneyed racist assumptions is his representation of the Amerindians as a malleable material. If the Indigenous individual is a material, this is so because he lacks any sort of agency. And this lack of agency leads to a hierarchical relationship between the material and the engineer that is responsible for shaping it. The contact between the Indigenous individual and her westernized counterpart is not a contact between peers who attempt to reciprocally understand each other, but a contact between a master and an apprentice that reproduces the worldview of the colonizer. [140]

III.5 Conclusion: Exclusion of Indigenous People — Inclusion of Disciplined Subjects

Rabasa, in his role as politician, was also a zealous advocate of the liberal project. During his tenure as Governor of Chiapas (1891-1894), Rabasa was a relentless promoter of community land (*ejidos*) demarcation.[141] As state governor, Rabasa had strong incentives for expanding the revenue of the local government. A key part of his strategy consisted in increasing the taxable real estate property. However, the burgeoning free market of real estate property was held back by communal lands and indigenous traditions. From the state's point of view,

[139] Rabasa, 278–79. The emphasis is mine,
[140] Paulo Freire would have characterized this approach to pedagogy as a banking model of education. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968; repr., Penguin Books Ltd, 2017).
[141] Fenner, *La llegada al Sur*; Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion*, 48–49.

fragmenting and placing these lands on the market would assure a lucrative source of revenue. In fact, Fener describes Rabasa as "the promoter of the distribution of communal land in the state"[142]. For Rabasa, communal lands and the capitalist model of economic success were entirely irreconcilable. Is it not an egregious display of ignorance to hold on to our outdated ancestral legacy and to refuse to board the train of progress? Rabasa advocated for conditions that disenfranchised indigenous people, and his argument should not be separated from his affiliation to the positivist-liberal project.

However, Rabasa was not interested in demarcation exclusively because of his responsibilities as governor. He also had strong ties with the local landowners and foreign investors. Moreover, he himself took part in real estate speculation.[143] The speculative activities of Rabasa and his group were particularly intense in the Palenque-Chilón region. Therefore, it is not surprising that he developed a negative opinion of whoever interfered with the commodification of land.

The relationship between Western culture and civilization was a permanent thread in Rabasa's political thought that can be traced both in his earlier novels and in his mature political writings. Similarly, his concern with the negative effects that ensue from isolation from the Western world is one of his oeuvre's leitmotivs. But these assumptions were not exclusive to Rabasa. They were widely shared among the Mexican liberals.

By infantilizing the Indigenous population, the Mexican liberals rejected all non-Western alternatives to their colonial project. Moreover, they claimed the moral high ground by presenting themselves as enlightened and charitable tutors. However, the indigenous population was never given an opportunity to decide on what civilization actually meant. They were never treated as adults capable of making autonomous decisions. Furthermore,

[142] Fenner, *La llegada al Sur*, 282.
[143] Fenner, 278–81, 360-66.

their culture was mocked as the source of their backwardness. Deliberate and planned acculturation was the corollary of a colonial project that debased any alternative to Western hegemony.

Therefore, infantilization and acculturation were the two central features of the liberal colonial discourse in Mexico at the turn of the century. These two features endowed the liberal colonial project with a high degree of flexibility for subduing otherness. On the one hand, it excluded those individuals and communities that unremittingly rejected Western values. Rebellious peoples were forcefully repressed; traditions that might stir Indigenous communities against the liberal status quo were outright banned. On the other hand, the liberal project was also engineered to integrate individuals with a non-Western cultural background. However, Amerindians did not decide the terms of their inclusion. The roadmap for their assimilation was chosen for them: Inclusion through discipline, and discipline through acculturation. Furthermore, Amerindians were integrated into the ladino society on the condition that they renounced their traditions. The Mexican liberals presented the Amerindians with a colonial dilemma: They had to choose between material and cultural genocide. In other words, they had to stop being Amerindians and to accept the tutoring of the vicars of true civilization.

Accordingly, Rabasa's argument is an interesting instance of a widespread belief among Mexican liberals: Indigenous communities are an obstacle for progress. However, this racist discourse is also interesting for its attempt to reconcile 'democratic' ideals with the exclusion of Indigenous people. According to Rabasa, inferior epistemological qualifications do not categorically exclude Indigenous people from political participation. To fully participate in decision-making, Indigenous people must erase the Indian within them, and obediently submit to the unyielding march of progress.

Therefore, the analysis presented in this chapter aims to better understand the inner workings of a racist discourse that is nominally democratic. This discourse should not be reduced to its exclusionary dimension. For thinkers such as Rabasa, inclusion is always a possibility. Everyone is allowed to participate in decision-making … as long as they accept to submit to the liberal standards of civilization.

Although Rabasa avoids theological arguments and religious phraseology, his portrayal of the Amerindians is significantly similar to the one presented by Bernardino de Sahagún almost three centuries earlier. Both of them depicted the indigenous people as ignorant and gullible. Sahagún and Rabasa agreed that the Amerindians lacked true knowledge. For both of them, Indigenous culture can be described as a disease that needs to be controlled and eradicated. Moreover, they also agreed on the cure to this dreadful disease: The two advocates of acculturation hold that the uncivilized Amerindians are in desperate need of receiving the knowledge produced in the West, and that the most effective way to achieve this is by means of cultural cleansing.

However, there are also important differences between the discourses deployed by both of them. Not only is one openly religious and the other avowedly secular. While Rabasa believed in social evolution and situated the indigenous people in the lower end of an evolutionary continuum, this evolutionary mechanism is absent from Sahagun's worldview. According to him, Amerindians were not underdeveloped but simply idolatrous. Similarly, the scientific emphasis of Rabasa had not fully developed in Sahagún. Although Sahagun's research antedates anthropological methodology, in Rabasa we find a full-fledged commitment to social engineering.

These findings do not suggest that Rabasa and the Mexican liberals were consciously and directly influenced by missionaries such as Sahagún. Neither do they imply that the liberal discourse is the unavoidable derivation of Sahagún's approach to Indigenous

otherness. Secular acculturation is not the natural offspring of its religious forerunner. However, key elements of their discursive practices were already common currency since the colonial period: the infantilization of indigenous people and the belief in their potential for due obedience; the characterization of non-Western traditions as an illness and acculturation as the most suitable treatment; the conviction that Western(ized) settlers were the bearers of the true faith/knowledge. All these elements were reinvented and redeployed in the nineteenth century. While their conditions of possibility are certainly similar, acculturation is not the natural or reasonable reaction to Indigenous rebelliousness. The colonial project has certainly managed to reinvent itself and thrive. But this cannot mean that Western hegemony is failproof or unassailable.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis attempted to better understand the relationship between knowledge, acculturation, and the Mexican colonial project. I analyzed two sets of documents that are crucial for understanding the discursive practices of the Mexican liberals during the second half of the nineteenth century: the proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of 1856-1857 and the works of Emilio Rabasa, a distinguished *fin de siècle* Mexican liberal. Additionally, in order to better understand the origins of the discursive practices of the Mexican intelligentsia, I analyzed Fray Bernardino de Sahagún *Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva España* which already contains some central elements of the liberals' depiction of indigenous people.

The first chapter aimed to identify the religious origins of the liberal portrayal of indigenous people. By contrasting the depiction of Amerindians in Sahagún's *History* with that of Mexican liberals, it becomes clear that some of the key features of the liberal projected iterated central elements of Sahagún approach to the colonized Other. In order to justify evangelization (i.e., acculturation), the missionary constructed a very peculiar depiction of the Amerindian: the indigenous people are naïve and superstitious. However, they are not intrinsically deprived; according to the Franciscan friar, Indigenous people are malleable enough to become good Christians and grow out of their idolatry. While the first trait makes evangelization morally necessary, the second one makes it pedagogically viable. Moreover, Sahagún portrays indigenous religions not only as false, but also as potentially dangerous. This last trait, as well as the zeal for identifying and uprooting even the slightest remainders of Indigenous religiosity, is symptomatic of colonial anxiety. Sahagún's *History* could be read as a manual for identifying and neutralizing the 'indigene in disguise '.

The second chapter focused on the contradictions of the liberal project regarding religious freedom. By analyzing the constitutional debates of 1856-1857, I argued that race was a central factor for fueling the controversies surrounding freedom of religion. The liberal agenda of rights was a racialized agenda. Although it would be naïve to assume that religious freedom is valuable in itself, the actual reasons for supporting or opposing this right were strongly racialized. Not only was the support for religious freedom driven by the desire to attract White Western immigrants; the refusal to explicitly recognize this right revealed the enduring presence of colonial anxieties. These double standards can be (and should be) characterized as hypocritical, but they are also relevant because they reveal the racial hierarchies in which the liberal colonial discourse is embedded. Here too, culture is a colonial marker for identifying who gets to be a full citizen. If not every religion deserves to be constitutionally recognized, this is so because some of them are suspicious to the colonial gaze. Additionally, if some settlers are more desirable than others, this is an effect of the belief that acculturation and westernization are a safeguard for the colonial project.

Finally, in the third chapter, the analysis of Rabasa's oeuvre presented in a more structured way most of the arguments and assumptions described in previous chapters. The central elements of Sahagún's evangelization project are iterated under a secular disguise: Amerindian backwardness, the frightful correlation between isolation and unruliness, the potential for assimilation into the civilized world, and the need of acculturation. Despite the undeniable similarities, the discursive practices certainly evolved; in some instances, we might even argue that they became more sophisticated. However, since the colonial project and the colonial anxieties did not wane, the emphasis on acculturation survived and thrived. New markers of colonial identity came into circulation (from idolatrous religions to Spanish illiteracy; from

Christian piety to familiarity with positive sciences), but the need to have markers did not disappear.

An overarching theme, one that appeared recurrently but that was not always spelled out, were indigenous and rural rebellions. These direct threats to colonial rule were what really triggered colonial anxieties. Although Rabasa offered a caricature of them in *La Bola*, they were by no means a literary invention. Lafragua and other participants in the Constitutional Congress addressed some of them explicitly during the debates concerning freedom of religion. The Caste War is probably the best-known instance of an indigenous uprising, but they were an endemic phenomenon in states such as Chiapas, the place where Rabasa lived for most of his youth and where he was appointed as Governor. These uprisings were all the more concerning because they were the offspring of liberal economic policies. They were a reminder that the sword of Damocles was permanently hanging over the colonizers' heads. Simultaneously, they were one of the conditions that fueled the bigoted and condescending remarks about Amerindians. From the colonialist perspective, it was a key reason for insisting that the acculturation of the colonial Other needed to be urgently carried out.

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A lot of things seem to have changed since the glorious times of the Mexican liberals, but their memory remains unblemished. Government offices still hang their portraits and display their statues; school textbooks still praise their legacy. Despite their bigotry and condescending opinions, they are still part of the pantheon of national heroes. Even worse, the patronizing ideas that they endorsed and disseminated have found their way in today's discursive practices. Apparently, the Other from the Global South still needs the selfless tutoring of the White man to learn how to walk in the right direction. The colonial self-righteousness still gets to decide who

accesses the civilized world and who gets to be declared persona non grata. In the realm of discursive practices, not much has changed since Columbus and his crew first decided who got to be a cannibalistic barbarian and who was a trustworthy subject.

1521 was a tragic year for many peoples in Abya Yala, but it was also the year where the people of Mactan taught the inhabitants of the Global South a very important lesson. Now it is up to us to stitch the body of the twenty-first-century Magellans with a new bamboo spear.

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